

**Teaching Personal Responsibility:  
The Ripple Effect**

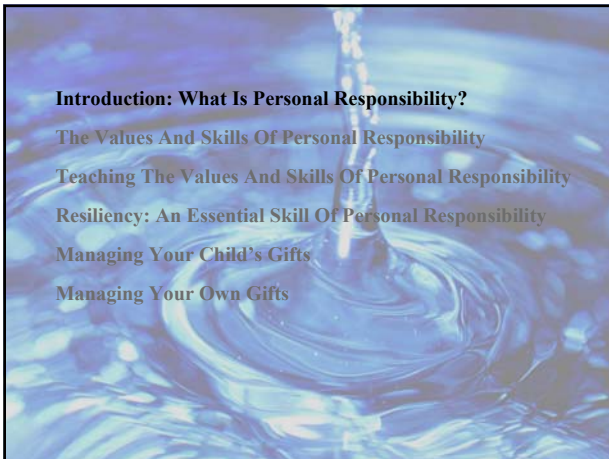
Dr. Bruce E. Kline, Clinical Psychologist  
Wright State University  
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Kline and Associates, Psychologists  
Dayton, Ohio

**Leora Kline**  
**A Brilliant Exemplar Of Personal Responsibility**

This presentation is dedicated to Leora Kline, a gifted and talented example of personal responsibility.

- Dedicated professional violinist
- Tireless community volunteer and fundraiser
- Exceptional teacher
- Frugal resource manager
- Loving, involved mother and grandmother
- Devoted daughter and caregiver for her mother, Lela Martin, throughout her long life and recent death

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**Introduction: What Is Personal Responsibility?**

The Values And Skills Of Personal Responsibility


Teaching The Values And Skills Of Personal Responsibility

Resiliency: An Essential Skill Of Personal Responsibility

Managing Your Child's Gifts

Managing Your Own Gifts

**We Are All Related**



The Plains Indians of North America, among many other cultures, believe in the concept of "Mitakuye Oyasmin," roughly translated as "we are all relations."

This concept is central to their day-to-day lives. Elders teach from birth that *everything that is done, said or thought affects the rest of creation* - family, friends, enemies, animals, even the ground that is walked upon.

*The strength of this belief forms a bedrock of personal responsibility for oneself and all beings, and a structure that demands personal best behavior in all situations.*

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**Jimmy Baxter**

"Athletes need to know they must lead by example," said Jimmy Baxter, Florida college basketball sensation.

In 2002, Jimmy Baxter did just that on his way home one night when he risked his own life to save two people from a car sinking in a roadside drainage ditch.

"Youth are looking up to us; they want to be in our position someday. You can't make a fool of yourself, *because what you do doesn't just reflect on you - it reflects on all athletes. It becomes a stereotype.*"

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**What Is Personal Responsibility?**  
**To Become It, You Must First Name It . . .**

Values

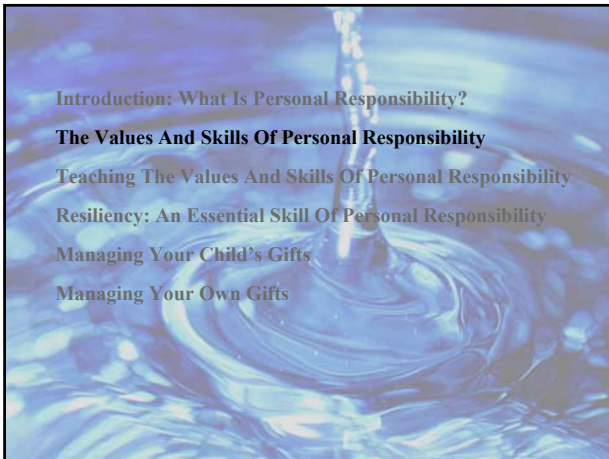
- A strong moral structure and value system
- A sense of purpose in life
- An awareness of the feelings and needs of others - genuine care for other people
- A social consciousness that encourages making a contribution to the world

Skills

- An effective use of talents
- A willingness to take responsibility for own behavior
  - Celebrate achievements
  - Acknowledge mistakes
  - Make amends and move on
- An emotional resiliency and balance



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## Personal Responsibility Laying The Foundation

It is the job of the parent(s) to consciously put their children on the path towards personal responsibility from the beginning.

