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**Parents as Role Models in creating responsible future citizens!**

**Abstract:**

Although moral development of children has long been ascribed predominantly to the effects of parenting, there has been little systematic examination of the specific nature of this relation. The aim of this paper is to analyze the role of parents in creating the responsible future citizens. It is intended to answer what and how we want them to learn to feel, think and act with respect for themselves and for other people.

**Introduction:**

As parents, we all want our children to grow up to be responsible citizens and good people. We want them to learn to feel, think and act with respect for themselves and for other people. We want them to pursue their own well-being, while also being considerate of the needs and feelings of others. Research has shown that children who grow up with strong, positive values are happier and do better in school. They are also better able to balance their personal wants and needs against those of others and to make positive contributions to society. On the other hand, if children do not learn proper values and behavior when they are very young, problems can develop. These problems can mushroom with serious consequences as children grow older—dropping out of school, drug use, teenage pregnancy, violent crime—the list goes on. The most important thing we can do for our children is to help them acquire values and skills that they can rely on throughout their lives. In doing so, they will have the best chance to lead good lives as individuals and a good citizen of the country.

Just as children must be taught to tie their shoes, read and write, solve math problems, and understand science concepts and events in history, so must they be guided in developing the qualities of character that are valued by their families and by the communities in which they live. It is only through guidance and modeling by caring adults that children learn to be honest and thoughtful, to stand up for their principles, to care about others, to act responsibly and to make sound moral choices.

This paper provides information about the values and skills that make up character and good citizenship and what you can do to help your child develop strong character with values. It suggests activities that you and your school-aged children can do to put those values to work in your daily lives and tips for working with teachers and schools to ensure that you act together to promote the basic values that you want your child to learn and use.

**Objective:** To help our children acquire values and skills that they can rely on throughout their lives. In doing so, they will have the best chance to lead good lives as individuals and as citizens our country.

**What does values and skills mean?**

They are the set of qualities that shape our thoughts, actions, reactions and feelings. People with moral values:

- show compassion,
- are honest and fair,
- display self-discipline in setting and meeting goals,
- make good judgments,
- show respect to others,
- show courage in standing up for beliefs,
- have a strong sense of responsibility,
- are good citizens who are concerned for their community, and
- maintain self-respect.

### Compassion

Compassion, or empathy, means identifying with and being concerned about other people's feelings and needs. It provides the emotional root for caring about other people. It allows us to be understanding and tolerant of different points of views and beliefs, it makes us aware of the suffering of others, and it allows us to empathize with them or to feel their suffering as our own. Compassion also allows us to feel joy and excitement—rather than anger and despair—at other people's successes and achievements. As children grow, compassion can guide their actions and behaviors in positive ways. They understand that by doing something wrong, they cause others pain or unhappiness.

We can promote compassion by helping our children to think about how others feel. For example, if your child says or does something hurtful to another child, help your child to focus his/her attention on the feelings of the victim by saying, for example, "How do you think Ramu feels? Would you like to feel like that?" Children develop compassion by practicing acts of caring and kindness towards others. As adults, we need to emphasize the importance of helping others, giving others the benefit of the doubt and being open to differences.

### What You Can Do?

- Talk about the point of view of others as you watch TV, read books or discuss other people with your child. For example, ask, "What do you think that character is feeling and thinking?"
- Show care toward others, such as doing errands for sick neighbors or opening doors for others.
- Give others the benefit of the doubt. If your child complains that a classmate deliberately pushed him/her down on the way to lunch, explain that sometimes when people are in a hurry, they don't watch where they're going—they don't mean to push or hurt anyone.
- Be open to differences. If your child says "Our new neighbors dress funny," explain that people often wear clothes that reflect their cultures or native countries.

### Honesty and Fairness

Simply put, honesty means being truthful with ourselves and with others. It means caring enough about others not to mislead them for personal benefit. It means facing up to our mistakes, even when we have to admit them to others or when they may get us into trouble. Fairness means acting in a just way and making decisions, especially important ones, on the basis of evidence rather than prejudice. It means "playing by the

rules” and standing up for the right of everyone to be treated equally and honestly. To understand the importance of being honest and fair, children need to learn that living together in a family, community or even a nation depends on mutual trust. Without honesty and fairness, trusting each other becomes very difficult, and families—and societies—fall apart.

Words of caution: There is a big difference between being dishonest—lying or cheating—and “making things up,” as children often do in fantasy play. If children are taught that not telling the truth is “a bad thing,” some young children might assume that it is also a bad thing to pretend to be a princess or an astronaut. Although you should discourage your child from deliberately lying and cheating, you should also let him know that it is fine to role play and pretend.

