

Character Matters

Show Kindness

Did you know that even the smallest act of kindness can change someone's entire day? Not only does being kind to others make them feel good—it makes you feel good too! Here are a few ways you can show kindness.

1. Smile and say “hello”

It seems simple, but offering a smile and a saying “hi” to someone in the hall or on the street can be enough to brighten their mood—and yours!

2. Sit with someone who is alone

Sitting by yourself in a crowded lunchroom can feel lonely and embarrassing. If you see someone sitting alone, ask to join them. Even better—introduce them to your friends and invite them to sit at your table the next day.

3. Give your time

There are many groups and organizations that need helpers. Find one that “speaks” to you and volunteer an hour or two each week. You can even spread the word to others and invite them to help too.

4. Have good manners

Open and hold the door for people. Say “please” and “thank you,” and don't interrupt when someone else is talking. Just try to always do what feels right and good.

For more tips on building good social skills, watch this quick video.



5. Give a compliment

When you tell someone that they look nice today or that they did a great job in the game last night, you're giving more than just a compliment. You're also giving them a confidence boost.

6. Share your strengths

If you're really good at something, such as math or playing an instrument, offer to help a friend or classmate who is struggling. You will both learn something!

7. Be a good neighbor

Shovel a neighbor's driveway when it snows. Rake their leaves in the fall, and offer to mow their lawn in the summer. Good neighbors are invaluable to people who can't do things for themselves.

Kindness Challenge

Make a pledge to do three things today that are helpful and kind. Write them below.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

*"No act of kindness, no matter how small,
is ever wasted." Aesop*

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Be Fair

In middle school and high school, fairness means equal opportunities for everyone, having and following rules, and making judgments based on worthiness and ability. Here are some ways you can make sure that you treat others fairly and justly.

1. Stick to the rules

Rules—in school, in sports, at home, and in society—exist for a reason. Because rules apply to everyone, and everyone is expected to abide by them, they keep things orderly and fair. Just keep in mind that sometimes rules need to be changed based on a person's specific needs—so that everyone has an opportunity to be successful.

2. Pull your weight

Whether you're part of a group project in class or working at an after-school job, you should always strive to do your share of the work. It's very unfair to expect others to do things you should do. On the flip side, it's appropriate to expect your classmates and co-workers to do their share too.

3. Listen to all sides

Conflicts happen. When they do, it's important to not only share your perspective, but to also listen to what others have to say. Being open-minded might teach you something new and open your eyes to perspectives and ideas you hadn't considered.

For more information on conflict resolution, watch this quick video.



4. Don't take advantage of others

When you take advantage of someone, you use them for your own personal gain. For example, if you're only friendly to someone when you need or want something, you're taking advantage of their good nature—and that's not fair to them.

5. Accept consequences

If you've done something wrong, don't make excuses or blame someone else. Admit what you've done and accept the consequences for your actions.

Think About It

People often think *fair* and *equal* mean the same thing, but they don't always. Treating people equally means treating everyone exactly the same. Treating people fairly means giving everyone the same opportunity to succeed.

Decide whether each situation is an example of people being treated fairly or equally.

1. A classmate who has vision problems always gets to sit at the front of the room.

2. Two students take turns choosing teams in gym class.

3. All students are expected to be quiet in the school library.

4. A student with a food allergy can choose from a special menu in the lunch room.

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Be Trustworthy

Trustworthiness is about more than being honest. Trustworthiness also means keeping your promises and letting others know they can count on you.

Here are some tips on how you can be a trustworthy person.

1. Make honesty a habit

When you get into the habit of always telling the truth, you don't have to remember the lies or excuses you've made, and others learn to trust and respect you as an honest person.

2. Do what you say you will do

Trustworthy people are dependable. This means that people can count on you to do what you say you will do. For example, a trustworthy person is on time for activities and appointments, returns the things they've borrowed, and does the work or chores they promised to do. Doing these kinds of things will show others that they can always depend on you.

3. Keep confidences

People who are trustworthy don't gossip or tell the secrets of others. For example, if a friend tells you something in confidence, they are trusting you not to share this information with others in person or online. Being a friend is being a person who can be trusted.

4. Consider consequences

When you're untrustworthy, there are often consequences that could affect your relationships, your success, and your long-term goals. For example, lying to a friend is likely to cause that friend to never completely trust you again. Cheating on a test could lead to discipline that goes on your permanent school record. When making choices and decisions, think about your values, and about the possible consequences of your actions.

For more on decisions and consequences, watch this quick video.



Think About It

Write your answers to the following questions.

What is one thing other people are trusting you to do today?

Describe a time that you were honest when it was difficult.

Do you consider yourself to be a trustworthy person?

