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FAMILY

# FAMILY VALUES: BUILDING A LEGACY



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## 2 VALUES, ETHICS AND CHARACTER

### RAISING CHILDREN OF CHARACTER REQUIRES TIME, ATTENTION, LOVE AND INSTRUCTION.

As children grow, their parents, caregivers and teachers provide instructions such as, “Say please and thank you,” “Share your toys,” or “Do not cheat,” that teach them how to behave. It can be more difficult to teach values — such as respect, kindness and honesty — that guide appropriate behavior and form a foundation for strong character. Nevertheless, children need loving adults to help them learn right from wrong and inspire them to make right choices even when it is difficult to do so.

Raising children of character requires time, attention, love and instruction. It involves regular learning and practice doing the right things. By actively teaching values and ethics to your children and modeling the behaviors you expect from them, you can help them grow into confident and happy adults who contribute to their community.

#### EXAMPLES OF VALUES

- Compassion
- Courage
- Honesty
- Integrity
- Justice
- Loyalty
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Service
- Trustworthiness

It is never too early or too late for your family to begin focusing on values, ethics and character. When you begin, it helps to have a common understanding of what values are and how they develop.

#### What Are Values?

Whether consciously or unconsciously, everyone lives according to values.

- Values are deeply held personal beliefs, desires and ideals. They are a filter for perceiving the world and acting in it.
- Values determine decisions and behavior. For example, an individual who values honesty and loyalty will be truthful and be faithful to family and friends.
- Values may conflict. For example, honesty and loyalty may conflict when telling the truth means getting a friend in trouble.

#### What Are Ethics?

Ethics are principles that define right and wrong.

- Ethics suggest how an individual should behave. They reveal what is right or appropriate, regardless of personal values. For example, whether or not an individual values honesty, it is right (or ethical) to be truthful and wrong (or unethical) to deceive.
- Ethics help balance conflicting values. Ethics do not always reveal a simple, right or wrong course of action. They may also provide a framework for evaluating and deciding what to do when facing a difficult choice.

## EXAMPLES OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

<b>At Home</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect family members.</li> <li>• Treat others as you want them to treat you.</li> <li>• Take good care of possessions.</li> </ul>
<b>At School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect the privilege of learning.</li> <li>• Set high standards for personal achievement.</li> <li>• Demonstrate respect for school authorities, teachers and students.</li> </ul>
<b>At Play</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play fairly and obey the rules of the game.</li> <li>• Respect the authority of coaches and game officials.</li> <li>• Be courteous to your opponent.</li> </ul>

### What Is Character?

Character is a durable framework of values and ethics that guides or shapes behavior. Having character means consistently living out values and practicing ethical behavior.

- Character requires an understanding of how to recognize right and wrong.
- Positive character requires the self-discipline to choose what is right, no matter what.

### How Do They Develop?

Values and ethics develop over time based on the examples and influences of:

- Parents and loving adults such as caregivers, teachers and coaches.
- Siblings, friends, classmates and teammates.
- Historical figures, business or political leaders and celebrities.
- Messages and lessons presented through print, film, television, music, video or online.

Children need guidance to form good values and ethics. Parents and other loving adults must deliberately teach and model values, ethics and character, or children will likely absorb a system of behavior based on the ideas and examples they receive from peers, media messages and what seems to benefit them at the moment.

## 4 PUT IT IN WRITING

Successful companies state their core values, mission statements and codes of conduct to help employees understand not only the nature of their goals, but also the means to obtain them. In the same way, your family can develop a written set of family values, mission statement and code of conduct. These tools can:

- Guide the development of family and individual character.
- Form a foundation for ongoing ethics discussions and instruction.
- Establish your family identity.
- Help children understand you are working together to achieve the same goals.

### Reflect

Parents should begin thinking deliberately about their personal values and ethical principles. Set aside time to discuss the following questions:

- Growing up, what was most important to you? What is most important to you now?
- What kind of family are you? What kind of family do you want to become?
- How much time do you want to spend together as a family?
- What kinds of things do you want to accomplish together?
- What kind of individuals do you want your children to become?
- What pursuits do you value most: religious activities, education, the arts, athletics, community service?

