

The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center



## A Parent's Guide to Teaching Good Character

*trustworthiness · respect · responsibility · fairness · caring · citizenship*

# Parenting for Good Character

Good character doesn't just happen. It is a result of parents who intentionally teach their children about character.

## What is character?

- **Moral character** includes values we need to be our best self, like the Six Pillars of Character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring & citizenship.
- **Performance character** focuses on values that help us do our best work, like diligence, imagination, work ethic, dependability, and a positive attitude.

## How to teach character with T.E.A.M.:

- **Teach children that their character counts**  
The Six Pillars of Character provide the vocabulary words to teach your children about character.
- **Enforce the Six Pillars of Character**  
Reward good behavior (usually praise is enough) and discourage bad behavior by imposing fair and consistent consequences.
- **Advocate Character**  
Continually encourage children to live up to the Six Pillars of Character.
- **Model Good Behavior**  
Everything you say and do (or neglect to do) sends a message about your values. Be sure that these messages reinforce your lessons about doing the right thing, even when it is difficult. When you slip, be accountable; apologize sincerely and do better!

## How to use this guide:

Our goal is to give parents a variety of ways to teach character. Imagine a parenting toolbox where you can keep all of your parenting strategies. This guide can provide you with more ideas for your toolbox.

This guide is organized by the Six Pillars of Character. For each Pillar, you will find:

- An introduction to the Pillar
- Ideas on how to teach, enforce, advocate and model good character
- A discussion starter
- An Excellence & Ethics Tool. These strategies can help you talk with your children, and can be used with kids or adults, at home, school or at work.

## About this guide:

A project of The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University, A Parent's Guide to Teaching Good Character introduces families to the Six Pillars and provides ideas for parents to help teach good character in their home.

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## Learn more:

For more resources, please visit us at [www.drake.edu/raycenter](http://www.drake.edu/raycenter), or call us at 515-271-1910.

# TRUSTWORTHINESS

- Be honest
- Don't deceive, cheat or steal
- Be reliable; do what you say you'll do
- Be loyal
- Have the courage to do the right thing
- Build a good reputation
- Keep your promises

When others trust you, they believe that you'll do what you say you'll do and keep your promises. You show integrity when what you believe matches what you do.

Figuring out the "right thing to do" can be difficult. Imagine that a cashier gives you too much change. Are you honest and return the extra money or are you dishonest and keep the money? Sometimes the choice that matches our values could be costly or inconvenient.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Show your child how using the tool below can help them make good choices.
- **Enforce:** Praise your child when they make good choices. Provide fair consequences for dishonesty and deceit.
- **Advocate:** Talk to your child about times in your life (and listen to theirs) when it has been hard to be honest or keep promises.
- **Model:** Be a good role model by doing what you say you'll do.

## Discussion starter

Ask your child what they think: is there harm in a little white lie? Here's one way to decide. If upon learning of the lie, would the person lied to thank you for caring or feel betrayed or manipulated?

## Excellence and Ethics Tool

Integrity-In-Action Check List

Ask yourself these questions:	YES	NO
Golden Rule Test: If the situation was reversed, is this how I would want to be treated?		
Conscience Test: Will I feel good about this afterwards - no regrets, no guilt?		
Parent Test: Will my parents be proud of this?		
Front-Page Test: Would I want this reported on the front page of the newspaper?		
What-If-Everybody-Did-This Test: Would I want to live in a world where everybody did this?		

### What if it is still not clear what to do?

- Stop!
- Think it over some more
- Seek additional insight from people whose character you respect.

# RESPECT

- Treat others with respect; follow the Golden Rule
- Be tolerant of differences
- Use good manners, not bad language
- Don't threaten, hit or hurt anyone
- Be considerate of the feelings of others
- Deal peacefully with anger, insults and disagreements

You don't have to like everyone and you don't have to agree with their opinions or behavior. Everyone has worth as a human being and deserves our respect. Give respect freely, regardless of the respect that you receive.

Respectful communication can be difficult when we disagree with someone. We must be willing to accept that our opinion is not fact; believing in something strongly doesn't make it more true. Communicating with respect requires us to express ourselves in a thoughtful and purposeful way.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Show your child how to use the tool below. Teach your children the Golden Rule: Treat others the way you want to be treated.
- **Enforce:** Embrace diversity and cooperation with individuals who are ethnically and culturally different.
- **Advocate:** Talk to your child about the differences between "treating everyone with respect" and admiring them.
- **Model:** Be a good role model by having respectful discussions.

## Discussion starter

Ask your child what they think: are there things that if everyone did it, would it be a bad thing? What if everyone used bad manners? What if no one treated others with respect?

