

LEAVIN' IT BETTER

ABOUT:

Some days Winston and I join my daughter, Olivia, and my grandchildren, Soren and Willow, on their morning walk to school. Olivia has instilled in Soren and Willow to leave things better than how they find them. For instance, on this particular morning, paper litter lay all along the sidewalk and immediately Soren and Willow started gathering it up to put in the trashcan by the playground. Close by, a little girl walked with her father and she started to help, but her father stopped her and said, "Let someone else clean this up." The little girl looked disappointed. When we came to the school, Olivia knelt and hugged her children, calling them nature's heroes. This, I thought, is a good message for all children, and I wrote this story.

PURPOSE:

Trusting children with responsibilities leads to a sense of worth. Age-appropriate tasks in the home or classroom make children feel capable, as well as proud. Also, as my daughter is doing, helping children recognize opportunities to contribute to the common good, like picking up paper trash. Of course, it is also important to teach children what to pick up and what to leave alone. It is my hope that children will identify with Winston's dilemma, Soren's willingness to help him, and Winston being cognizant to leave things better and putting up his toys. Small steps will lead to big gains.

SUGGESTIONS:

Life can get frantic, and it takes a lot of patience and consistency to teach responsibility. It is so easy to react instead of responding, to lecture and criticize. Believe me, I was guilty of this while raising my children. But I learned to build bridges instead of erecting walls. Being specific in assigning tasks instead of general ones really helps children catch the vision. Instead of "*clean your room*", maybe tell them to pick up their toys or put their dirty clothes in the hamper. When that is completed, move on to another task. And if it isn't done perfectly, remember, while practice doesn't guarantee perfection, it does lead to a more responsible child.

IDEAS:

Play a *What If* game. Have cards with "what if" questions on them, such as, what if all the drinking glasses are in your room? Then have them call out answers. Follow up with the question *What needs to be done?*

While children are out of the room, move several items out of place, such as pillows on the floor, clothes draped over furniture, paper scattered, etc. If doing this in a classroom, have several things out of place. Then have the children identify what is wrong with the room. Ask them why these things are wrong. Then ask what needs to be done and ask them to make it right.

Make a list of professions such as a teacher, firefighter, doctor, builder, taxi driver, etc. Make copies and give them to family members or students. Assign each profession a number, then ask questions such as, "Who is responsible to put out fires?" Have the children write the

number by the profession. When the game is finished, talk about what might happen if the people on the list didn't do their job. This helps with understanding the importance of people being responsible in their jobs.

Winston depends on me being responsible. I feed him, make sure he has water, take him on walks, give him a lot of love, and make sure he goes to get his checkups. Discuss with your children or students what their pets need to be healthy.