

Healthy Living



A Newsletter from Catholic Counseling Services



Our Lady of the Angels
Western Region

Responsibility

For more information or to schedule an appointment, call Catholic Counseling Services at one of the numbers below:

St. Robert's Center
211 3rd Avenue
Venice, CA 90291
(310) 392-8701 x 105

St. Margaret's Center
10217 Inglewood Ave
Lennox, CA 90304
(310) 672-2208

IN THIS ISSUE

□ RESPONSIBILITY

BOOKS OF INTEREST

**PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY:
WHY IT MATTERS**
by Alexander Brown
Continuum, 2009

**TEACHING YOUR CHILDREN
RESPONSIBILITY**
by Linda Eyre and
Richard Eyre
Fireside Books, 1994

**EARNING YOUR OWN
RESPECT: A Handbook of
Personal Responsibility**
by Thom Rutledge
New Harbinger
Publications, 1998

**ACTS OF COMPASSION:
CARING FOR OTHERS AND
HELPING OURSELVES**
By Robert Wuthnow
Princeton University Press,
1991

*A man walking through the forest saw a fox that had lost its legs and wondered how it lived. Then he saw a tiger come in with game in its mouth. The tiger had its fill and left the rest of the meat for the fox. The next day God fed the fox by the means of the same tiger. The man began to wonder at God's greatness and said to himself, "I too shall just rest in a corner with full trust in the Lord and he will provide me with all I need. He did this for many days but nothing happened, and he was almost at death's door when he heard a voice say, "O you who are in the path of error, open your eyes to the truth! Follow the example of the tiger and stop imitating the disabled fox" (from *The Song of the Bird* by Anthony de Mello).*

We are bombarded on a daily basis with many examples of people behaving like the man in the forest. Maybe we see ourselves in him. Life would be so much easier if we could all just rest in a corner and trust that our needs would be taken care of by others. Who wouldn't love to be free of the responsibilities of daily living?

➤ The person in the commercial tells me that being fat is not my fault. He tells me enthusiastically I can eat whatever I want, live like a couch potato, and still lose weight if I will buy and use what he is selling, a miracle concoction.

➤ The commercial actor tells me it's not my fault that I am in debt.

➤ A recent acquaintance complains that he drinks too much because his boss is such a pain, and adds, with a sense of righteousness, that his wife made him hit her because she's such a nag.

➤ A woman, age 65, is still blaming her own mother for every bit of her

own unhappiness.

➤ A couple sits on the therapist's couch, with fingers pointed at each other, reciting a well rehearsed litany of their partner's faults as to why the relationship is in trouble.

➤ He stands at a podium for his public apology and says he's sorry that I was offended by his comments. He never actually says he's sorry for making comments that were offensive or out of line.

➤ The _____ (fill in the blank with a politician, a party, religion, or gender) blame _____ (the other politician, party, religion, or gender) who blame _____. You've heard and seen all of this before.

➤ Today, bullying and sexual harassment are fairly common and one excuse we hear is that "it's just boys being boys." We also have reality shows featuring people who behave badly and act obnoxiously, which goes to show just how often bad behavior is rewarded because it produces high ratings.

All this makes me wonder at what point are we responsible for ourselves? For our successes and failures? For what comes out of our mouth? Or what goes in? For our own behavior? What has to happen for us to come to the realization that it's our job to make ourselves happy? It's not our partner's job. Not our parent's job. Not God's job.

We all understand that there are a number of factors (genetics, familial, environmental) that contribute a great deal to who we become, impact the state of our health, and influence the

opportunities we have or may not have. In no way do I believe that the playing field is even. Some of us are born into environments and circumstances that ooze advantage and opportunity. Others are born into such chaos and scarcity that mere survival can be miraculous. There are so many external factors that make the influence evident. So it is important to keep an open mind and to keep a compassionate approach when dealing with self or others.

Saying all that, how does it relate to responsibility? As a therapist, I see the struggle with the issue of responsibility over and over in the lives of clients and others with whom I am familiar: What responsibility do I have for how things go for me? Where is that balance between being able to feel legitimately sorry for myself, acknowledging I got cheated or shortchanged by life, and getting to the point of accepting that my life is mine, for better or worse, no matter what might have been done or was done for or against me.

For me, the issue is a very personal one. Many years ago my life was about as miserable as could be. I was depressed and unhappy. I was lonely and despondent. At best, life felt like a 'forced march' with so much drudgery and duty and so little joy. And for such a long time I was convinced the solution had to come from outside of myself. I prayed and prayed to be rescued. I prayed for help, for deliverance, for that someone or something (I had no idea who or what) to come to my aid and somehow get me out of that awful predicament.

BOOKS OF INTEREST

STEPPING UP:

[How Taking Responsibility Changes Everything](#)
by John Izzo, Ph.D.
Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2012

DO I HAVE TO?