## Excellence and Ethics Tool

Two Steps to Better Communication

### 1 Try to Understand

Use active listening by restating, in your own words, what you just heard. This helps to make sure that you understand what you are hearing.

Example:

Person 1: "I'm disappointed that you didn't come to my birthday party."

Person 2: "I understand that you are upset that I didn't come to your party."

### 2 Try to be Understood

Express your thoughts, feelings and expectations without blame, insult or personal attack.

Example: "I'm disappointed that you didn't share your new toy."

# RESPONSIBILITY

- Do what you are supposed to do
- Persevere; keep on trying
- Always do your best
- Use self-control
- Be self-disciplined
- Think before you act; consider the consequences
- Be accountable for your choices

Showing responsibility and doing your best requires effort and a good attitude.

Whether it is learning a new skill, doing household chores, or helping kids with their homework, our success will depend on the amount of effort we put in and the attitude we have. Our greatest improvements will come when we combine a lot of effort with a great attitude.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Talk to your child how it takes both attitude and effort to reach our goals. Use the tool below to show how it can help with one of their goals.
- **Enforce:** Develop high expectations and link consequences to poor choices.
- **Advocate:** Give your child a chore to do. Teach them how to do it again and give them a deadline to complete it, then expect your child to be responsible in doing the task. Thank them after they do it.
- **Model:** Be a good role model by doing your best and not giving up.

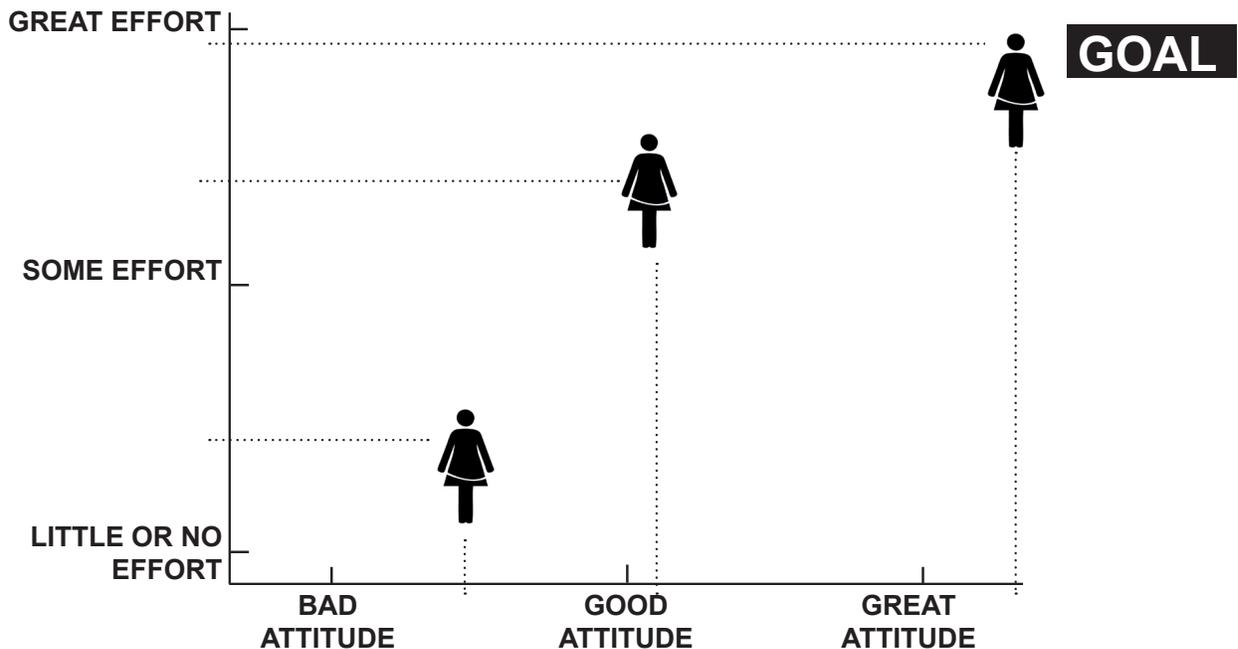
## Discussion starter

Ask your child what they think: does everything we do make a difference? What we say and what we do starts a chain reaction that affects the lives of others. Even choosing not to choose is a choice.

## Excellence and Ethics Tool

Reaching Goals with Attitude and Effort

As you can see on the diagram below, putting in good effort and having a great attitude will help achieve your goal. As Jane's attitude and effort improves, she gets closer to her goal.



# FAIRNESS

- Play by the rules
- Take turns and share
- Be open-minded; listen to others
- Don't take advantage of others
- Don't blame others carelessly

Kids can often complain that things “aren’t fair” when things don’t work out as they want. One way to help teach fairness is to promote compromise.

