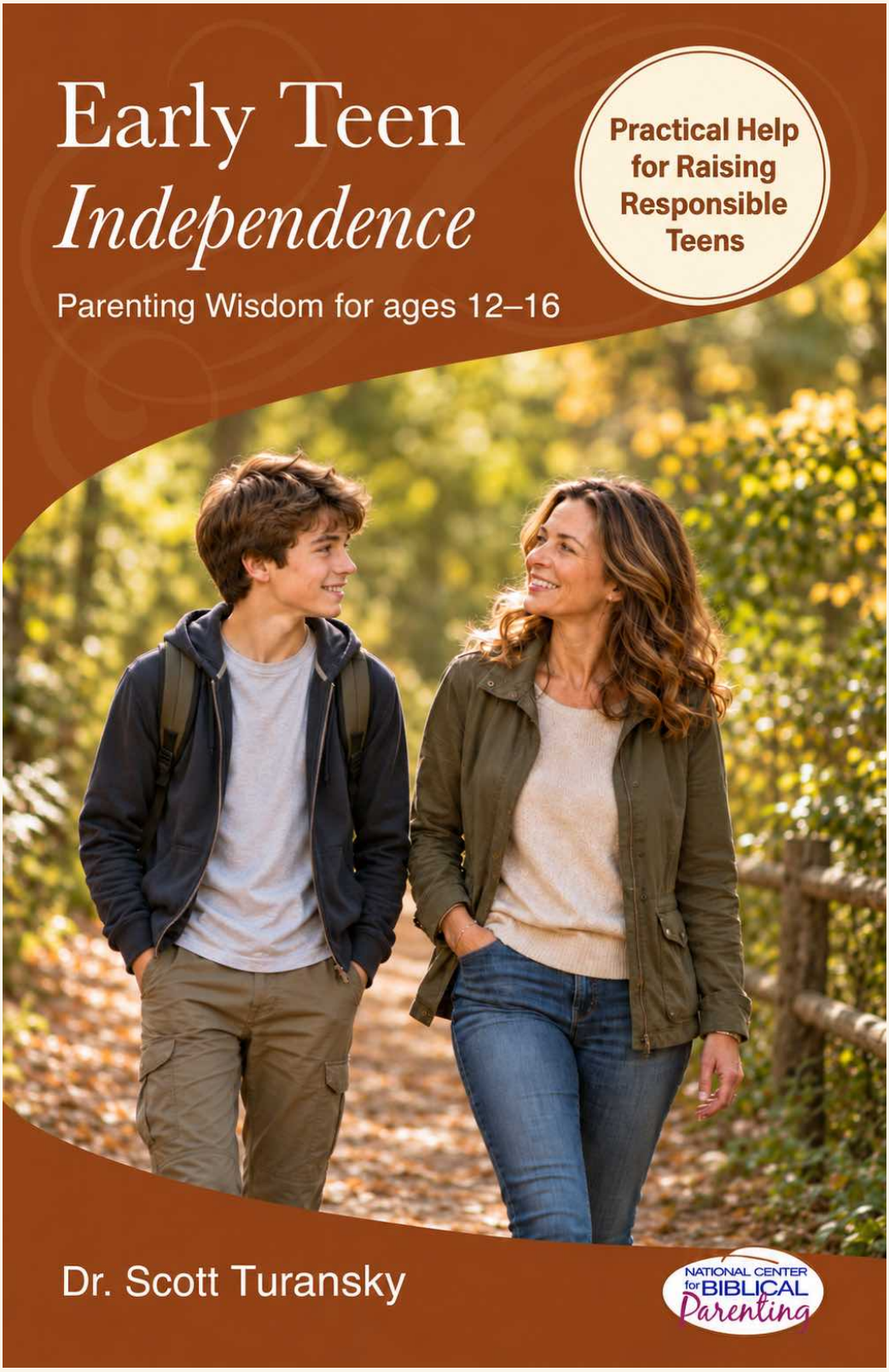
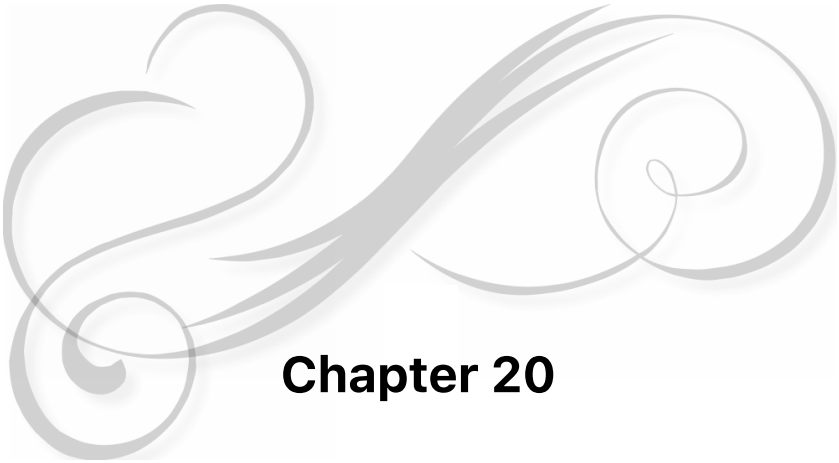
FREE SAMPLE CHAPTER



Chapter 20

Help Your Teen Act Without Being Reminded



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"Why do I have to remind you every time?" Parents ask that question when a young person can do a job but rarely starts it independently. The recycling overflows, the dog needs food, or the school materials remain on the kitchen counter. Once reminded, the teen may take care of the responsibility. But noticing what needs to happen still seems to be the parent's job.

