

Introduction

Good character traits, such as respect, cooperation, and honesty, are arguably the most important things that children need to learn. These traits and others help students make good choices, develop self-esteem, and become responsible citizens and caring individuals. While many schools are successfully implementing character education lessons into their curriculum, children are most influenced by the character traits exhibited by those around them, especially at home.

Table Talk

Put the importance of positive character traits into perspective for your youngster by starting conversations about respect, honesty, responsibility, or teamwork. After listening to your child's stories from school, for example, turn the conversation to character-related themes by asking leading questions such as:

1. Why do you think your friend/teacher/classmate acted like that?
2. What could you have done to help?
3. Do you think that was the right thing to do? Why?
3. How did that make you feel?

Tips & Tricks

- **Be a role model.** Children imitate the adults in their lives—especially their parents. Take time to reflect on your words and actions to make sure you are portraying the character traits you want your child to develop.
- **Don't be a helicopter parent.** Children—and adults—develop character when they experience things first-hand. When appropriate, take a step back and allow your child to solve his/her own disagreements with friends, make and fix his/her own mistakes, and deal with other real-life situations.
- **Praise your child.** Notice when your child exhibits positive character traits such as sharing toys, keeping his/her room clean, or holding the door open for someone who needs help. Praise your child for his/her generosity, responsibility, or caring.
- **Don't be afraid of punishment.** If you have clear rules for how your child should act and he or she disobeys, a suitable punishment shows him or her that poor character choices (tantrums, irresponsibility, dishonesty, etc.) have consequences.

Plan & Practice

There are many activities you can do with your child to help him or her develop good character. Here are a few things you can try:

- Read books or watch TV with your child. Take note of which characters act well and which do not. Use the story line as a starting point for a discussion about character. Check out the Learn More section below, where there is a link to a list of good books which showcase different character traits.
- Consider finding somewhere to volunteer as a family. Showing concern for others is central to good character. Every community has numerous opportunities where even young children can be involved in something bigger than themselves. Perhaps you could help out at a local soup kitchen, assist efforts to keep your town green, volunteer to teach new immigrants, or sign up to run in a fundraising race.

Learn More

Check out the following websites for more information on how to help your child develop positive character traits.

- **CharacterEd.Net**
<http://www.charactered.net/>
Click on the *Parent Notebook* for tips on teaching your child about character. The site contains informational articles, suggested activities, and lists of other resources.
- **Best Children's Books**
<http://www.the-best-childrens-books.org/Character-Education-books.html>
Need books that teach character? This blog lists children's books by topic as well as age group.
- **How to Raise Children Who Bounce When They Fall**
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/robashghar/2014/01/24/scraped-knees-can-americans-raise-children-who-can-bounce-when-they-fall/?ss=forbeswoman>
This article discusses the need to allow our children to take risks and be vulnerable in order to develop resilience and character.