#### What You Can Do

- Be a model of honest relations with others.
- Discuss with your child what honesty is and is not. Point out, for example, that being honest doesn’t mean telling someone you think he looks ugly. Kindness goes along with honesty.
- Discuss fairness (chances are that your child will bring it up) in different situations. For example, how do we show fairness in our family? What does fairness mean to the community? What were standards of fairness in the past?
- Talk about how you try to be fair in your life and work. What issues of justice have you wrestled with? Your adolescent will be particularly interested in talking with you about these things.

#### Self-discipline

Self-discipline is the ability to set a realistic goal or make a plan—then stick with it. It is the ability to resist doing things that can hurt others or ourselves. It involves keeping promises and following through on commitments. It is the foundation of many other qualities of character. Often self-discipline requires persistence and sticking to long-term commitments—putting off immediate pleasure for later fulfillment. It also includes dealing effectively with emotions, such as anger and envy, and developing patience. Learning self-discipline helps children regulate their behavior and gives them the willpower to make good decisions and choices. On the other hand, the failure to develop self-discipline leaves children wide open to destructive behavior. Without the ability to control or evaluate their impulses, they often dive headlong into harmful situations.

#### What You Can Do

- Talk with your child about setting reachable goals. For example, help him break big tasks into little tasks that can be accomplished one at a time. Have the child pick a task and set a deadline for completing it. When the deadline has passed, check together to see if the task was completed.
- Help your child build a sense of her competence. To do this, your child needs experiences of success, no matter how small. This builds confidence and effort for the next time. Keep making the tasks just a little more challenging but doable.

#### Good Judgment

Children develop strong character by learning to think about and make sound judgments about what is

right or wrong, good or bad. These are not always easy distinctions for adults to make, much less children. For example, it can be difficult for a child to recognize the difference between acting bravely and acting recklessly. As parents, we can help by showing, through what we do as well as what we say, that it is important in such situations to think carefully and honestly about what should be done, carefully weighing how others will be affected by what we do. Sometimes we get into trouble because we “just didn’t think.” We let our emotions lead us to actions that we regret later. Making good judgments requires skills in monitoring impulses, using reasoning to sort through feelings and facts, and thinking about the consequences of our actions. Your child’s ability to think and make sound judgments will improve as your child matures. With age, however, it also may become easier for your child to try to justify and make excuses for selfish or reckless behavior. However, if you have helped them develop strong habits of honesty, courage, responsibility and self-respect, your child will have the ability to see the flaws in their reasoning and be able to come to the right conclusion about what to do.

#### What You Can Do

- Teach your child to stop and think before acting on impulse.
- Teach your child to tell fact from feeling. Let them know that just because he feels strongly about something—such as hitting someone who made him/her angry— doesn’t mean it’s the right thing to do.
- Encourage your child to think about the consequences of their decisions. Tell them little stories about situations they might face and talk about actions children might take, who might be affected by their actions, what might happen because of their actions and what the best action might be.
- When your child has a problem with a rule, brainstorm together a list of possible reasons for the rule. This leads to greater understanding.
- Remind your child to pay attention to the rules or codes that apply in each situation. For example, the rules for behaving in a temple are different from those for a football game.

#### Respect for Others

Respect for others is based on self-respect and is summed up in the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. It is the value that makes the world a more decent and civilized place. People show respect in many ways. They speak and act civilly—avoiding insults, cruel remarks and rude or crude language. They are courteous and considerate of others, including family members and friends, and care about their rights, beliefs and well-being. They treat others fairly and as individuals, regardless of race, sex, age or ethnic group. They display tolerance for people who do not share their personal beliefs and likes—so long as those people do not harm others. Research indicates that children learn to respect others when they are treated with respect themselves. Constant criticism of a child, negative comments about him and failure to praise his achievements can lead the child to be disrespectful to others. Treating children with respect pays large dividends both to families and to societies as a whole.

#### What You Can Do

- Practice respectful ways of communicating. Show your child how to talk to others with respect.

Help your child to resolve conflicts nonviolently. When facing a conflict, encourage your child to do the following:

- Find out what the conflict is. For example, if your child is angry because his/her little brother barges into his/her room without knocking, help them to explain the conflict by using an “I” statement, such as “I feel angry when you come into my room without knocking.”

- Next, suggest different ways they might resolve the conflict. They could say to their brother, “I know I can’t always hear when I’m listening to music, so you knock really loud five times—if I don’t answer, then open the door.” Or, “If I don’t answer your knock, slide a note under the door.”