Before a child is 5 years old, teach:


1. Honesty  
Find a way to tell the truth
2. Justice  
Make amends for misdeeds or poor judgments
3. Determination  
Identify and accept challenges
4. Consideration  
Awareness of others' feelings (how your actions affect others)
5. Love  
Be generous with affection for your child - your love will be reciprocated with the same behaviors toward you and others!



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## The Youth Matures Continuing To Lay The Groundwork

1. Continue to instill and encourage the values and skills you began teaching before age five. As the youth matures, increase the amount of information disseminated and begin to introduce more complex (adult) concepts and opportunities.
2. Identify the gift, the passion, and the purpose  
- Assessment testing by a psychologist
3. Provide opportunities to experience and develop abilities in art, science, athletics, music, the humanities, etc.



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## Specific Areas Of Giftedness



Academic



Leadership



Visual/Performing Arts



Psychomotor



Creative Thinking

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## Specific Areas Of Giftedness

**Academic**

- Good memorization ability
- Advanced comprehension
- Acquires basic skill knowledge quickly
- Widely read in special interest area
- High academic success in special interest area
- Pursues special interests with enthusiasm and vigor

**General Intellectual Ability**

- Formulates abstractions
- Processes information in complex ways
- Enhanced awareness
- Excited about new ideas
- Enjoys hypothesizing
- Learns rapidly
- Utilizes a large vocabulary
- Inquisitive
- High motivation for learning

**Visual/Performing Arts**

- Outstanding with spatial relationships
- Unusual ability for expressing self, utilizing words and emotion in one or more of the fine arts
- Good motor coordination
- Exhibits creative expression
- Desire for producing original work

**Psychomotor**

- Excels in difficult athletic activities
- Exhibits precision in movement
- High energy level
- Excels in motor skills
- Well-coordinated
- Enjoys participation in various athletic opportunities
- Good manipulative skills

**Leadership**

- Assumes responsibility
- High expectations for self and others
- Fluent, concise self-expression
- Foresees consequences and implications of decisions
- Good judgment in decision making
- Likes structure
- Well-liked by peers
- Self-confident
- Organized

**Creative Thinking**

- Independent thinker
- Exhibits original thinking in oral and written expression
- Generates multiple solutions to a given problem
- Exhibits a sense of humor
- Often improvises
- Relishes being different from others
- Creates and invents

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## Traits Of Gifted Children What Affects Your Child's Ability (Both Positively And Negatively) To Be Responsible?

- Youth need to have a purpose in life and need to feel that the purpose is taken seriously
- Highly empathetic
- Often see their own behavior as unacceptable or eccentric
- Often feel different and begin to think and speak of themselves as "stupid," "wrong," "out of step," or "not fitting in"
- Can be utterly convinced of their rightness, have intensity of purpose, and feel that they see things others miss or overlook



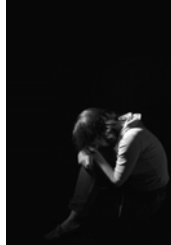
"My purpose in life is to make people laugh."  
- Roger Rabbit in *The Framing of Roger Rabbit*

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## Be Aware of Constructive Challenge Opportunities

Keep your eyes open for opportunities in day-to-day life as well as creating varied opportunities to explore the child's gifts and offer a challenge.

A wonderful opportunity for learning can be created from almost any situation - especially those that may, at first, seem the most stressful, negative or overwhelming.