### Clarify Values

As a family, set aside time to talk about and identify your most important values. This should be an enjoyable time of discussion, perhaps at the dinner table or during a family picnic. Depending on the ages of your children, you may want to use the following exercise as a guide (revise as appropriate):

- Distribute five blank cards or slips of paper to each family member.
- Using the *What Are Your Values?* chart (spaces are provided for listing additional values as appropriate), ask each family member to identify their top five values by writing one value on each card or slip of paper.
- Take turns discussing your chosen values and reasons for selecting them.
- Identify the top four to six values that your family members have in common.

## WHAT ARE YOUR VALUES?

• Accountability	• Flexibility	• Humility	• Privacy	• Service
• Citizenship	• Fun	• Integrity	• Promise keeping	• Teamwork
• Commitment	• Goodness	• Justice/Fairness	• Respect	• Tradition
• Compassion	• Goodwill	• Love	• Responsibility	• Wisdom
• Contentment	• Gratitude	• Loyalty	• Responsiveness	(List others below)
• Courage	• Honesty	• Openness	• Security	_____
• Faith	• Honor	• Peace	• Self-restraint	_____
				_____
				_____

## Create A Mission Statement

After clarifying values, consider writing a mission statement describing your family's identity (who you want to be) and purpose (what you want to achieve together). To be effective, your family's mission statement should:

- Reveal a family vision.
- Incorporate values and principles important to all family members.
- Motivate and inspire your family: "This is who we are. We share a common purpose. This is why we exist as a family."
- Be written and displayed where all family members can see it daily.
- Be memorized and regularly reviewed.

Every family member can help create your family mission statement.

- Review your most important values.
- Discuss questions such as, "What do you think is most important about our family?" "What are our family strengths?" and "What do you think our family priorities should be?"
- Identify common themes, priorities or ideas.
- Select the most common and important elements for inclusion in your mission statement.
- Write your family mission statement and display it prominently.

## FAMILY MISSION STATEMENTS

<p><b>Example 1</b></p>	<p>The mission of our family is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice our faith.</li> <li>• Love each other.</li> <li>• Respect and be kind to others.</li> <li>• Wisely use our time, talents and resources.</li> <li>• Do our best in all things.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Example 2</b></p>	<p>Our family purpose is to create a nurturing, safe environment where we honor individual differences; seek spiritual, emotional and physical development; pursue loving relationships; practice caring, open communication; and make a positive difference in our private and public lives.</p>
<p><b>Example 3</b></p>	<p>We will be thankful for what we have and use our talents and possessions to give to others.</p> <p>Our priorities are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spend time together as a family.</li> <li>• Value and nurture family, friends and pets.</li> <li>• Take care of our health.</li> <li>• Practice our faith.</li> <li>• Invest in the future spiritually, professionally and financially.</li> <li>• Perform good deeds for the community.</li> </ul>

### Develop A Family Code Of Conduct

A family code of conduct provides clear guidelines for what is expected of parents and children. Consider having each family member sign it to show they understand the rules and agree to follow them to the best of their ability. Refer to your code frequently during family discussions related to important issues.

Remember: Parents should be the first to live by the family values, mission and code of conduct. It is important to be humble enough to ask our children to remind us when our actions contradict what our family believes to be important and true.

Developing these character-building tools is a useful and worthwhile process. It involves uncovering what is already most important to each of you and helps each family member understand your family's unique strengths and common vision.

## FAMILY CODE OF CONDUCT

### EXAMPLE

- We honor and love one another.
- We treat others as we would like to be treated.
- We tell the truth.
- We obey our parents, doing what we are asked without arguing.
- We do not hurt others with unkind words or deeds.
- We listen to others, taking their thoughts and ideas seriously.
- We are polite. We say “please,” “thank you” and “excuse me.” We take turns and share.
- We do not create work for others. If we use something, we put it away. If we make a mess, we clean it.
- We keep ourselves neat and clean.
- We take good care of our possessions.
- We are diligent workers. We do our best and complete our work properly without complaining.
- When we do not know what to do, we ask.
- We arrive on time.
- We keep our word.
- We finish what we start.
- When we go out, we behave as we are expected to behave at home.
- When necessary, we accept discipline and instruction.

