

Teaching Kids the New Three Rs

Not so long ago, when you referred to the *Three Rs*, everyone assumed you meant Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. But as our society becomes more environmentally aware, those triple Rs can also serve as a good reminder to Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle. With an ever-increasing population and an ever-decreasing supply of nonrenewable energy and raw materials, the new *Three Rs* can help us to frame some necessary changes to our often wasteful American lifestyle. Involving our kids in this process takes a little more effort, but in doing so we can teach them how and why to make choices that are earth-friendly, though sometimes a little inconvenient. By showing them that if enough people make even small changes it can make a big difference, our children will grow up as people who care enough about the planet and its inhabitants to sacrifice that bit of convenience sometimes.

Modifying our daily routines to include “earth-friendly” as well as “user-friendly” can be a bit inconvenient, but here are a few fairly painless ways to model a green attitude for our kids:

- Let them know when you’re riding your bike or walking to work to save gas, keep the air cleaner and your body healthier.
- When you stop for coffee in the morning, tell them you’re using a commuter mug instead of getting a new paper cup every day to help save trees and the energy used to produce those paper cups.
- Explain when you buy products at the grocery store with one large package instead of several small ones (the 2 ½ gallon spring water container vs. 24 bottles) that it helps save energy and reduce the amount of waste that goes into our landfills.
- Ask them to remind you to bring your reusable grocery bags into the supermarket—they’re so easy to forget. Most kids thrive on such a task, and what a simple, concrete way to help raise their environmental awareness.

Teaching our children to practice the new *Three Rs* makes all of us more conscious of what we’re consuming and how we’re disposing of it. If we have to think about putting that water bottle into the recycle bin instead of tossing it in the garbage can, we are working for the benefit of something bigger than we are: the welfare of this amazing planet and all of its inhabitants, both now and in the future. In doing so, we begin to shift our mindset from an attitude of indifference to that of making a difference. And really, from where I stand, that’s what it’s all about.

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