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## Spare The Prod, Spoil The Child Stress (Challenge) Is Not A Dirty Word

There are plenty of challenges at the Johns Hopkins Center's three-week summer program for gifted 11 to 17-year-olds. Youth reactions to this kind of stressful learning environment were positive. "Here you can have an intelligent conversation," stated one student.

After being overworked and overwhelmed, a student replied by responding, "I LOVE IT!"

After all the students had read a copy of a 14-year-old girl's essay, and each had a crack at ripping it apart, the student bit her lip, looked down - and didn't cry. She "thanked me for the constructive criticism she had never had," said Philip Boshoff, teacher.

Many of these students dread going back to regular high school, where they'll probably be intellectually undernourished. A student commented, "It's like giving a weight lifter 10-pound weights to work out."

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## Children Need Appropriate Adults Who Model Personal Responsibility

### Mastery Model

Demonstrates *immediate* and present goal attainment

### Coping Model

Demonstrates *delayed* goal attainment - failure first, progressing toward proficiency



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## The Power Of Developmental Relationships

Youth with strong primary relationships are:

- 46% less likely to use illegal drugs (70% for minority youth)
- 27% less likely to drink
- 33% less likely to hit
- 50% less likely to skip school



Public/Private Venture, Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America, 1995

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## Balancing Challenge And Support

### High Expectations (Stress/Challenge)

- Believe in innate resilience
- Believe in learned resilience
- Give respect
- Positive attribution
- Guide without coercion
- Allow freedom from structure
- Share rituals/rites of passage
- Focus on strengths
- Develop innate resilience
- Teach learned resilience
- Challenge excellence
- Reframe
  - Turn problems into promise
  - Damage into restoration
  - Difficulty into proficiency

### Caring Relationships (Support)

- Provide unconditional love
- Deliver support messages (encouragement), and positive affirmations
- Spend time
- Honestly pay attention
- Show interest
- Listen non-judgmentally
- Establish basic trust
- Exhibit patience
- Get to know youth's interests, strengths, dreams
- Show compassion (look beneath problem behavior/the appearance level)

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## Teach Your Child How To Be A Still Point In A Shifting World

Allow your children into your personal life at whatever level they are willing and able to understand.

Show them that your morals, your beliefs, and your circle of support are a ballast when challenges overwhelm. Allow them into your own internal conflicts and model your return stability.

This teaches your child that you can be moved without being pushed over, the essence of resiliency, this is a crucial factor in establishing the roots of personal responsibility.



## Create A Large Circle Of People For Your Child To Learn From And Grow With

If we, as parent, caregiver or teacher, do not have the skills, moral judgment, values, emotional resources and balance, or knowledge needed to fully manifest a child's gift, then we must do the following:

- Find a group, faith, or church with values in which you can believe.
- Take a class, perhaps with the child, to acquire the knowledge and learn the skills you need.
- Find a personal therapist or counselor for emotional help or consultation.
- Identify a personal coach.
- Identify and continually expand your network of people and resources for parenting.
- Actively search out the data, resources or information that you need.

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## If You Know You're Not The Best Model For Personal Responsibility

1. Find the most responsible person you know and 1) ask for help or 2) model their behavior
2. Take on small projects and see them through to completion. Then slowly increase the amount of responsibility you take on. The more we do, the more we can do and the better we get (and this is excellent modeling for our children).
3. Accept 100% responsibility for what happens in your life, and know that you have the power to take control of many aspects of your life - mental and physical.
4. Stop blaming and start making decisions. And be responsible for the outcome, both positive and negative.

Self control is the key. Take responsibility for 1) creating 2) developing 3) maintaining your place in the world. It's not so much what happens to you in life, but how you handle it. How you respond to it. Whether or not you are willing to step up to the plate and be responsible.

Linda Coleman Willis, Positive Talk

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## Hungry Ghosts

Mary Taylor Previte offers specific advice on teaching your child personal responsibility - even in a hostile environment:

**Be the boss.** Some parents think the ultimate gift is letting go of the kite strings. Children actually want to put their feet on firm ground.

