



# A Family's Guide to Teaching Good Character

Grades 6-8

Trustworthiness · Respect · Responsibility · Fairness · Caring · Citizenship

# Parenting for Good Character

Good character doesn't just happen. It is a result of families 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 positivity, learning, resilience, self-discipline, perseverance, and diligence.

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

- **Teach Children that their Character Counts**  
We must teach our children about the Six Pillars of Character, what each Pillar means, and what it looks like and does not look like in action.
- **Encourage 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 by explaining and showing why demonstrating the Pillars matters.
- **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 families a variety of ways to teach character. Imagine a parenting toolbox where you can keep all of your parenting tools. 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, encourage, advocate and model good character
- A discussion starter
- An Excellence with Integrity tool. These strategies can help you talk with your children, and can be used with kids or adults, at home, school or work.

## About this guide:

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

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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

Trustworthiness is a trait that requires integrity and a willingness to do what you say you will.

Trust requires you show integrity, especially in challenging situations.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Teach your child about being trustworthy using the discussion starters and tools below.
- **Encourage:** Praise your child when he or she demonstrates trustworthiness and offer fair consequences when he or she displays untrustworthy behavior.
- **Advocate:** Provide opportunities for your child to practice trustworthiness and discuss why it matters to him/her, you, your family, and your community.
- **Model:** Be a good role model and demonstrate trustworthiness in all areas of your life.

## Discussion starters

What makes a friend trustworthy? How does this family show they are trustworthy? How do you know when someone is trustworthy? What could each of us do better or differently to show we are trustworthy?

## Excellence with Integrity Tool

### Integrity-In-Action Check List

Sometimes making the right decision is hard, ask yourself the questions on the checklist tool and if you have more yes checks than no checks, you are probably making a good choice.

Practice using the checklist on scenarios such as a cashier gives you too much change. Use the checklist to decide what you should do in this situation.

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 understanding of differences
- Use good manners, don't use bad language
- Don't threaten, hit or hurt anyone
- Be considerate of the feelings of others
- Deal peacefully with anger, insults and disagreements

Respecting other people's beliefs begins with an understanding of who they are. It requires you listen and understand where they are coming from, and how they see the world.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Teach your child about respect using the discussion starters and tools below.
- **Encourage:** Praise your child when he or she demonstrates respect and offer fair consequences when he or she displays disrespectful behavior.
- **Advocate:** Provide opportunities for your child to practice respect and discuss why it matters to him/her, you, your family, and community.
- **Model:** Be a good role model and demonstrate respect in all areas of your life.

## Discussion starter

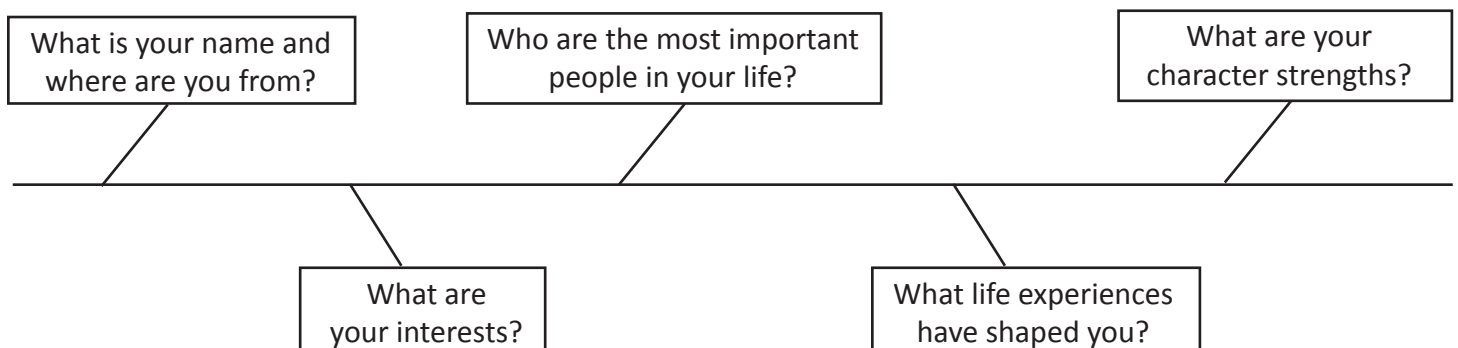
How can respecting other people's opinions, even if we do not agree with them, affect relationships? How can connections with other people help us to become more respectful of other cultures and perspectives? What could each of us do better or differently to show we are respectful?

