

Return to Learn with the Six Pillars of Character®



Return to learn with the Six Pillars of Character

This year, perhaps more than any other, parents, families, educators, and students are making incredibly challenging decisions as they return to learning with the continued uncertainties of the global health pandemic. The Six Pillars of Character (Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness Caring, and Citizenship) can provide a guide for families, students, and educators to maximize the opportunity to provide the safest and impactful education experience.

Trustworthiness

It's important in these moments to presume the best intentions of others and at the same time act in a capacity worthy of trust in our own actions as people try to do what they think is right for their families, youth and school community.

In situations where there isn't a clear and obvious answer, it's useful to have a tool, like the Integrity in Action Checklist, to help check our decision-making. Not every decision will pass each test below. Sometimes, the right decision isn't fair to everyone, for example. However, checking your actions against the Integrity-in-Action Checklist can help ensure that you make good choices and maintain trust.


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INTEGRITY-IN-ACTION CHECKLIST

Would my decisions pass each of these tests?	Yes	No
Golden Rule Test: If the situation was reversed, is this how I would want to be treated?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairness Test: Is this fair to everybody involved in and affected by my actions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Truth Test: Does this represent the whole truth — no distortions, omissions, or spin?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conscience Test: Would I feel good about this afterward — no regrets, no guilt?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Role Model/Mentor Test: Would the people whose integrity I respect most be proud of this?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Front-Page Test: Would I want this reported on the front page of the newspaper?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consequences Test: Would this lead to positive consequences and avoid negative consequences now and in the future?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What-If-Everybody-Did-This Test: Would I want to live in a world where everybody did this?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guiding Beliefs Test: Would this be supported by the philosophical, religious, political, and/or ideological worldviews guiding my life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What if it's still not clear what to do?

1. Stop!
2. Think it over some more.
3. Seek additional insight from individuals whose integrity you respect.



Adapted from Lickona & Davidson (2005).

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Trustworthiness for Educators

Even people with the best of intentions can sometimes make the wrong decision, especially when navigating the countless changes created by a global pandemic. As you work to bring students back to the classroom safely, or migrate your lessons to online delivery, use the Integrity-in-Action Checklist to make sure the choices you make are thoughtful and build trust with students, parents, families, and your colleagues.

Trustworthiness for Students

Students can use the Integrity in Action Checklist to help them make choices that could impact the health and safety of others. (“Is it fair to my classmates if I don’t follow guidelines to help stop the spread of COVID-19?”) Likewise, students working remotely can use the checklist to help make good decisions about how they engage with school. (“Do I want others to know that I was watching TV rather than paying attention to this online lesson?”)

Trustworthiness for Families

The decisions parents/families make in the best interest of their student also impact the health, safety, and learning experiences of everyone else at school. Use the Integrity in Action Checklist to make sure the decisions you make are not only good for your students, but the teachers and other students with whom they interact. In addition, families can use the checklist to help guide the decisions their students make. “I know it’s uncomfortable to wear a mask, but let’s look at the truth test. While the mask is uncomfortable, the truth is I can wear it, get used to it, and keep myself and others safe.”



Respect

Every school stakeholder – students, parents, families, educators, and administrators – have a key role in the success of each school year. How well these stakeholders work together and treat each other with respect ultimately determines how successful the year will be.

A Compact for Excellence is a simple tool to help groups of people agree on what they need to do in order to do their best work and treat each other with care and respect. To use a Compact, create a list of expectations (see sample below) that outline what every stakeholder needs to do in order to ensure their best work can be done and everyone is treated well. Then, ask all stakeholders the following questions:

- Is there anything else that needs to be added to this list?
- Is there anything that needs to be clarified?
- Is there anything that you cannot or will not do?
- Do we agree to work with these guidelines?

