

Marriage & Family

Character Education

Note: This booklet used for this material was developed to be used by educators interested in “character education.” While obviously not all the material produced by CEP is directly applicable to rearing children in the home, there is much that can be learned from this material.

1. Promotes core ethical values and supportive performance values as the foundation of good character.
 - a. Character education holds that widely shared, pivotally important, core ethical values—such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others—along with supportive performance values—such as diligence, a strong work ethic, and perseverance—form the basis of good character. (Little sermon: I don’t care what “widely shared” ethical values are—God’s standards are what’s important).
 - b. The important thing here for us is two-fold:
 - We need to have “core ethical values” to instill in our children.
 - We need to define these values in terms our children can understand and practice (e.g., a toddler may not understand the word “honesty,” but he/she can understand the concept—the concepts need to be placed on the child’s level).
2. Defines “character” comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior.
 - a. A holistic approach to character development seeks to develop the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of moral life.
 - b. Children grow to understand core values by discussing them, observing behavioral models, and resolving problems involving the values.
3. Uses a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character education (The wording here applies directly to the school system, but there is much for families to learn!)
 - a. “Stand alone” character education programs can be useful first steps or helpful elements of an ongoing effort but are not an adequate substitute for a holistic approach that integrates character development into every aspect of school life.
 - b. Rather than simply waiting for opportunities to arise, with an intentional and proactive approach, the school staff takes deliberate steps for developing character, drawing wherever possible on practices shown by research to be effective.
4. Creates a caring community.
 - a. A family committed to character strives to become a microcosm of a civil, caring, and just society.
 - b. It does this by creating a community that helps all its members form caring attachments to one another.

5. Provides children opportunities for moral action.
 - a. In the ethical as in the intellectual domain, children are constructive learners; they learn best by doing.
 - b. To develop good character, they need many and varied opportunities to apply values such as compassion, responsibility, and fairness in everyday interactions and discussions as well as through community service.
6. Strives to foster children's self-motivation.
 - a. Character is often defined as "doing the right thing when no one is looking." The best underlying ethical reason for doing right is respect for the Divine—not fear of punishment or desire for a reward.
 - b. Rather than settle for mere compliance, families need to help children benefit from their mistakes by providing meaningful opportunities for reflection, problem solving, and restitution.
7. Engages the entire family as a moral community that shares responsibility for character education and attempts to adhere to the same core values that guide the children.
 - a. Parents must assume responsibility by modeling the core values in their own behavior.
 - b. Second, the same values and norms that govern the children govern the parents.
 - c. The adults in the family will regularly ask reflective questions such as: What negative moral experiences are we failing to address? What important moral experiences are we now omitting?

Tom Lickona, Eric Schaps, and Catherine Lewis, "CEP's Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education," Character Education Partnership.