## Excellence with Integrity Tool

Surface to Substance

Respecting others can be demonstrated by taking the time to get to know the people around you. Building good relationships and learning about other people's opinions and values is respectful.

You can connect with others by asking different levels of questions. Start with general questions and as your friendship grows, you will talk about more personal topics.



# 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

Being responsible requires you manage your time well, and plan. Organization and prioritization can help you do your best work, and to be accountable for the work you are supposed to do.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Teach your child about being responsible using the discussion starters and tools below.
- **Encourage:** Praise your child when he or she demonstrates responsibility and offer fair consequences when he or she displays irresponsible behavior.
- **Advocate:** Provide opportunities for your child to practice being responsible and discuss why it matters to him/her, you, your family, and community.
- **Model:** Be a good role model and demonstrate responsibility in all areas of your life.

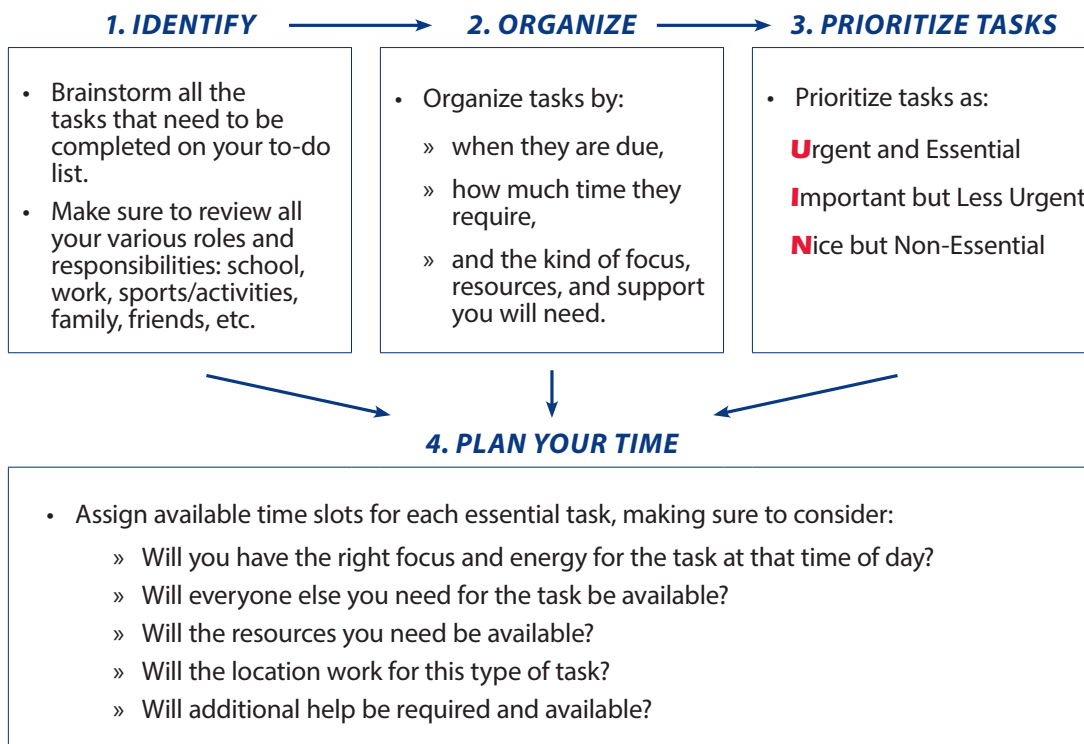
## Discussion starter

Why is responsibility important to you? What are some things that prevent you from being responsible? What could you do better or differently to be more responsible with your time?

## Excellence with Integrity Tool

### Time Management Plan

As kids get older and more involved in activities, time management becomes a challenge. Use the time management plan to help your child be more responsible balancing their time.



# 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

Fairness is a difficult concept to teach and learn in a world that is not always fair. To demonstrate fairness, we must learn to see situations through different lenses so that we can assess what is needed to be fair to each person.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Teach your child about being fair using the discussion starters and tools below.
- **Encourage:** Praise your child when he or she demonstrates fairness and offer fair consequences when he or she displays unfair behavior.
- **Advocate:** Provide opportunities for your child to practice fairness and discuss why it matters to him/her, you, your family, and community.
- **Model:** Be a good role model and demonstrate fairness in all areas of your life.