[Kids Talk about Responsibility](#)
by Nancy Loewen
Picture Window Books,
2002 -For Kids Grades 2nd
through 5th

PARENTING WITHOUT POWER STRUGGLES

[Raising Joyful, Resilient
Kids While Staying Cool,
Calm and Connected](#)
by Susan Stiffelman
Atria Books, 2012

IF EVERYBODY DID

by Jo Ann Stover
JourneyForth, 1989

FINDING YOUR MORAL COMPASS:

[Transformational Principles
to Guide You in Recovery
and Life](#)
by Craig Nakken
Hazelden, 2011

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY:

[Self-Reliance and the
Accountable Life](#)
by Nathaniel Branden, Ph.D.
Touchstone, 1997

PARENTING WITH LOVE AND LOGIC

[Teaching Children
Responsibility](#)
by Foster Cline, M.D.
and Jim Fay
NavPress Publishing, 2006

KIDS, PARENTS, AND POWER STRUGGLES

[Winning for a Lifetime](#)
By Mary Sheedy Kurcinka
William Morrow
Paperbacks, 2001

WEBSITES OF INTEREST

JOSEPHSONINSTITUTE.ORG

LIBERTYMUTUAL.COM/RESPONSIBILITY

That stalemate went on far too long until it finally hurt enough and I grew angry enough to make some important decisions and changes. The decisions were exceptionally hard to make and the changes were very painful to live with, but the end result was that I took a huge step toward being more responsible for myself. And, it was one of the best things that could have happened.

When it comes to responsibility, here are some of the things I have been learning:

1) I am responsible to filter through what I see and hear, to decide what is accurate or just an excuse.

2) I cannot control everything that happens, but I am responsible for my attitude. I am in charge of and have the final say about my outlook, for being a pessimist or an optimist, for seeing things as obstacles or opportunities, for seeing myself as helpless victim or a challenged participant.

3) I can't control the behavior and/or conduct of others, but I am responsible for how I will choose to respond. My behavior is my choice and not just a reaction. It is a fallacy to believe anyone "made me do it." I did "it" (whether it is behaving badly or speaking inappropriately) because that's what I wanted to do or that's what I've conditioned myself to do.

4) I am responsible for what comes out of my mouth even in the heat of battle.

5) I can control my thoughts if I work at it. And as I control or contain those thoughts, I can also influence how it is that I feel. If I consistently think failure, it should be no great surprise that I fail or feel like a failure. If I think dark and dreary thoughts, it's not surprising that I feel depressed. If all I do is worry, no wonder my anxiety level is sky high.

6) I have a lot of control over my health and that pertains to the health of my body, my mind, my heart and my soul. It's my job to exercise my brain and my spirit, just as I would my body.

7) Sometimes, asking for help can be the most responsible decision I can make. Being independent and self-sufficient doesn't mean being isolated. There are times and circumstances when we can benefit from the assistance of others and we may suffer needlessly because we are too proud or afraid to ask for help.

8) It is my job to make myself happy. That is not a burden or expectation I ought to place on any other person. It's true that others enhance my happiness, or maybe do their best to detract from it. But bottom line, it's my job to make myself a happy person.

9) I am responsible to cultivate whatever gifts I might possess. I might not be the most talented person out there, but all of us have some talents, and, it is a waste not to grow whatever it is I've been given.

10) I am responsible for my contributions to my environment, whether it has to do with garbage on the ground or negativity in the air. Even if it's just by small increments, I make things better or I make them worse.

11) I am responsible for what becomes of my relationships. So many times couples in the midst of distress fall victim to the temptation to target and blame their partner for what is wrong with the relationship. It might be an issue of listening, in-laws, sex or money. The issues matter less than the dynamics. It's even possible that one person is entirely to blame for a given situation, but in most circumstances it does indeed "take two to tango." Usually when one person is trying to put all the blame on the other, it's because he or she has turned a blind eye on their own failures or shortcomings.

I am convinced most issues (self-esteem, relationships, and peace of mind) would improve if I put as much energy into self-correction and growing up as I do into complaining, criticizing, and dodging responsibility. And what I want in the people around me is not perfection but a similar mindset that demonstrates a willingness to work on their contribution. That's a pretty good recipe for success.

Where to begin? Where I ought to begin (without pointing a finger) is with a look in the mirror. The questions I begin with ought to sound something like these:

➤ Rather than blaming you for not understanding me, I should begin by asking "am I making myself clear in expressing what I want or need?"

➤ As I conduct my affairs in this marriage, am I thinking only about me? Or about us?

➤ Am I doing all that I can to make this relationship succeed?

➤ What is it I do or think that tends to sabotage our attempt to be a healthy couple?

➤ Maybe less of "what am I going to get out of this?" and more "what is it I bring to this union."

➤ Maybe less of "what can I get or what do you owe me" and more "what can I do to make the life of my partner, friend, parent, or child easier and more enjoyable?"

➤ What am I doing to help my own situation?

Are you having difficulty teaching or encouraging your children to be responsible people? Maybe, just maybe, it has something to do with the climate out there for which all of us are accountable. Maybe the responsible thing to do would be less talking and more trying to set a good example, less preaching to our children about how they should be and more about showing them how to be responsible through our own actions, words, and attitudes.

We started with a story titled "The Disabled Fox" from Anthony de Mello's book [The Song of the Bird](#). That story ends like this:

On the street I saw a naked child, hungry and shivering in the cold. I became angry and said to God, "why do you permit this? Why don't you do something?"

For a while God said nothing. That night he replied, quite suddenly, "I certainly did do something. I made you."