**Attach your child.** Glue your child to you - to at least one positive person.

**Set high expectations.** If you believe in your child, he just might believe in himself.

**Create memories.** Establish rituals and traditions to last a lifetime.

**Start early.** When problems arise in the teen years, they're harder to treat.

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## Integrate Your Child Into Your Family Culture and Integrate Your World With Your Child's World

1. Take inventory of your child's needs
2. Promote moral development – Kohlberg's moral reasoning
3. Establish regular dialogue and communication on all kinds of subjects
4. Experience what your child experiences and then talk about it (redemption of pop culture)



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## Redemption Of Pop Culture

Pop culture, movies, music, television shows, etc. offer a rich opportunity to teach values and how everything we do affects others.

Prime examples of movies include:

- The Lion King (circle of life)
- Pay It Forward (interconnectedness)



Life skills are often best taught by a combination of real life experiences, role modeling, and a generous dose of consistent love and gentle encouragement.

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## Teach By Creative Example

1. Look for every opportunity to teach your values - pop culture (i.e., television, movies, magazines, etc.), things that happen during a normal day, nature, etc.
2. Directly teach moral judgment, both verbally and by example. Don't expect children to make judgments on a moral basis unless you have taught the specific awareness and skills.
3. Inspire youth with family stories of accomplishment, education, courage, faith and hard work, family culture, biographies of famous people, the history of a country, etc.



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## Teach To The Individual Child



How we pass personal responsibility along needs to take into account the personality of the child in question. A sensitive child may become so strongly captured by the idea of how actions affect others, that the child becomes frozen - becomes afraid to take any action for fear of hurting someone else.

A less sensitive child may hear the idea expressed many times in many ways, and still not internalize the concept in any lasting way - remaining basically oblivious to how actions affect others.



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## Teach Basic Life Skills

Do not underestimate the power of teaching basic life skills.

- How to shop
- How to cook
- How to take care of clothes
- How to manage money

Basic life skills provide the tools for responsible living.



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## Teach Emotional Management

Young children experience emotions in their raw state with no buffers - and few tools to understand or control them. Strong emotions can be a hindrance to learning as well as to finding one's place in a larger social context.

Emotional management should be one of the earliest skills taught to your child.

When your child reaches puberty and is again overwhelmed by strong emotion, the skills you have taught will be second nature, allowing your child to rise above the emotional quicksand that entraps so many adolescents.

## Cause And Effect Is Cumulative

Personal responsibility takes into account the fact that repeated thoughts and actions can affect the world - much like water hollows out a piece of wood or stone over time.

This is another important concept to pass along to our children.



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## What Is Resiliency?

### Internal Assets

- Social competence
- Autonomy/identity
- Problem-solving skills
- Sense of purpose and future

### External Assets

- Caring relationships
- High expectations
- Opportunities to participate/contribute



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## How To Increase Resiliency To Stress And Enhance Behavioral Cooperation

1. Consistent nurturing at a level high enough to engender trust in its availability.
2. One person (minimum) who accepts the youth unconditionally, regardless of temperament, idiosyncrasies, behavioral, mental or physical handicaps.
3. Primary adults who encourage independence.
4. Primary adults who model and teach assertive and appropriate communication skills.
5. Primary adults who model and teach self-help skills.
6. Primary adults who reward acts of helpfulness and caring.
7. Primary adults who themselves model acts of helpfulness and caring.
8. Having some responsibility for family tasks.
9. Living in an emotional environment that is predictable and stable.
10. Little or no exposure to substance use or abuse, mental illness, interpersonal discord, or legal entanglements.
11. Family structure of four or fewer children with two or more years between siblings.
12. Positive adjustment in school, making it a place of security - a "home away from home."

Werner, Emmy E., Children of the Garden Island. *Scientific American*, April 1989.