## Discussion starter

What is something you find unfair? What can you do when you believe something is unfair? Is fairness the same as equality? Explain. What could you do better or differently to demonstrate fairness?

## Excellence with Integrity Tool

### Lenses of Perspective

Sometimes, making fair decisions requires us to examine a situation through multiple lenses. Practice using the perspective tool on the following example: Your grandmother's 85th birthday celebration is the same day as your friend's birthday party at the pool.

Gain perspective - and energy - by reexamining your story

1. **Reverse Lens:** What might others involved say, and in what ways might it be true? Your parents, your grandma, your friends)
2. **Long Lens:** How will I most likely view this situation in six months, or six years?
3. **Wide Lens:** Regardless of the outcome, how might I grow and learn from this?

Adapted from Schwartz and McCarthy (2007)



# CARING

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

Caring for others is an important, life-long skill. We demonstrate caring through our words and actions. Sending someone a gift, offering praise and encouragement, standing up for what is right, working hard on a cause, or any number of other examples are all ways we can show that we care.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Teach your child about being caring using the discussion starters and tools below.
- **Encourage:** Praise your child when he or she demonstrates caring and offer fair consequences when he or she displays uncaring or unkind behavior.
- **Advocate:** Provide opportunities for your child to practice caring and discuss why it matters to him/her, you, your family, and community.
- **Model:** Be a good role model and demonstrate caring in all areas of your life.

## Discussion starter

How can our words show we care (for pets, family, friends, teachers)? How do actions show we care? Do you believe the children's rhyme, "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," is true? Why or why not? What could you do better or differently to demonstrate caring?

## Excellence with Integrity Tool

Praise and Polish

If we genuinely care about someone then we want to support them as they learn and grow. One way we can do that is to use the praise and polish tool to help our child see what they are doing well and what they can do to improve.

I think we did well on...

I think we could improve by...

I think we should add or clarify the following...

*Adapted from Lickona & Davidson (2005).*

# 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
- Protect the environment

When we put good character into action, we take the first step towards good citizenship. Being a good citizen means you get involved in your home, school, and community.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Teach your child about being a good citizen using the discussion starters and tools below.
- **Encourage:** Praise your child when he or she demonstrates citizenship and offer fair consequences when he or she displays contrary behavior.
- **Advocate:** Provide opportunities for your child to practice citizenship and discuss why it matters to him/her, you, your family, and community.
- **Model:** Be a good role model and demonstrate citizenship in all areas of your life.

## Discussion starter

What does it mean to have good character? How do you demonstrate you are a good citizen at home and at school? What are some ideas to serve the community? What could you do better or differently to demonstrate citizenship?

## Excellence with Integrity Tool

Leader to Detractor Scale

Being a good citizen requires we take responsibility for ourselves, and encourage responsible behaviors in others. Using the leader to detractor scale below, think of times when you are a detractor (not responsible for self or others), a participant (responsible for self), and a leader (responsible for self and others). What do you have to do differently to move from detractor and/or participant to leader?



*Adapted from Jeffrey Beedy.*



# 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 of 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 happened 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

Families will encounter a wide range of issues, which can include everything 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 managing his or her time you can help them complete a time management plan. If your child is struggling with impulsive decision making use the integrity in action checklist. Plus, you can always refer back to your family pact to guide family discussions.

## Healthy Use of Social Media

One hot topic that affects families with tweens and teens is the healthy use of social media. Here are some ways to help your child learn about healthy social media habits using the Six Pillars of Character.

### Trustworthiness

- Utilize the Integrity In Action checklist to determine if your post is appropriate for social media.

### Respect

- Establish boundaries for when and how social media can be utilized in the home. Hold each other accountable by respecting the boundaries you create.

### Responsibility

- Be responsible with your time by using screen time limits on the phone for social media and gaming apps.

### Fairness

- Research where social media posts are coming from and fact check social media posts before reposting or liking.

### Caring

- Demonstrate caring by recognizing the negative impact social media posts can have on yourself and others. Hold self and friends accountable by deleting or reporting uncaring posts.

### Citizenship

- Model good citizenship by spreading positive news through social media.

As a family, discuss the questions listed below to establish healthy boundaries for social media. Then create a family pact for social media with the boundaries you discussed.

1. What are times the phone/social media are off limits?
2. What time is considered bedtime for social media?
3. What are the time limits appropriate for social media use?
4. What is appropriate to post on social media?
5. Who should you add as a friend or connection on social media?