Compromise is creating a “win-win” situation and finding a balance between the different needs of individuals. Compromise is essentially an “I want, you want, we could” process.

Depending on their age and/or maturity, some children will find compromise difficult. You may need to help them work through the issue. Keep in mind that you aren’t just helping them get through the current disagreement, but teaching them a strategy for fairness that they will be able to use throughout their lives.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Talk to your child about compromise using the tool below.
- **Enforce:** Consistently apply rules. Make expectations clear and predictable.
- **Advocate:** Involve children in developing rules they are to follow.
- **Model:** Be a good role model by compromising and being open-minded.

## Discussion starter

Ask your child what they think: can you think of a time when you thought something wasn’t fair? Could a compromise have helped the situation?

## Excellence and Ethics Tool

I Want, You Want, We Could

**Communicate so your needs are understood.**



**Communicate so you understand the needs of others.**



**Be creative to find a compromise.**



**Example:**

Person 1: “I want to go to the movies.”

Person 2: “I want to stay home and read a book.”

Person 1: “**You want** to stay home and read. **I want** to go to the movies. **We could** stay home today and go to the movies on Saturday.”

# CARING

- Be kind
- Be compassionate and show you care
- Express gratitude
- Forgive others
- Help people in need

You can be caring by being a good friend. Learning more about your friends helps keep your friendships strong and helps you connect with new people.

When you are talking to someone new it is important to learn more about them. It takes courage and curiosity to connect with others - especially those you don't know, who are new or seem a little different than you.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Talk with your child about connecting with friends by using the tool below.
- **Enforce:** Consistently ask how choices impact the feelings of others. Help him or her to see the relationship between their actions and the feelings of others. Do not tolerate your child doing or saying things to intentionally hurt anyone.
- **Advocate:** Do something as a family that shows caring for someone in need. Take your children along with you when you volunteer.
- **Model:** Be a good role model by being compassionate and forgiving others.

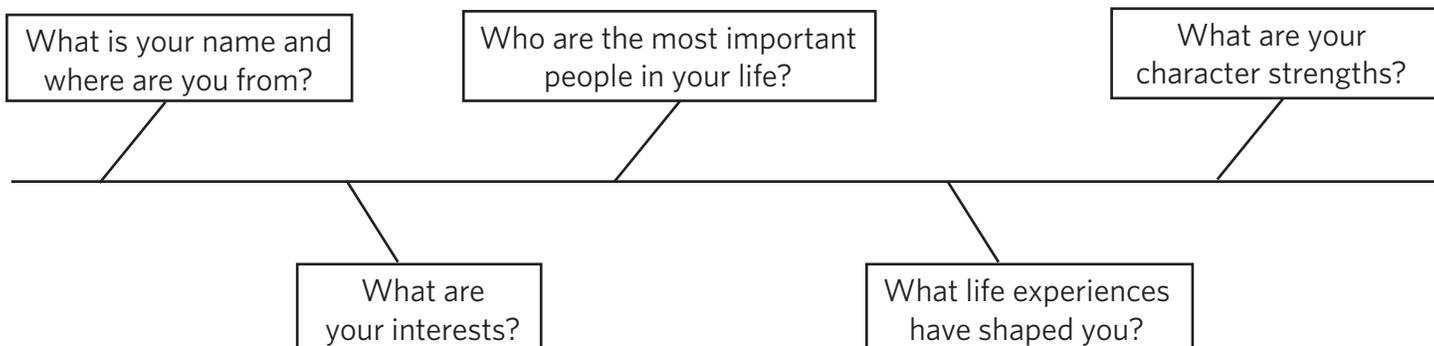
## Discussion starter

Ask your child what they think: can you take back hurtful words? Give an example of trying to put toothpaste back into the tube.

## Excellence and Ethics Tool

Surface to Substance

Start with general questions and as you continue to connect, move to questions that are more personal.



# CITIZENSHIP

- Do your share to make your school and community better
- Cooperate
- Get involved in community affairs
- Stay informed; vote.
- Be a good neighbor
- Obey laws and rules; respect authority.

You can show good citizenship by being a leader in your school or community. Leadership isn't a job - it is an action. Everyone in your family can be a leader.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Teach your child about being a leader using the tool below.
- **Enforce:** Praise your child when they are acting as a leader. Provide fair consequences when they do not respect rules.
- **Advocate:** Have a family plan to regularly protect and conserve resources. For example: recycle, plant trees, don't litter.
- **Model:** Model how to keep up on current events by reading or watching the news, attending local meetings of importance, and talking about issues as a family.

## Discussion starter

Ask your child what they think: how do you think our community or school could be better? What can you do to help?

