

A Family's Guide to Teaching Good Character

Grades K-5

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 and 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, 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.

T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Teach your child about being trustworthy using the discussion starters and the tool below.
- **Encourage:** Talk to your child about times in your life and listen to theirs, when it is hard to be honest or keep promises and why it matters.
- **Advocate:** Talk to your child about how honesty builds trust. Discuss the impact of trust on your family and friendships.
- **Model:** Be a good role model by doing what you say you'll do.

Discussion starters

How can lying break trust? What makes an adult trustworthy? What could I do better or differently to be more 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 giving 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?		
Family Test: Will my family be proud of this?		
Headline Test: Would I want this reported on the news?		
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

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

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

What if everyone used bad manners? What if no one treated others with respect? What could I do better or differently to show respect to others?

Excellence with Integrity Tool

Two Steps to Better Communication

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.

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.

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 responsibility 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

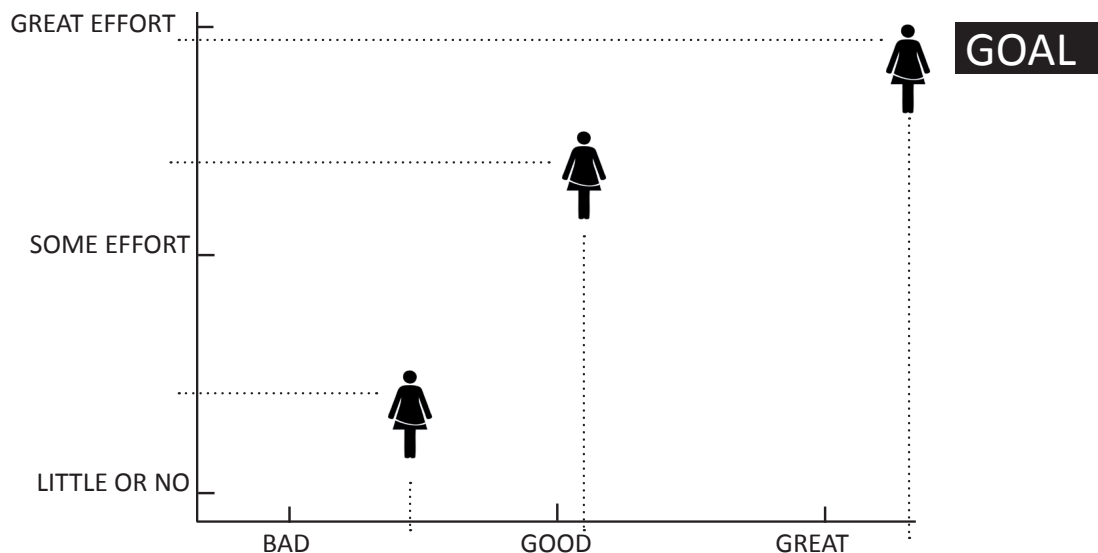
How is keeping track of your own things demonstrating responsibility? What are the responsibilities you have to help our family? What is a responsibility you have as a learner at school? What could I do better or differently to be more responsible?

Excellence with Integrity Tool

Reaching Goals with Attitude and Effort

Whether it is learning a new skill, doing household chores, or completing homework, success will depend on the amount of effort your child puts in and the attitude he or she has. Help your child identify a goal he or she wants to achieve. Every day ask them to rate their attitude and effort and plot it on the tool below.

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 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.

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

Can you think of a time when you thought something wasn’t fair? How could a compromise have helped the situation? What could I do better or differently to be more fair?

Excellence with Integrity Tool

I Want, You Want, We Could

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.

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.

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

Can you take hurtful words back? What could I do better or differently to be more caring?

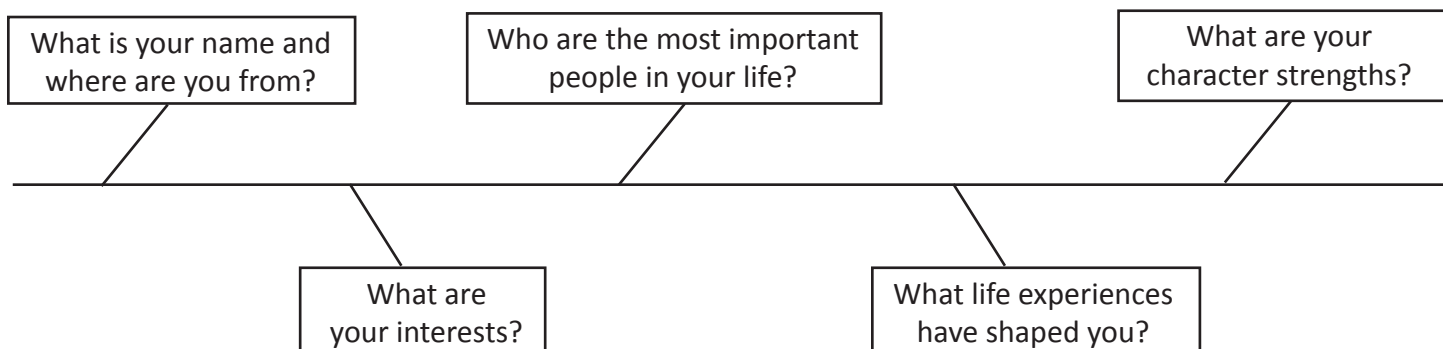
Excellence with Integrity Tool

Surface to Substance

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.

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

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.



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

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 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 be a good citizen? How do you think our community or school can improve? What can you do as a citizen to help? What could I do better or differently to show leadership and citizenship?

Excellence with Integrity Tool

Leadership in Action

Being a good citizen requires action, so follow the four steps to leadership in your community.

4 Steps to Being a Leader

1. Commit to a shared goal
2. Motivate others
3. Help others do their best
4. Hold yourself and others accountable

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. Everyone wants the park to be clean and commits to show up one Saturday a month to help. (Commit 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. Remind each member of the family that we are cleaning the park tomorrow. (Hold yourself and others accountable)

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.

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 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 lessen the power the bully believes he/she has.

Raising Kids in a Digital World

Smartphones and social media have changed how we 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.

For more information and resources to support character and get more information on addressing hot topics go to www.drake.edu/raycenter.