Signatures: Parent \_\_\_\_\_ Parent \_\_\_\_\_

Child \_\_\_\_\_ Child \_\_\_\_\_

Child \_\_\_\_\_ Child \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## 8 TEACH EFFECTIVELY

Character develops over time from the daily practice of observing and doing the right things. Your character-building efforts will be most effective when you follow these steps.

### Lead By Example

Children learn by example. Since you are their most vivid role model, it is important to be a good one. According to the Josephson Institute of Ethics, “everything you say and do, and all that you allow to be said and done in your presence ... reinforces or undermines the credibility of your messages about the importance of good character.”

Refer to your family’s mission statement and code of conduct to help achieve your goals.

### Spend Time Together

Daily interaction is the key to parental influence. Plan ways to spend more time with your children.

- Eat meals together. Sociologists affirm that family dinners promote conversation, sharing of values and a sense of belonging.
- Do simple things together at home. Play a board game, watch a sporting event or bake a cake.
- Plan weekly fun times with the whole family. Go places your children like, especially if it involves everyone in an activity, such as bowling or miniature golf.
- Involve the whole family in community service projects.

### Listen And Respond

Listen to what your children have to say and they will learn to listen to you.

- Let children introduce topics of conversation. Be patient, as they may need extra time to express their thoughts.
- Ask questions about things they enjoy (activities, music, technology).
- Ask older children and teenagers for advice about events in your life, as appropriate.

### Tell Stories

- Help children form a mental picture of what individuals of character are like and how they behave.
- Tell children about family members and role models who shaped your life.
- Discuss historical figures who lived ethical lives.
- Read inspirational biographies together.

## Create An Ethical Atmosphere

Pay attention to the content of what you and your children hear, read, watch and do. Music, books, television shows and movies contain positive and negative messages. It is your right and responsibility to control the ideas and images that fill your home and influence your children's thoughts and actions.

## Explain Why

Use clear language to convey ethical messages. Tell why it is good to tell the truth, why it is bad to be selfish, why certain behaviors or attitudes are right and others are wrong. Discuss news stories, television programs or movies that demonstrate the presence or absence of ethical behavior.

## Stay Involved

Know how others are influencing the course of your children's lives.

- Pay attention to what happens at school.
- Communicate with teachers.
- Get to know your children's friends and their parents.

Helping children select and build positive friendships and become good students also helps them acquire strong character.

## Expect Their Best

Tell children how you expect them to behave at all times and discuss the consequences of making poor choices. Praise good behavior, set appropriate boundaries and hold family members accountable. Let children learn from their mistakes and insist that they accept the consequences of their actions.

## Set A Good Example

Children learn more from what you do than what you say. What they observe in you will influence their own ethical choices.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Character Counts!

##### National Office

Josephson Institute  
of Ethics

(800) 711-2670

[www.charactercounts.org](http://www.charactercounts.org)

[www.josephsoninstitute.org](http://www.josephsoninstitute.org)

#### The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

(847) 434-4000

[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

#### Search Institute

The Banks Building

(800) 888-7828

[www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)

## 10 CHARACTER IN ACTION

Having the character to consistently live out values and ethics depends on an individual's ability to:

- Make important decisions based on reason rather than feelings.
- Control emotions and manage stress when moral convictions are tested.
- Foresee a choice's potential consequences and devise alternative options.
- Learn from past experience.

Your children may face their biggest ethical decisions when you are not available to guide them. Make sure they have the knowledge and skills to put character in action and make the right decisions.

### Recognize Important Decisions

Your children should know that a decision is ethically important if:

- Their choice could hurt them or someone they know.
- Their choice could keep them from achieving an important goal.
- Their decision could harm someone's reputation.

### WEIGH OPTIONS

Children should learn to think through these questions before making an ethical decision.

Is there anything right with this choice?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Would I want others to do this to me?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Would I want others to behave in this way?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Would my family approve?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Does this support what my religious faith teaches?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Does this decision align with our family's values, mission statement and code of conduct?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
If everyone could see me do this, would I still do it?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

If the answer to any of these questions is "no" or uncertain, your child should consider another option.

Use family time to solve ethical problems together. With your family's values, mission statement and code of conduct in mind, work through the following scenarios, revising them as appropriate for your children.