An important part of growing responsibility is learning to recognize cues. A cue is a responsibility indicator. It tells you that something needs attention. When parents teach young people to notice and respond to those indicators, they help transfer more than the work. They help transfer the thinking that gets the work started.

Move from Level 1 to Level 2 Thinking

I use the term Level 1 thinking to describe self-centeredness. At this level, a young person's attention revolves around

personal desires: What do I want to do? What interests me right now? A teen may be absorbed in a game or conversation and give little thought to a responsibility nearby.

Level 2 is Responsibility Thinking. The questions change: What needs to happen? What am I responsible for here? Your teen learns to consider obligations even when something else is more appealing. These levels describe ways of thinking, not permanent labels for children. A young person may demonstrate responsibility in one situation and need considerable training in another.

Cues help prompt the move from Level 1 to Level 2. The clock indicates that it's time to get ready. A container's contents indicate that it needs emptying. Finishing an activity indicates that it's time to put things away. The cue draws attention beyond the immediate desire and toward a responsibility that needs action.

When Mom Becomes the Cue

Parents often function as their children's Level 2 indicators. Mom notices what needs doing and gives an instruction. Dad watches the time and announces that everyone needs to get ready. The young person carries out the task, but the parent continues to manage the awareness behind it.

Fourteen-year-old George came to my office with his parents. We were all in the room together, and I began to talk to George directly. "Do you know why you're here?"

"Yes," he said. "I want more privileges and my parents are too strict."

I said, "You've come to the right place. I train parents, and I

can help you train yours. Would you like that?"

His eyes lit up in surprise. "Yes," he said. His guard started to drop.

As we talked, I asked, "What chores do you have at home?"

He couldn't think of anything at first, but after a bit of interaction, he remembered that one of his responsibilities was taking the trash from inside the house to the outside container.

"How do you know when it's time to take the trash out?" I asked.

"My mom tells me," he said.

I turned to Mom and asked, "How do you know when it's time to tell your son to take out the trash?"

She said, "It's full." Mom was responding to a cue, while George was responding to her instruction.

We agreed that George could watch the trash can and empty it when it was three-quarters full. That would give him a cue earlier than his mother's. At our next meeting, Mom reported that she hadn't needed to tell him once that week. He had taken care of it himself. He was learning to notice the indicator and act before Mom became involved.

During our times together, Dad and Mom pointed out that when their son became more responsible, then he would be given more privileges. The light bulb was coming on in George's mind. He now had something he could actually work on.

Find the Indicator Behind Your Reminder

To identify a useful cue, ask yourself, "What tells me this

needs to happen?" Often you're already responding to information your teen can learn to recognize. You notice the time, see a need, or remember what happens on a particular day. Help your young person make that connection.

Suppose your daughter needs to bring certain materials to school on Tuesdays. You might ask each day, "What day is it, and what do you need today?" The calendar becomes the indicator. As she practices checking it, she learns to connect the day with her responsibility. Preparing the night before may give her more time to respond successfully.

Or consider a teen who leaves the bathroom untidy. The cue can be leaving the room. Teach the young person to turn around and check for anything that needs attention before walking away. Initially, your comment might simply be, "You're leaving the bathroom." The meaning of that comment has already been explained and practiced.

Keep the cue specific and easy to recognize. "Notice when things need doing" is too broad for a teen who is still learning this skill. "When you finish your snack, check the counter and put away what you used" gives a clear connection between a familiar event and a responsibility.

Point to the Cue and Practice

This approach requires parents to change their part in the interaction. Instead of repeatedly directing the action, you draw attention to the indicator. At first, you're still providing support, but your words help your teen learn where to look. With practice, the cue itself can begin to prompt the response.

For example, breakfast might become the cue for feeding the

dog. After explaining the plan, you might say, “You’re getting ready to eat breakfast.” Your teen connects that moment with caring for the animal first. You still check that the dog is fed while the routine is developing. A dependent animal shouldn’t go hungry during the learning process.

If your teen misses the cue, find out where the process broke down. Was the indicator easy to notice? Did the young person understand the task? Was there enough time to act? Sometimes the cue needs adjusting. Sometimes the teen noticed but chose to ignore the responsibility, and accountability is needed. Recognizing a cue is a skill; following through also requires willingness.

Learn to Act Without an Overseer

Proverbs 6:6–8 directs us to learn from the ant. It describes an ant that “has no commander, no overseer or ruler,” yet prepares its provisions in the appropriate season. The passage challenges laziness and presents a picture of purposeful work without someone standing nearby giving instructions.

That’s a useful direction for our parenting. We want young people to recognize what needs doing and respond without constant supervision. The passage doesn’t mean your teen should already be able to manage everything alone. It gives you a picture of initiative toward which you can train, one manageable responsibility at a time.

When your teen acts independently, name what happened. “You noticed the recycling needed emptying and took care of it. That’s Responsibility Thinking.” Your comment helps the young person recognize the internal work behind the completed

chore. You're acknowledging awareness and initiative as well as a finished task.

Transfer One Reminder This Week

Choose one responsibility that currently depends on your reminders. Identify the cue that alerts you, then work with your teen to find an indicator early enough to allow a good response. Explain what to notice and what action should follow. Practice together, pointing to the cue as needed and gradually reducing your prompting.

You're helping your young person move from waiting for directions to noticing an obligation. Over time, the question becomes, "What needs my attention?" That shift from Level 1 to Level 2 thinking gives your teen a practical way to grow. You can remain involved as a parent while helping your child take ownership of the next responsible action.

Help your teen grow in responsibility.

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