

Counselor's Corner

Angela Bender, MA, LPC

Rita Mitchell, MA, LPC

When Your Child Loses His Coat (or shoes, or backpack, or lunchbox. . .)

The weather is turning colder now. How many coats will your child lose this year? It can be very frustrating as a parent when your child is careless with his or her personal items. It can also be inconvenient and expensive. So, how can we teach our children to keep track of their own belongings? One point to consider - are you training your child to rely on you, or training him to learn responsibility?

First, look at this issue as a life skill you are teaching your child. He won't always have his mom and dad to check his stuff, run back to the school to pick up his coat, or remind him to leave his belongings in a safe place. He needs to learn to do this for himself. Expect some mistakes. Keeping track of his belongings is a habit your child must establish and no one acquires new habits quickly. Have a talk with him about which items he must remember. Ask him for his ideas on how he can keep track of them better. He might come up with some good suggestions like always putting his coat in the same place. Then, make a habit of noticing when he *does* remember his coat and comment on it. "Good job, you remembered your coat." Refrain from reminding or scolding—and don't rescue him by replacing lost items. Let him be responsible for coping with the loss—it's his problem, not yours.

If your child simply doesn't care about keeping track of her things and doesn't mind inconveniencing you, then a consequence is in order. Whenever possible, don't replace the item. Let your child experience the loss of a favorite or useful item. If you must replace the item (it's too cold to go without a coat), then require your child to pay for it. If she doesn't have money, sell something of hers to pay for a replacement (maybe two video games, or something like that). This consequence can be very effective for a repeat offender. As the child gets older, begin charging him for the inconvenience of retrieving a forgotten item. You'll find more practical tips you can use right now in [*Go to Your Room!: Consequences That Teach*](#) by Shari Steelsmith.