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COMPACT FOR EXCELLENCE

In order to do our **best work** and treat each other with **respect and care**,
we each agree to/not to:

- » 1) Assume best intentions – everyone is doing their best to make the right decision in a constantly changing situation
- » 2) Focus on both academic growth and student mental health
- » 3) Maintain clear and open lines of communication
- » 4) Prioritize health and safety by following current guidelines
- »



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Respect for Educators

At the beginning of each school year, educators set classroom rules and expectations. This year is no different. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic you may need to update these expectations to address online learning, following health guidelines at school, or even create a Compact with parents and families so all stakeholders have clear guidelines for how everyone can do their best work and treat each other with care and respect.

Respect for Students

Whether working at home, in school, or in a hybrid setting, think about what is needed for you to do your best work and treat others well (teachers, parents, families, siblings, other students, etc.). Create a Compact for Excellence that outlines what everyone agrees to do in order to do your best work and treat each other well, no matter the environment. You can also create a Compact with your group before beginning a new group project.

Respect for Families

Create a Compact for Excellence with your students that outlines how you will work together to ensure that everyone can do their work effectively and treat each other well. Agreements could be: 15-minute active break for every 60 minutes of work, only engage on social media during breaks, negotiate who utilizes work spaces (at home), maintain social distance and wear a mask (if back at school), and so on.



Responsibility

When under stress, or outside of our comfort zone, it can be tempting to shy away from responsibility. However, it is critical as the school year progresses that each person take responsibility for their role in ensuring a safe and productive learning environment.

When norms and routines are disrupted, it can be easy to lose sight of our goals and the process we need to follow to achieve those goals. The Goal Map tool is an excellent resource to focus attention on the action steps needed to continue progressing towards our objectives, especially when we are outside of our comfort zone.

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GOAL MAP

Measure. Monitor. Revise.

How:

When:

Starting

Point

action step(s)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

action step(s)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

action step(s)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

action step(s)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Desired

Goal

Checklist:

- ☐ Is the desired goal specific and can it be measured?
- ☐ Is there an honest/accurate assessment of the starting point?
- ☐ Have all of the major action steps been identified and broken down into smaller, doable steps?
- ☐ Have the roles, workflow, and timeline been worked out?

Support & Challenge:
Expertise, Encouragement, Accountability

Who:

When:

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Responsibility for Educators

The unique challenges of this school year likely feel overwhelming. How do you transition your entire curriculum to online delivery? How do you track student progress when you don't see your students each day? How do you create a productive classroom space while still following health guidelines? Use the Goal Map to break down what seem like insurmountable tasks into small, achievable action steps. Devote your time and energy solely to each step until you are ready to move on to the next action step.

Responsibility for Students

Students can use the Goal Map to craft a plan for achieving objectives each day, each week, each month, or even over an entire semester. Whether attending school online or in person, the Goal Map can help students identify what tasks need to be completed, in what order, and track their progress towards completion.

Responsibility for Families

The Goal Map is a great tool for parents/families to use to help their students create a learning plan, especially for students working online. Create a Goal Map each day, outlining the objective for the day, and the action steps needed to reach those objectives. Then, review the Goal Map at the end of the day to track progress and ensure students are taking the necessary steps to be successful each day.

For all stakeholders it is important to note that effective use of the Goal Map must include the ongoing opportunity to measure, monitor and revise the action steps along with support and challenge to be held accountable for the outcomes.



Fairness

In a time of uncertainty, it can be difficult to find fair solutions for diverse groups of stakeholders. Is it fair to prohibit young people from participating in social activities when it appears the effects of COVID-19 aren't as severe for young and healthy people? On the other hand, is it fair to individuals in a demographic with more risk if young people increase their exposure to the virus and then spread it to others?

When clear solutions aren't available, it's up to individuals to negotiate win-win solutions that account for the needs and wants of all parties to reach a fair solution for the greater good. To do this, one must listen to understand what the other party wants by asking questions and restating what the other person says to ensure clarity. You must also clearly describe what it is you desire and why. Only when all parties understand that this is what you want and this is what I want, can you work together to find a "we could" win-win solution.



Fairness for Educators

Few things will be normal this school year. Educators will have to negotiate win-win solutions on everything from how students will pass each other in the hallways to how students will eat lunch. In every negotiation, commit to understanding the other person's perspective, clearly state your idea, and stay focused on your common ground – what you both want to achieve.

