



Show-Me Character

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Youths are 27 percent of our population, but 100 percent of our future.

The purpose of character development is to strengthen the character of young people today and thereby safeguard tomorrow for all. As adults we must help to refashion a generation that has great potential to make a difference — to make character count — and in doing so, perhaps improve our own character.

What is Show-Me Character?

Show-Me Character is a program that teaches young people to make sound moral judgments. It also encourages all adults to become more involved in helping youths develop positive character traits, such as honesty and truthfulness. It makes sense that our communities benefit when youths and adults understand the importance of being involved and caring citizens, and “doing the right thing.” Effective character education encourages youth to “do the right thing” by incorporating these core ethical values in their daily lives:

- trustworthiness
- fairness
- respect
- caring
- responsibility
- citizenship



These six pillars describe character and ethical behavior in ways that youth understand how a person of character thinks and behaves. By teaching and demonstrating these six values, adults help youths learn the importance of being a person of character. In order to effectively promote these character pillars, Show-Me Character believes the following points are very important:

- People do not automatically develop good moral character. Efforts must be made to help youths develop the values and abilities necessary for moral decision making and conduct.
- Character education is an obligation of families; it is also an important obligation of faith communities, schools, youths and other human serving groups.
- Positive character development is best achieved when these groups work together.
- Every adult has the responsibility to teach and model the

core ethical values and promote the development of good character.

What can you do to promote character development?

There are many things you can do to teach and encourage your child to be a person of good character. Specifically, you can:

- Teach your child that character counts — that their success and happiness will depend on who they are inside, not what they have or how they look. Tell them that people of character know the difference between right and wrong because they guide their thoughts and actions by some basic rules of living.
- Be an advocate for character. Don't be neutral about the importance of character nor casual about improper conduct.
- Be careful and self-conscious about setting a good example in all you say and do. Hold yourself to the highest standards. Remember, everything you do and don't do, sends a message about your values. When you slip, act the way you want others to behave when they act improperly — be accountable, apologize sincerely and resolve to do better.

Show-Me Character is Missouri 4-H Youth Development's Character Education Program, based on CHARACTER COUNTS!™ CHARACTER COUNTS! is a service mark used by the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics.

■ Praise good behavior and discourage bad behavior by imposing fair, consistent consequences that prove you are serious about character. Show courage and firmness by enforcing the core values when it is difficult or costly to do so.

This guide describes each of the pillars with accompanying adult exercises and adult and youth activities to help you reinforce the development of these positive character traits with your child.

Trustworthiness

People with good character are people we can trust. Trust is not automatic. Earning trust takes time, losing trust can happen quickly. Honesty, promise keeping, loyalty and integrity are four elements that are key to building trustworthiness. Use these guidelines for earning and maintaining trust.

Honesty means saying things that are true. Tell the truth.

- Be sincere. Say what you mean and mean what you say.
- If you find something that doesn't belong to you, return it.

Promise keeping is doing what you say you will do. Only make promises that you can keep and that you fully plan to keep. It means you:

- Keep your word.
- Are reliable.
- Return the things you borrow.

Loyalty is protecting and promoting the interests of people who are important to you. It means that you:

- Keep private information private.
- Do not gossip.
- Help prevent a friend from do-

ing something that is harmful to him or her.

- Don't ask a friend to do something wrong to keep your friendship.

Integrity means being what you say you are. It is:

- Standing up for what you believe.
- Acting on what you believe.
- Doing the right thing no matter what you lose in the process.

Adult exercises

Think about the two or three people you trust the most. What qualities do they display? What have you done lately to demonstrate to your family, friends or co-workers that you can be trusted?

Give the following situations some thought. How would you handle each scenario?

- You notice a billing error in your favor of \$1,000. Do you let it pass or call it to the business' attention?
- Your tractor is listed in the want ads and you need to sell it fast. Do you tell potential buyers everything or try to unload it quickly?
- Your boss has mistakenly given you credit for someone else's work. Do you correct your boss and tell your co-worker?

Working with children and teens

Discuss with children or teens how trust is earned and why we consider others trustworthy. Provide specific examples and illustrations to express thoughts. Sample discussion questions may include:

- How do others earn your trust?

- How do you know when you can trust people?
- Which people do you feel are the most trustworthy?

Ask children or teens to write the names of people they can trust and why they consider them trustworthy. Younger children can draw a picture that relates to each of their choices.

Are you worthy of trust?

Invite children to respond to a list of hypothetical scenarios by having them identify the course of action that would be most trustworthy and then tell honestly what they would do. Sample scenarios are:

- Your teacher has miscalculated your test score, giving you a higher grade than you deserve.
- Your parents praise you for homework well done. But your older sister helped you with most of it.
- The teacher is in the hall and you need a pencil. There are pencils in the teacher's desk drawer.

