

Ownership

There's an excellent book (it's been around awhile – copyright 1973) out about parenting and raising responsible children titled Raising a Responsible Child by Dr. Don Dinkmeyer and Dr. Gary McKay. Its focus is preparing your child for today's complex world. One chapter, in particular, addresses ownership of problems: is the problem the child's or the parent's.

In parent-child relationships, ownership is best determined by thinking in terms of whose desires or rights are interfered with. Unfortunately, many parents assume ownership of their child's problems and feel responsible for her or his behavior at school, with siblings, and with peers and neighbors. When parents assume ownership of their child's problems they deprive the child of opportunities to learn how to handle problems effectively, they hamper his relationship with them (the parents), they decrease their influence with the child.

When parents decide to transfer ownership (which means they decide to allow the child to take responsibility for the problems he/she encounters in life) they help the child develop problem-solving abilities. Transferring ownership does not mean a parent no longer cares about the child but rather, cares enough to be concerned about the child's development. Too often a parents' intervention becomes a rescue. And, too often, the child learns the wrong message. The rescuing can lead to enabling where the child believes he cannot solve problems himself but needs mom and/or dad's help.

The worst end result can be that the child learns that he can be "saved" from consequences by mom and/or dad. Consequences are good teachers for all of us. Without them our learning is hampered and distorted. The last thing we want our children to learn is that they can do whatever they want because mom and/or dad will "clean up the mess for them" – should there be one. Behavior without consequences (positive or negative) is a loose cannon without direction – without purpose.