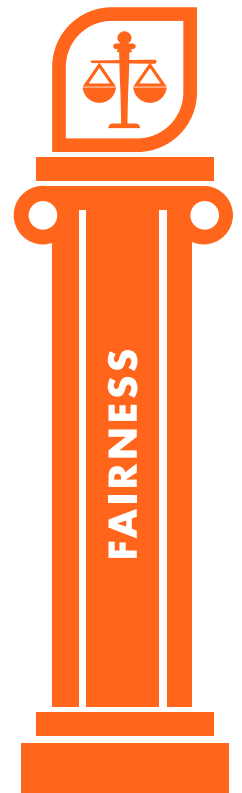
Fairness for Students

Students can use the Win-Win Negotiation tool to help them find compromise with teachers or parents/families. For example, students using win-win negotiation when asking permission to attend a social event would clearly articulate what they want (to attend event) and why they want it (to see their friends), and would listen to and understand what their parent wants (student to be safe and healthy). Then, both parties can focus on solutions that can meet this objective (you can attend the event if there are less than 10 people and you wear a mask).

Fairness for Families

Parents/families can use the Win-Win Negotiation tool to help find compromise over work time, if students are working from home. Or, the tool could be used to reach agreement on what social activities their students can engage in. Parents/families can even use it when finding solutions with schools on everything from behavior issues to virtual versus in-person attendance.

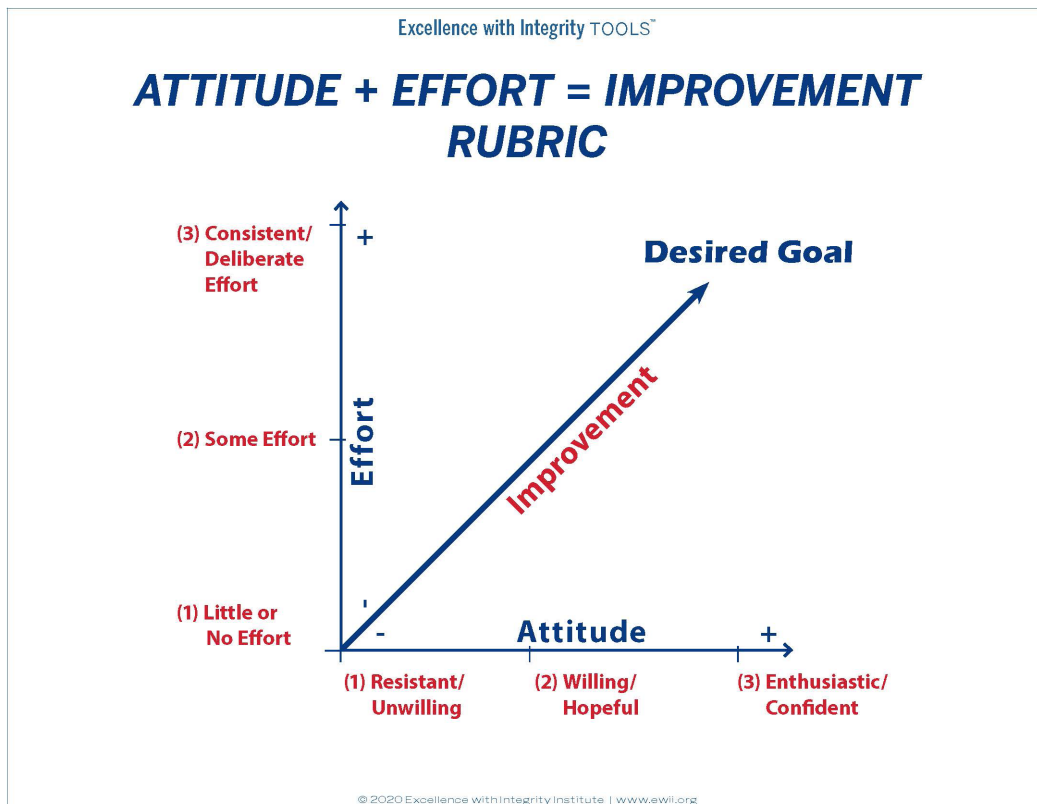
Fairness in decision making is most effective when there are clearly established non-negotiables that are communicated clearly and consistently applied.



