Responsibility and the Ability to Respond

An occasional paper by Di Margetts and Peter Harper

The concept of rights and their corresponding responsibilities is integral to the Protective Behaviours process. There has been, and will continue to be, much discussion about these elements in particular the difference between feeling, or belief that we are responsible to others and for ourselves. As responsible adults we may need to intervene (protectively interrupt) if our child is in danger of hurting themselves or others. We can not be responsible for another person and yet we are certainly responsible to all other people. We can be, and often are responsible for an object such as a vase or equipment. For generations we have believed ourselves to be responsible FOR our children (and for the actions of others). We have chosen the example of parent and child, and yet the same principles apply to teachers and students, nurses and patients, or anyone working or living with others.

As an example we have taken a fairly commonly held belief that we are responsible for our children. If we take a not unusual event in the life of a parent and apply it to our thinking,. feeling and behaviour then we can see how this may be played out in life. It is important to note here that which ever side of the equation we are working on, we will have challenging times with our children, (or anyone else). Challenging our beliefs does not mean that all will be peaceful and harmonious all the time (thankfully).

My child has made friends with someone I do not like

If my belief is; I am responsible FOR my child	If my belief is; I am responsible TO my child
My Feelings might be: Fearful, frustrated, dissatisfied, resentful, worried, feel out of control (over the situation), anxious, helpless, self righteous, justified (in taking strong action)	**My Feelings might be:** 'Oh Oh !' worried (for my child), concerned. open (for discussion), acceptance, comfortable, secure (in the knowledge that this can be sorted out) .....
My thoughts might be: They're too young to know what is best ! I must tell them not to play with this person ! I must stop this now before it is too late ! Oh no! Look what has happened to me: I didn't listen to my parents; the same will happen to my child.....! They will be led astray and end up in trouble ! Why are they doing this to me? I'll have to answer for this !	**My thoughts might be:** There must be something good that my child sees in this person. It's OK for me not to like this person and I have the right to voice my opinions. I can draw on my experience to share ideas and support my child to make suitable friends. Am I being too judgmental? What are my unwritten rules here? Why is it I don't like this person? What can I do or say to help the situation?
My Behaviour might be: Try to have control over the situation, Defensive behaviour for example, emotionally remove myself, subtle(or not so subtle) manipulation to control child's behaviour, Arguments, aggressive, confrontations, distancing behaviour, throw up arms, don't care attitude, or	**My Behaviour might be:** Accepting of the friend, able to voice an opinion without trying to control child, able to set boundaries. Honest and open discussions about my values, prejudices, and unwritten rules. Discussion about why I do not like this person and what my concerns are, still accepting and being respectful of my child's choice.....