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## Stressful Life Events - The Greatest Opportunities For Teaching Personal Responsibility

	Preschool	Elementary	Jr. High	Sr. High
Death of a grandparent	30	38	35	36
Beginning a new school	42	46	45	42
Being accepted to college of choice				43
Change in parents' financial status	21	29	40	45
Outstanding personal achievement	23	39	45	46
Loss of job by parent		38	48	46
Birth or adoption of sibling	50	50	50	50
Suspension from school		46	54	50
Break-up with boyfriend/girlfriend			47	53
Not making extracurricular activity			49	55
Hospitalization of parent	51	55	54	55
Failure of a year of school		57	62	56
Change to a different school	33	46	52	56
Hospitalization of youth	59	52	59	58
Having a visible congenital deformity	39	60	70	62
Death of a close friend	38	53	65	63
Change in acceptance by peers	38	51	68	67
Death of sibling	59	68	71	68
Marital separation of parents	74	58	77	69
Involvement with drugs/alcohol		61	70	76
Divorce of parents	78	84	84	77
Acquiring a visible deformity	52	69	83	81
Death of parent	89	91	94	87
Unwed pregnancy			95	92
Getting married				100

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## Changes In Emotional Resilience Gifted Adolescent Females

Gifted females experience significant changes in social and emotional balance during the school years. This was the beginning hypothesis of a cross-sectional study of first through twelfth-grade gifted females. The study identified 89 subjects and administered a 138-item youth questionnaire. Analysis of the data indicates a significant decrease in the self-regard and self-confidence of gifted girls throughout their school years. Likewise, levels of perfectionism, hopelessness, and discouragement rose in the same developmental time block.

Relationships with parents and other adults decline while peer relationships take on added prominence. Implications are profound. As emotional vulnerability increases by grade twelve, inner courage and self-assurance decline. To combat this, strong identity information and models need to be presented, emotional stability encouraged, and life direction (including career planning) strongly emphasized.

**Key Words:** Gifted Females, Social-Emotional Resiliency, Relationships

Dr. Bruce E. Kline and Elizabeth B. Short, *Roeper Review*, Volume 13, No. 3.

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## Changes In Emotional Resilience Gifted Adolescent Females

Question Clusters	F Value	Grades 1-4		Grades 5-8		Grades 9-12	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Self Confidence	3.83*	3.98	.55	3.78	.44	3.60	.49
Perfectionism	4.96**	2.97	1.18	3.27	.98	3.75	.85
Relationship With Parents	5.48**	4.37	.72	3.90	.74	3.53	.97
Relationship With Peers	1.26	3.90	1.08	4.31	.44	4.08	.67
Discouragement	5.54**	2.33	.77	2.47	.55	2.86	.62
Hopelessness	1.35	2.28	1.06	1.73	.55	2.05	.98

\* = p < .05

\*\* = p < .01

Red print = significant difference

Dr. Bruce E. Kline and Elizabeth B. Short, *Roeper Review*, Volume 13, No. 3.

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## Changes In Emotional Resilience Gifted Adolescent Males

That gifted males experience significant changes in social and emotional valence during the school years was the hypothesis for a cross-sectional study of first through twelfth-grade males. The study identified 82 subjects. A 138-item youth questionnaire, which focused on self-confidence, perfectionism, relationships with parents, relationships with peers, hopelessness, and discouragement question clusters, was administered. Analysis of the data indicates a significantly higher level of discouragement and hopeless feelings for junior high school boys as compared with senior high school boys.

**Key Words:** Gifted Males, Social-Emotional Resiliency, Relationships

Dr. Bruce E. Kline and Elizabeth B. Short, *Roeper Review*, Volume 13, No. 4.