### Scenario 1

You find \$20 in the gym and remember that you saw another student in the same area who was counting some cash. When you ask the student if he lost some money, he says he did not. What would you do?

### Scenario 2

During recess, you observe a bully bothering a shy, new student. No teachers or adults are nearby. The bully begins to shove the student and turns to see if anyone is watching. He notices you. What would you do?

### Scenario 3

Late one night, some friends suggest throwing water balloons into a neighbor's open window. You back out and head home. The next day, you learn that the water balloons landed on a laptop computer and damaged the computer. The angry owner is taking action against the individuals he believes are responsible — individuals other than your friends. What would you do?

### Scenario 4

You overhear your older sister and her 18-year-old friend making plans to go to the high school football game Friday night. You overhear that the friend, whose parents know your parents well, is getting a fake ID so they can buy wine coolers on their way to the game. Would you share this information with your parents?

## PARENTS: BE CREDIBLE

Do you exemplify ethical behavior even when you are tired, money is tight or your child's straight-A record is at stake? Consider these examples.

1. Traffic is heavy at the end of the day. Do you obey traffic laws? Or do you make illegal U-turns, run yellow lights and drive above the speed limit to arrive home a bit earlier?
2. The family goes out to eat, and the restaurant offers discounts to children ages 10 years old and younger. Your daughter is 11 years old. Do you accept the discount?
3. It is 10 p.m. and your son remembers a school project due the next morning. He is exhausted after an afternoon of soccer practice and other homework. Do you make him stay up and complete the work? Or let him miss school so he can finish it the next day?
4. A clerk gives you more change than you are entitled to receive. Do you return the money, or do you keep it even though it does not belong to you?

## 12 RAISING CHILDREN OF CHARACTER

Raising children of character is not easy. Be patient, remembering that character development is an ongoing process. With regular communication and practice, along with the right blend of love and discipline, you can inspire your children to recognize, practice and love what is right.

The Josephson Institute's Six Pillars of Character<sup>SM</sup> are ethical values that you can share with your children to help them guide their choices.

### THE SIX PILLARS OF CHARACTER

<b>Trustworthiness</b>	Be honest; do not deceive, cheat or steal. Be reliable — do what you say you will do. Have the courage to do the right thing. Build a good reputation. Be loyal — stand by your family, friends and country.
<b>Respect</b>	Treat others with respect; follow the Golden Rule. Be tolerant and accepting of differences. Use good manners, not bad language. Be considerate of the feelings of others. Do not threaten, hit or hurt anyone. Deal peacefully with anger, insults and disagreements.
<b>Responsibility</b>	Do what you are supposed to do. Plan ahead. 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 words, actions and attitudes. Set a good example for others.
<b>Fairness</b>	Play by the rules. Take turns and share. Be open-minded; listen to others. Do not take advantage of others. Do not blame others carelessly. Treat all people fairly.
<b>Caring</b>	Be kind. Be compassionate and show you care. Express gratitude. Forgive others. Help people in need.
<b>Citizenship</b>	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. Volunteer.

*Six Pillars of Character<sup>SM</sup> is a service mark of Josephson Institute.*

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## RESOURCES



The USAA Educational Foundation offers the following publications on a variety of topics:

**PREPARING FOR PARENTHOOD** (#563)  
**CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS** (#548)  
**KEEPING YOUR CHILD SAFE** (#549)  
**HELPING CHILDREN DEVELOP  
HEALTHY HABITS** (#547)  
**BALANCING FAMILY AND CAREER**  
(#529)  
**PARENTING A TEEN** (#515)  
**CHOOSING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE**  
(#546)  
**LIVING A GREENER LIFE** (#560)  
**SUICIDE PREVENTION** (#581)

**CHILD SAFETY IN AND AROUND  
VEHICLES** (#555)  
**KEEPING EVERY YOUTH SAFE (K.E.Y.S.)**

- **BEHIND THE WHEEL** (#565)
- **ON THE ROAD (DVD)** (#567)
- **COST OF DRIVING** (#568)

**INTERNET SAFETY FOR ADULTS** (#572)  
**INTERNET SAFETY FOR TEENS** (#573)  
**PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR  
COLLEGE** (#514)  
**HOW TO SUCCEED IN COLLEGE** (#512)  
**CHANGING JOBS** (#532)

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