Respect

People of good character are respectful of others. People of good character show respect by recognizing and honoring everyone's right to be themselves, to make decisions, and to have privacy and dignity.

Everyone wants to be treated with respect. People have become a little careless with respect. We do not always treat others like we want to be treated. Ethical people deal with others under the Principle of Autonomy and the Principle of Acceptance.

Principle of autonomy

Respectful people give others the information they need to

make wise decisions about their lives:

Principles of acceptance

Ethical people accept individual differences without prejudice. Respect is given because you are a person of good character.

Use these guides to strengthen character:

- Be courteous and polite.
- Be kind and appreciative.
- Accept individual differences and don't insist that everyone be like you.
- Judge people on their merits, not on race, religion, nationality, age, sex, physical or mental condition, or socio-economic status.

Adult exercises

Consider the following situations and your reactions. Did you display respectful behavior?

- You're pulled over for speeding. You know it's true, but it still bugs you. Do you complain about the dumb police in front of your children and make excuses for your error, or do you treat the policeman with respect and admit you made a mistake, willing to accept the consequences?
- You work in a business that serves customers of all ages. A line of customers is forming. Do you turn to help the adult before the teen, even though the teen was there first? Do you speak to children and teens respectfully?

Working with children and teens

Help children distinguish between respectful and disrespectful statements and actions through everyday situations. Ask children whether each of the following is

an example of respect or disrespect. Discuss how those showing lack of respect could act respectfully.

- A friend borrows one of your toys and won't return it.
- A classmate pushes you out of line and takes your place.
- A classmate takes time to help you understand a math problem.
- You tell a friend a secret and he tells it to a few other people.
- A friend says "pardon me" before going around you to hang up her coat in the closet.
- A classmate teases you about your new haircut.
- You raise your hand to answer a question, and everyone listens quietly while you talk.
- You are cursing loudly in the lunchroom because your friends think it is funny.
- You are playing baseball and accidentally throw the ball through a neighbor's window.
- Someone at a party spills grape juice on you and doesn't apologize.
- Several people are pushing to get on a crowded bus.
- Your father says he is expecting an important phone call. Five minutes later the phone rings. It's a friend of yours from school.

Responsibility

Taking responsibility is a way to show we are people of character. It means doing our part, controlling our thoughts and actions, and doing our best.

When we are acting responsibly, we take the blame when it is due and do not claim credit for other people's work. We accept responsibility for our decisions.

Being responsible means that you:

- Think before you act.
- Think about how your actions affect others.
- Think before you speak.
- Be accountable. Take responsibility for the results of what you do and don't do.
- Fix your own mistakes.
- Keep trying. Stick to duties even when they are difficult.
- Be reliable. Always to your job.
- Clean up your own messes.
- Act as if someone you respect is always watching.
- Show perseverance by demonstrating a commitment to finish what you start.

Adult exercises

Think of the last time you felt you were wronged. Perhaps you put faith in a person or product that did not deliver as promised. Who's responsible for the outcome? Do you quickly blame others for everything that goes wrong? Do you model responsibility by admitting to your mistakes as well?

Working with children and teens

Children learn about acting responsibly by identifying responsible behavior in hypothetical situations.

Read the following situations and have children tell what is a responsible reaction and why.

- You're sitting at your desk ready to take an exam. You were told to bring a No. 2 pencil, and you forgot. What would you do?
- You're at a fast food restaurant. You have just paid for your lunch, but when you count your

change you notice that it is not enough. What do you do?

- You've worked long and hard writing a special story. When you get your paper back from the teacher, the grade is lower than you think you deserve. What do you do?

Responsibility journals

Children become more aware of their behavior by keeping a "responsibility journal" for two or three days. Record behavior in one of three sections: being dependable, being accountable, doing my best. Discuss strengths and weaknesses.

Fairness

Fairness is one of the most difficult Pillars of Character to define clearly. People often see decisions that help them as being "fair" and those that do not as being "unfair."

Fairness is often a matter of perception. Although some decisions are clearly unfair, the fact is there is usually more than one fair choice.

How can one be fair? Use the same rules for everyone so no one has an unfair advantage. Being fair means you:

- Listen to others and try to understand what they are feeling and saying.
- Consider all the facts, including opposing views.
- Use the same standards for everyone in the same situation.
- Correct your mistakes.

Adult exercises

Any adult who is around children or has children of their own can quickly tell you one of the most dreadful statements you can deal with is, "But it's not fair." Fair-

ness issues are complex. Have you ever thought about the following:

- I worked twice as long on that new project at work and someone else got all the credit. It's not fair!
- I made a decision and I thought it was the best for all parties concerned, but later I found out I didn't have all the information. So I'm being questioned about my decision. It's not fair!

How do you deal with fairness issues? What are you modeling to others around you?