## Excellence and Ethics Tool

Leadership in Action

### 4 Steps to Being a Leader

1. Commit to a shared goal
2. Motivate others
3. Help others do their best
4. Convince others to join you and believe in your goal

### Here's what the Four Steps look like in action.

The Smith family has decided to spend Saturday cleaning up their local park. They can all be a leader in the project.

1. They all want the park to be clean, and they are dedicated to the project. (Committing to a shared goal.)
2. When one member of the family gets tired, another reminds them of how great the park will look when they are done. (Motivate others)
3. If a member of the family is having trouble with their task, another can give them help or teach them how to do it. (Help others do their best)
4. The project goes by quickly because each member of the family brought a friend to help clean the park. (Convince others to join you and believe in your goal)

# A FAMILY PACT

A family pact is an agreement of your values. It focuses on what is most important in your lives and relationships.

Having a written copy of your pact provides your family with a reminder on the expectations in your home. Every family's values are different and so every family's pact will be different. Here are two examples:



## The Davidson Way

☞ We don't whine, complain, or make excuses; instead, we work hard, focus on the positive, have a can-do attitude, and hustle while we wait.

☞ We commit to be honest & trustworthy, kind, and fair. We don't lie, cheat, steal, or intentionally hurt others.

☞ When we make a mistake we own it, make up for it, learn from it, and move on.

☞ We work to keep our minds, bodies, and souls healthy, strong and pure; We discipline ourselves so that others don't have to.

☞ We commit to learn and grow in our faith through consistent practice and an unwavering trust in God's goodness and His particular plan for our unique potential.

☞ We are fun-loving, healthy risk-takers. We live deliberately with an attitude of gratitude and joy. We laugh often, and love generously, wisely, and well.

**☞ Remember who you are—  
wherever you go, whatever you do.**

## How to create your family pact

- Explain that a pact is an agreement between everyone in the family. This pact will be an agreement on what values are most important in your family.
- Ask each family member to contribute ideas to the pact. As a family, go through the ideas and determine which items reflect your most important family values.
- Turn those values into statements. How will you act?
- Post your family pact in a prominent place in your home. Or, you may want to make multiple copies and give them to each family member.
- You could have each member of the family sign the pact.
- Don't forget to regularly talk about your pact and make any updates to your pact as needed.

## How to use it

Your family can use your family pact as a reminder of expected behavior. You can also refer back to it as issues arise. For example, "Our pact reminds us to take care of our pets; I would like you to please feed the dog." Or, "We agreed in our pact that we would always tell the truth. I would like you to please tell me the truth about what happen at the park."

We'd love to see your Family Pact! Share it by emailing it to us at [RayCenter@Drake.edu](mailto:RayCenter@Drake.edu).

# HOT TOPICS

Modern day families will encounter a wide range of issues. From sibling rivalry to cyber bullying, the strategies in this book can provide you with a starting point to address any topic.

For example, if your child is having difficulty with a subject in school, you could explain the attitude and effort example on the responsibility page. If your children are arguing and tattling, you could use the communications strategy on the respect page and the win-win strategy on the fairness page. Plus, you can always refer back to your family pact to guide family discussions.

Here are a few other hot topics that can be addressed using the Six Pillars of Character and the strategies in this guide.

## Bullying

### Generally, experts agree that bullying:

- is a repeated action/actions,
- is negative and targeted at a specific individual(s), and
- occurs between individuals where there is a perceived "power imbalance" (strength, status, size).

### What to do if your child says they are being bullied:

- Ask your child to explain what happen. Be compassionate and understanding.
- Notify the school (or coach, etc) and give them the details you learned from your child. Be calm and respectful in your communication.
- Learn the school policies. Teach your child what to do when bullying occurs at school.
- Help your child be "bully-proof." Here are just a few ways:
  - Find ways to build your child's self-confidence. Give them opportunities to succeed.
  - Encourage your child to build a support system at school. Bullies are less likely to strike when other students are present.
  - Teach the child to find their voice. They may want to respond to the bullying when it happens, for example, "I want you to leave me alone." A stern response may lesson the power the bully believes he/she has.

## Raising Kids in a Digital World

Smartphones and social media have changed how we have to parent our kids. An entire new world of potential danger can now fit in their pockets. Here are few tips to start your family on the right technology track.

- Set clear expectations and rules for technology use.
- Use online security and privacy features to limit what is accessible.
- Parents should regularly read email, text messages, view photos and social media feeds.
- Teach your children about online safety and the importance of not sharing personal information online.
- Be proactive. It is your responsibility to teach them how to be safe and then appropriately monitor their use.
- Be informed. Websites like CommonSenseMedia.org provide ratings and reviews for movies, tv shows, apps, games and websites.