- Then have your child agree on one of the choices.

- Finally, have them make a plan to check whether the solution is working.

- Teach your child to respect the valued traditions of our heritage. Talk about family customs for showing respect, for honoring elders and for helping the community. Encourage them to do these things.

### Self-respect

Self-respect means taking satisfaction in appropriate behavior and hard-won accomplishments. People with self-respect also respect others. They do not need to disparage others or build themselves up by bragging or exaggerating their abilities or talents. They do not need lots of money or power to feel good about them. People who respect themselves view selfishness, loss of self-discipline, recklessness, cowardice and dishonesty as wrong and unworthy of them. They have inner strength and are unwilling to let others use or manipulate them. They know that showing patience or tolerance does not mean allowing others to mistreat them. People with self-respect do not crumble when they fail. They accept mistakes as a part of life. As we help our children set high standards for themselves, we also need to let them know that failure is no embarrassment when they have done their best. Teaching children self-respect, however, does not mean complimenting everything they do. They also need honest criticism from time to time. When we do criticize, we should focus on things they have done, not on them personally.

### What You Can Do

- Encourage your child to build a positive identity that focuses on their integrity and talents.
- Emphasize that character is built upon the decisions and actions a person takes each day.
- Work with your child to help them reach their full potential by encouraging them to develop their talents, set reachable goals and honor themselves as a unique person.
- Teach your child how to choose good values. Help them reason about what are worthy goals and what proper means to reach those goals are.

### Courage

Courage is the ability to overcome fear in order to do what is right, even if it is difficult or risky. Courage can mean facing physical dangers, but it also can mean standing up for beliefs and making hard decisions on the basis of evidence rather than on what is the easy or popular thing to do. It means being neither reckless nor cowardly but facing up to our duties and responsibilities. Courage, however, does not mean never

being afraid; and children should be told that there are times when it is all right to be frightened and to run away from danger. But they also need to learn how to face and overcome some fears, such as a fear of the dark.

#### What You Can Do

- Coach your child on how to be brave. Praise them when they act courageously (but never ridicule them for any reason—ridicule can have long-lasting effects on a child’s self-confidence).
- Discuss with your child how to say no. Sometimes children don’t know how to say no to peers who ask them to do dangerous or risky things. After identifying ways that they might be tempted, teach your child a three-step process for self-protection:
- Apply the “trouble” rule: Will this action break a law or rule?
- Make a good decision—think carefully about the risks or possible consequences.
- Act fast to avoid trouble, using options such as the following:
  - Say no!
  - Leave.
  - Make a joke
  - Suggest something better to do.
  - Make an excuse such as, “My dad will get really mad.”
  - Act shocked.

#### Responsibility

Being responsible means being dependable, keeping promises and honoring our commitments. It is accepting the consequences for what we say and do. It also means developing our potential. People who are responsible don’t make excuses for their actions or blame others when things go wrong. They think things through and use good judgment before they take action. They behave in ways that encourage others to trust them. People who are responsible take charge of their lives. They make plans and set goals for nurturing their talents and skills. They are resilient in finding ways to overcome adversity. They make decisions, taking into account obligations to family and community. Children need to learn that being part of a family and a community involves accepting responsibilities. When each of us acts responsibly, our families and communities will be stronger.

#### What You Can Do

- Make agreements with your child and expect them to follow through.
- When things go wrong, help your child take responsibility for their part and make a plan to do things differently next time.
- Encourage your child to find out more about the world and how their actions may affect others far away.

#### Citizenship and Patriotism

Citizenship requires doing our share for our community and our country. Being a good citizen means caring about the good of society and participating actively to make things better. Research reveals that

participating in community service programs and learning about the importance and value of serving others can be a powerful influence on positive character development. Patriotism is an important part of good citizenship. Patriotism is love of and loyalty to our country. It involves honoring the democratic ideals on which the country is based and expecting elected officials to do the same, respecting and obeying its laws and honoring its flag and other symbols. It also involves accepting the responsibilities of good citizenship, such as keeping informed about national issues, voting, volunteering and serving the country in times of war.

#### What You Can Do

- Take your child with you when you vote. Talk to him about the candidates, the offices they aspire to hold and their positions on key issues.
- Participate in community-building activities, such as cleaning up parks and assisting with school activities.
- Discuss citizenship with your child and find examples of what good citizens have done for their communities.