Sometimes decisions are made because of a perceived need that someone else cannot see. People cry "unfair" when they simply don't have all of the information.

Discuss family rules so children see how important rules are to ensure fairness and equal opportunities. By suggesting new rules and offering ideas about those currently in place, children learn that they have a responsibility to work for fairness in the home.

Working with children and teens

Make a list of some of your family rules and the consequences of not following them. Ask children what their rules would be if they were in charge of making them. List these next to the actual rules.

Discuss the rules one by one. Ask, "Is this one fair? Why or why not? What would happen if we adopted this rule?" Compare these to the first list in terms of fairness. Decide what will happen if the rules are broken.

Consider revising some of the current rules if youth can show how their suggestions are more fair.

Fairness journals

Children reflect on the issue of fairness in journal writing exercises and family discussions about what they have written. Have children make journal entries about fairness with sentence stems like the following examples:

- I am treated fairly when....
- Everyone deserves...
- It's important to play by the rules because....
- The way older people are treated is...
- People are not treated fairly when...

Caring

Caring is a word that implies action, not just empty emotion. Caring people love, help, give and are kind. They are caretakers of people, pets, plants, possessions and even the planet. Caring people show their concern for others in an active way.

Genuine concern for others is a sign of growing up. A big part of growing up is the ability to think and care about someone besides yourself.

The Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," is a guideline accepted around the world that helps people do more good and less harm to others. Caring people:

- Show kindness and compassion for others.
- Live by the Golden Rule.
- Think about what their decisions, words or actions will do to other people.
- Put concern for others into action.

Adult exercises

Who cares?

How rude?

When was the last time you made one of these statements?

Sometimes we are all guilty of forgetting the Golden Rule. If people around you were to evaluate your caring behaviors, would you hear examples of how you put concerns for others into action? Would the majority of responses be reflective of living by the Golden Rule. Are your behaviors genuine or phony?

Working with children and teens

Youngsters who want to get Mom or Dad a gift without spending money could make a book full of "caring coupons." Think of caring acts that others appreciate and list these acts on the coupons.

Examples: one dishwashing job, yard work, extra house cleaning chores, keep TV/stereo off while others are sleeping, a hug and a kiss.

Pen pals

Have children become pen pals with a group of youngsters in another country.

Role-playing compassion

Ask children what compassion would look like if:

- Your dog was caught up in his leash.
- Someone was sad because her father was sick and in the hospital.
- Your mother seemed so tired after work.
- A friend was confused about what a teacher said.

Citizenship

In practice, good citizenship is understanding and doing things that make life better for yourself

and other people. True citizenship means participation, involvement and contribution. No one can make a difference without being involved. Good citizenship is not just doing the thing that "looks good."

Good citizenship means helping others. A citizen is a member of a family, a community, a nation and a world. Being a good citizen means more than knowing how the government works. It means working to make our community, country and world a better place to live.

All communities are built by people working together. The well-being of every citizen depends on everyone in the community. Community members organize to improve living for everyone.

A good citizen:

- Obeys laws.
- Helps others/volunteers.
- Protects the environment.
- Votes.
- Respects the flag and other national symbols.

Adult exercises

Take a personal inventory of your citizenship behaviors.

- Do you volunteer on a regular basis for community or friends'/family needs?
- Do you reduce, reuse, recycle? Are you careful about the chemicals you use on your lawn?
- Do you vote regularly?
- Do you discuss the need for citizen involvement with those around you?
- Do you show respect for national and state symbols as well as other cultural symbols?

Good citizenship begins with you.

Interviews

Have children interview adults they consider good citizens. Then share interviews with family members and reflect on what it means to be a good citizen. Suggest children ask questions like:

- Do you think you are a good citizen?
- Do you do anything at work that shows good citizenship?
- How do you think young people can show good citizenship?
- Do you do volunteer work?

Working with children and teens

Collage of citizenship

Have children cut out pictures and assemble a collage depicting acts of civic responsibility such as recycling, voting, showing respect for the law and speaking out against injustice.

When the collage is complete, each family member identifies one contribution they have made and explains its significance.

Addressing community problems

Ask children to think about problems they might find in their neighborhood. Discuss what causes these problems, how problems affect members of the community and how concerned citizens can solve the problems. A list of concerns might include:

- Litter and other forms of pollution.
- Shoplifting.
- Outdoor play equipment is broken.
- Wildlife dying because of harsh weather.

Adapted from *Character Counts!*
North Dakota State University
Extension Service.

These activities were designed to help adults regularly reinforce character traits with children in their care. Parents, teachers and other adults are very important in helping youths have the understanding, desire and courage to be persons of good character. By actively engaging in conversations and activities about character, you help children strengthen their awareness of moral obligations, enhance their desire to do the right thing and implement principled choices.



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