Caring

Caring can be demonstrated in numerous ways. We can demonstrate caring by maintaining social connections, supporting friends and family who are struggling, completing random acts of kindness, or simply being available for a friend who needs a safe, compassionate listener.

The attitude and effort we choose to display is another way we show caring. Bringing a positive attitude each day, to every task, is a great way to show that you care. Likewise, the amount of effort we put forth is another indicator of how much we care about someone or something. The Attitude + Effort = Improvement (AEI) tool is a simple way to reflect on whether you brought a positive attitude and effort to a task, and by extension, how much you cared.



Caring for Educators

Use the AEI tool to define for your students what great, good, and poor attitude and effort looks like in action. Be sure to help students see the distinction between attitude and effort (you can have a positive attitude and put forth no effort, and vice versa). Ask students what they can do to demonstrate a great attitude and work ethic each day, whether remote or in-person. Then, have them reflect on their attitude and effort each day.

Caring for Students

Students can track their daily attitude and effort on a 1 (poor) through 3 (great) scale and see if they notice any trends. For example, their attitude and effort is great when working on math, but poor when working on Spanish. Students can then create a plan for what to do better or differently to improve their attitude and effort where needed.

Caring for Families

The AEI tool provides a simple way to engage your student in self-reflection. Ask your student to rate himself or herself on their attitude and effort each day and ask them what they can do better the next day. The conversation is even more powerful you reflect on their own attitude and effort each day and try to improve with your student.



Citizenship

There is, perhaps, no more important time to be a good citizen than during a global pandemic. Each of us plays a critical role in contributing to the health and well-being of others. Whether returning to the classroom or engaging in online learning, educators, administrators, students, and families have an important role to play in maintaining the health and safety of all parties, and contributing to a positive educational environment.

The Leader-to-Detractor tool serves two important purposes. First, it defines what each role – detractor, participant, and leader – looks like in action. Good citizens are able to change detractor behaviors to participant behaviors, and participant behaviors to leader behaviors. Second, one can use the tool reflectively by asking, “were my actions that of a leader, detractor, or participant, and what do I need to do better or differently tomorrow to be a better citizen?”



Citizenship for Educators

Educators can use the Leader-to-Detractor tool to define what each role looks like in their classroom (virtual or in person). You may choose to include leader to detractor behaviors that are specific to following health guidelines as well. Share these definitions with families so they know what your expectations are as well.

Citizenship for Students

Once students have worked with educators or parents/families on defining what leaders, participants, and detractors look like in action, they can engage in daily self-reflection to gauge their behaviors for the day. Students should note if there are instances in which they are more likely to be a detractor or participant and create and follow a plan to be a leader in every circumstance. Their reflection can be centered on school, home, following health guidelines, or a combination of all three.

Citizenship for Families

Parents/families can use the Leader-to-Detractor tool to identify leader, participant, and detractor behaviors they observe each day. These may be behaviors the student exhibits, or observations of others, whether at the grocery store, at work, or in the community. Ask your student what leader to detractor behaviors they notice in others each day, and what could be done better or differently to be a leader in each situation.





About CHARACTER COUNTS!

Built on the foundation of the Six Pillars of Character (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship), CHARACTER COUNTS! provides practical strategies, curricular resources, and trainings to positively impact your school system, community, youth-serving or people-helping organization. Since 1992, CHARACTER COUNTS has impacted more than 8-million youth.

CHARACTER COUNTS! has demonstrated success as a stand-alone initiative or working in alignment with other programs such as PBIS to foster positive climate change to produce exceptional results in the academic, social and emotional, character development and school-climate domains.

CHARACTER COUNTS! is housed at The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. As a global initiative that transforms lives and strengthens communities, CHARACTER COUNTS! supports our mission to improve civility through character development and ethical leadership.



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