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Be Responsible

Responsibility can mean different things to different people. In general, being responsible means following through on your commitments, working hard, and being accountable for everything you say and do. Here are some tips to help you be more responsible.

1. Don't make excuses

No one is perfect, and we all make mistakes. How you respond to your mistakes makes all the difference. You can blame others or make excuses, or you can take ownership of your mistakes and do what you can to fix them. This is called being accountable, and it's key to being a more responsible person.

2. Give 100% to everything you do

When you commit to something, such as getting a better grade in a class or having a healthier diet, it's important that you do your best to make it happen. Even if you fall short, you'll know you tried your hardest.

3. Don't give up

When things get tough, you have two choices: you can give up, or you can persevere. Responsible people work toward a goal with a spirit that won't be defeated. Of course, this isn't always easy to do. To help you reach any goal, make a plan for how you will tackle the challenges you may face—and don't give up.

4. Think first, act second

You make lots of decisions every day, and most of them aren't that important. However, some decisions can impact your life for a long time—possibly forever. When you stop and think before you act, you can avoid costly mistakes.

For more on making smart choices and decisions, watch this quick video.



Think About It

It's not always easy to do the responsible thing. Read the following three scenarios and check the boxes that show what you'd most likely do.

1. You see someone accidentally drop a twenty dollar bill.

- You catch up to them and give it back.
- You keep it.

2. Your friends want you to come and hang out, but your chores aren't done.

- You go hang out with your friends.
- You finish your chores and then meet your friends.

3. You broke a vase and your mother asks if you know what happened.

- You say you don't know.
- You say you broke it and apologize.

How would your family members, teachers, and friends rate your level of responsibility?

- very responsible
- somewhat responsible
- not very responsible

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Be Respectful

Being respectful includes accepting others for who they are, being tolerant of differences, and being open-minded to the thoughts and opinions of others. When we respect one another, it leads to feelings of acceptance, trust, and love. Here are some tips on how you can be a more respectful person.

1. Embrace differences

How boring would the world be if everyone looked, acted, and thought the same? Look at others' differences as an opportunity to learn and grow. For example, if you have a friend or classmate who practices a religion or observes a holiday different from your own, ask them to tell you more about it. Be open to new perspectives and experiences.

2. Be kind

Treat others the way you would want to be treated. This means being mindful of your words and actions and being kind and courteous to everyone you meet, regardless of their race, gender, or age.

3. Be respectful online

When you are online, people can't see your expressions or hear your tone of voice, so what you say can easily be misunderstood. Be careful with what you post, and only use social media for positive comments and to support others.

4. Be mindful of others' feelings

Everything you say and do has an impact on your well-being, and also on the morale and well-being of those around you. When making a decision, try to be mindful of how it may affect others.

5. Communicate calmly

When you have a disagreement or problem with someone, state your point of view in a calm, clear voice. Keep an open mind, let others talk, and listen to what they have to say. Communication is the key to developing and maintaining relationships.

For more information on getting along with others and developing relationships, watch this quick video.



Think About It

Complete three "I will" statements to show how you will strive to be respectful every day.

I will _____

I will _____

I will _____

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Be a Good Citizen

Being a good citizen means making the world a better place for everyone. For you, this means being a good family member, friend, and classmate; lending a helping hand to those in need; being active in your community; and doing your part to care for the environment. Here are some ways that you can be a good citizen.

1. Share your time and talents

What strengths or talents do you have that could be helpful to a family member, friend, or classmate? For example, a simple offer to help a neighbor with some yard work or household tasks can mean so much. Older neighbors will especially appreciate this act of kindness.

What is one way you can help a neighbor?

2. Understand your civic duties

Even if you're not old enough to vote, you can stay informed about what is happening in your community, state, and country. Choose reliable sources of information, ask questions, and be open to different points of view.

What is a local or national issue you care about?

3. Protect the environment

It's up to every citizen to do their part to protect our land, air, and water. Some things you can do include disposing of trash properly, recycling, picking up litter, and using energy wisely. Even small changes can have a big impact.

What is one thing you can do differently to help protect the environment?

4. Get involved

If you want to be more involved in your community, but don't know where to start, choose an opportunity that's based on a cause that is important to you. For example, if you love animals, volunteer at a local animal shelter.

What is a cause that means something to you?

5. Be a good human

Good citizens all have the same basic qualities: they are kind, respectful, compassionate, and inclusive. They feel a responsibility to make the world better for all people, and they give their time to meet the needs of others. Work to embody these characteristics, and to find joy in being a good citizen.

6. Be kind online

Being a good digital citizen is just as important as being a good citizen in person. Be smart and kind online.

For more, watch this quick video.