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## Changes In Emotional Resilience Gifted Adolescent Males

Question Clusters	F Value	Grades 1-4		Grades 5-8		Grades 9-12	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Self Confidence	1.17	3.70	.55	3.52	.55	3.49	.55
Perfectionism	.47	3.40	1.07	3.66	.91	3.61	1.07
Relationship With Peers	1.05	4.40	.46	4.17	.61	4.24	.46
Discouragement	3.11*	2.31	.47	2.71	.84	2.32	.47
Hopelessness	5.44**	1.90	.74	2.27	1.24	1.53	.74

\* = p < .05

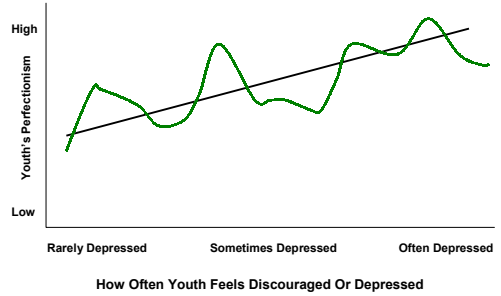
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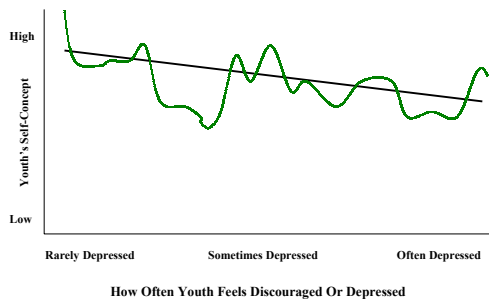
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## Perfectionism Versus Depression



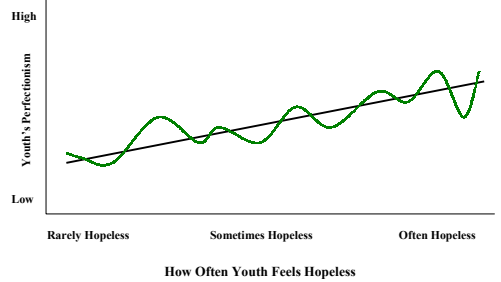
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## Self-Concept Versus Depression



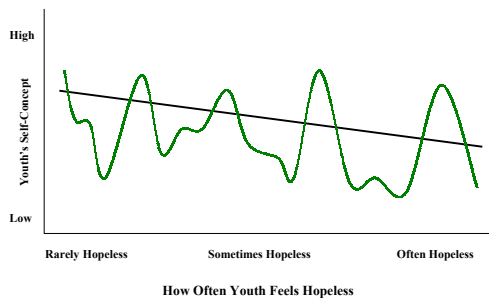
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## Perfectionism Versus Hopelessness



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## Self-Concept Versus Hopelessness



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## Acknowledging Our Own Resiliency

As adults, we must recognize the source of our own resiliency and personally grapple with questions such as:

- What awakened my own resiliency?
- What occurred in my life that brought out my latent strength and capabilities?
- How am I using this knowledge in my relationships with young people?

Only when this understanding is in place are we truly able to create the caring relationships, high expectation messages, and opportunities for young people. With that strength of purpose, we are more fully empowered as adults to activate the innate resiliency in our young people.

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## Managing Your Child's Gifts

We as parents, grandparents, teachers, and caregivers need to:

- Identify the child's gift and give it a name
- Explore the child's gift - what are all the facets of the gift?
- Express the child's gift
- Expand the child's gift - allow it to touch as many areas of knowledge and sectors of life as possible
- Extend the child's gift - give it durability, give it strength, give it length
- Execute the child's gift - envision and help manifest a lifetime career for your child



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- Execute your gift - envision and begin to manifest a lifetime career for yourself



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## The Ripple Effect Of Personal Responsibility

Personal responsibility is formed on a bedrock of beliefs as well as a set of learned values and skills.

Personal responsibility is also contagious. When you exemplify a life of personal responsibility, all those around you will begin to strive to live up to your outstanding model.

This is a *great opportunity* as well as a *great responsibility*.

Be conscious of the things you teach (the ripple you send out) - both wittingly and unwittingly.