#### How Can We Help Children Learn about Character?

- Children learn about strong character when parents and other adults in their daily lives,
- set a good example through their own behavior and actions,
- set and communicate high standards and clear expectations,
- coach them on how to be responsible and kind, and
- use literature to reinforce the values of strong character.

#### Set a Good Example

We are always teaching our children something by our words and our actions. They learn from seeing. They learn from hearing and from overhearing. They learn from us, from each other, from other adults in the community and by themselves. Children share the values of their parents about the most important things in life. Our priorities and principles and our examples of good behavior can teach our children to take the high road when other roads look tempting.

Remember that children do not learn the values that make up strong character simply by being told about them. They learn by seeing the people around them act on and uphold those values in their daily lives. In our daily lives, we can show our children that we respect others. We can show them our compassion and concern when others are suffering, and our own self-discipline, courage and honesty as we make difficult decisions. How we conduct our everyday activities can show our children that we always try to do our best to serve our families, communities and country.

The way that we view money and material goods also can mold our children's character. If we see our self-worth and the worth of others in terms of cars, homes, furniture, nice clothes and other possessions, our children are likely to develop these attitudes as well. Of course, it is important to meet our children's needs, but it is also important to help them understand the difference between their needs and their wants.

The expensive jacket that your child has to have may be OK—if you can afford it. Finally, we need to be consistent in upholding the values we want our children to respect and not present them with conflicting values. We may tell our children that cheating is wrong, for example, yet brag to a neighbor about avoiding paying taxes. We may say that rudeness to others is unacceptable, yet laugh when we see that behavior on a favorite TV show.

Words of caution: Your expectations must be appropriate for your child's age and stages of mental, emotional, social and physical development. For example, it's not appropriate to tell an infant not to cry and expect them to obey. Likewise, it's not appropriate to expect a 3-year-old to sit still for hours or for a 13-year-old not to worry about how they looks. Pay attention to what your child can do, start there and help her learn skills to move forward. Be gentle but firm in your expectations.

#### Coach

Remember how you learned to drive or cook? You practiced while someone coached you, reminding you what to do until you were able to coach yourself and then, eventually, do it automatically. Children learn values much the same way. They practice different kinds of behavior, while, you, as coach, help focus their attention on what is important and on fine-tuning important skills. You support them with your praise, encouragement and gentle reminders. If you don't coach your child, they will find their coaches elsewhere and be guided by the values of the media, their peers and anyone else who captures their interest. So, step up to the plate, don't be afraid and help your child learn how to be a good person, step by step.

#### Use Literature

Literature can be a very powerful teaching tool. In fact, people in stories, poems and plays can influence children almost as much as the real people who read with them. Therefore, reading to and with children, encouraging older children to read on their own and talking with children about the books they read are important ways to help children learn about and develop the values of strong character and good citizenship.

#### Asking Questions to Guide Discussions

Use questions such as the following to help your child think about the values of stories:

##### Motivation

How did the people in the story act?

Did they have good or bad motives?

Who were the heroes? Why were they heroes? Were there villains?

Why were they villains?

##### Judgment

Did the people make good decisions? Why or why not?



### Action

How did the people carry out their decisions? What kinds of steps did they take? Were there obstacles?

How did they respond to the obstacles?

### Sensitivity

Did the people think about the welfare of others?

Did the story have a good or bad ending? For whom was it good? For whom was it bad?

How could the story have turned out better for everyone?

### Activities

As parents, we may need to set aside particular times or create special activities to teach our children certain things. But this isn't true when it comes to helping them learn about character. Everyday life is filled with opportunities for helping our children learn about the values we prize and want to encourage.

Rather than "things to do" with your child for half an hour once a week, most of the following activities are more like rules-of-thumb or ideas to build into your daily lives. Most illustrate several qualities of character and show that one quality often grows from another.

The activities can be adapted for children from early childhood through adolescence, and most contain specific suggestions for children of different ages and stages of development. You, as your child's first and most important teacher, are the best judge of which activities are most appropriate to use based on the emotional and social development of your child. As you choose the activities to use with your child, remember this thought: Teaching our children about values doesn't mean that we can't laugh or that we have to be grim. Our children should see that we can be serious about our values and principles and still play and have fun. In fact, you can teach a lot through play. And you can make games out of learning particular skills. We hope that you and your child enjoy these activities and that they inspire you to think of additional activities of your own.

### Magic Words, Caring Deeds

Good manners are a part of showing respect for others. Using games to reinforce manners provides children with the practice they need to learn manners without embarrassing themselves—or us.

### What to Do

Let your child know that respect for others can begin with something as basic as showing good manners, like —shaking hands in greeting; —looking someone in the eye while talking;

—saying "please," "thank you," "excuse me," and "I'm sorry";

—opening doors for others;

—using expressions such as "yes, sir" and "no, ma'am" when speaking to older people; and

—giving up a seat on a bus or subway to an older person or a person with a disability.

At lunch or dinner time, have family members pretend to be eating in a restaurant. Ask your child how they should talk to you and to others at the table. What should your child say when "the waiter" brings their food? How should they eat the food? What should your child say if he/she wants to leave the table?

Line up several chairs and have your child and other family members pretend to be on a bus. Ask your child to show you what she should say and do if the bus stops suddenly and she bumps into someone.

How should they carry a large package on the bus so that it doesn't harm or bother others? What should your child do if he/she is sitting on a bus and there are no vacant seats when an older person gets on?

When your child mentions something nice that someone did for them, encourage your child to write a thank-you note. Explain that the note doesn't have to have a lot of words. For younger children, it also can have drawings. After he/she writes the note, help your child to go over it and correct spelling and punctuation. Explain that taking the time to check and correct what we've written shows respect for the person getting the note.

Let your child see you writing short notes to others. You might write a note to the mail carrier to thank them for helping you with a large package, to a neighbor to wish them well on a job interview or to a relative to congratulate them for winning an award.

#### Our Heroes!

Heroes are everywhere, and sharing stories about them can help children understand what qualities it takes to be a hero and what heroism really means.

#### What You Need

Family photographs; newspaper pictures of local people who have been recognized for community service, bravery or selfless acts; pictures from books or the Internet of people in history or current events whom we admire.

#### What to Do

Talk with your child about what it means to be a hero. Ask them what he/she thinks a hero is and what qualities a hero has to have. Ask them who his/her heroes are and why. Select a photo of someone in your family who has an admirable quality or who performed a courageous act. You might choose your mother who sacrificed so that you could have a good education or your father who fought in a war. Sit with your child and tell them about the relative's life. Talk with them about the qualities of character that the relative showed—courage, self-discipline, responsibility, citizenship, and so forth.

Show your child newspaper pictures of local people who have performed acts of courage or service to the community. Talk with your child about what the people did and why they are considered "heroes."

#### How Can I Be of Service?

From an early age, children benefit from giving their time and efforts to help others.

#### What to Do

Talk with your child about the importance of charitable work and serving others. Point out that such work is an important part of living in a civil and democratic society.

Help your child think about age-appropriate things that they can do to serve the community. For example, your young child might help you sort items for recycling or give money from their piggy bank to a charitable group. An older child might participate in walks for charity, volunteer at animal shelters or visit residents of a local nursing home.

### Coping

Everyone faces hardships at some point in life. Children need to learn skills and qualities that can help them survive difficult situations.

### What to Do

Talk with your child about resilience, or the ability to succeed despite hardship or tragedy. Talk about how people cope with situations such as family breakups, health problems or community disturbances. Explain to your child that resilient people have certain things in common and these qualities are real assets for any person to have. Researchers have identified many of them, and below is a short inventory of such assets. Have your child rate themselves on each one and discuss the results with them.

### Personal qualities

- The ability to make a plan and carry it out
- A positive view of herself
- Confidence in her abilities
- A belief in her strengths
- The ability to communicate well with others (family, friends, and strangers)
- The ability to solve problems
- The ability to manage anger
- The ability to manage impulses

### Putting it All Together

Thus far we have tried to identify the components of a moral child and the parenting behaviors that foster or impede their development. We also have tried to explicate in more detail how parents can implement core parenting strategies that have been empirically related to the growth of our nine aspects of child morality. Many parents naturally engage in these strategies, but others may require education or structured training to provide the kind of parenting that supports moral development.

### Role of Parents:

- Personal character traits of the parents and environment at home play a crucial role in making the children modest, disciplined and courteous.
- Teaching process always start from parents. They must be child's first masters.
- Inspirational books providing values to the kids should be arranged at home. Parents should take interest in reading them to children and explaining the meanings and learning from them.

- Along with academic knowledge, children should be exposed to practical aspects of life and its challenges.
- Children should be sensitive towards social issues.
- Special attention should be given to physical, mental and character development of children.

To summarize, in prohibiting actions, giving instructions, and responding to transgressions, parents are important and because of their emotional bonds to their children, valued source of children's social experiences that lead to the construction of moral concepts throughout childhood and adolescence.

More than playing the role of parent for the overall development of child, a parent should be a Role Model.