

Bringing Out Their Best

Parents want their children to be polite and respectful, tolerant and honest. How can you teach your youngster to be the best she can be? Try these strategies to build good character in your little one.

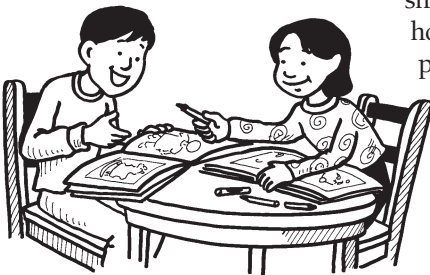


Random acts of kindness

Take on the kindness challenge. Encourage everyone in your family to do something nice for someone else every day. Explain to your youngster that kindness can be as simple as lending a crayon to a classmate or smiling at someone who looks sad.

At dinner, share your kind acts with each other. Maybe you got lunch for a busy coworker, or your child told the bus driver that he's a good driver. Ask your youngster how she felt when she was being kind—and how she thinks the other person felt. On your

kitchen calendar, have your child write or draw a picture about the kind act she does each day.



Creative tolerance

Help your child develop tolerance by teaching him to accept others as they are. Ask him to think of a classmate who is different from him. Does he know someone who is taller? Or who has a different skin color? Talk about what he has in common with this classmate: Does he like to sing songs or catch bugs, too?

Then, try this art project. Have your youngster draw three people and vary how they look (differently shaped eyes, long or short legs, wearing glasses). Then, help him cut the drawings into three parts: the head, body, and legs. Encourage him to mix and match the pieces to make three unique people. He can glue them onto new sheets, give them names, and tell a nice story about each person he created.

Responsibility poster

Help your child be responsible in his daily routines. Cut a sheet of poster board in half. Label one half "Morning" and the other half "Evening."

Let him illustrate his responsibilities on each one. For example, his "Morning" poster could have pictures of clothes (getting dressed), a toothbrush (brushing teeth), coat and school bag (going to school). You can help him write "clothes," "teeth," and "coat and bag" under each picture. His "Evening" poster might include "bath," "teeth," and "pajamas."

Encourage your youngster to look at his posters while he gets ready for school and bed. Pretty soon, he may be able to take care of these things without any prompting from you.



Politeness points

Celebrate politeness when you see it in your home. Start by brainstorming polite words and phrases with your youngster. *Examples:* "please," "thank you," "you're welcome," "excuse me," "I'm sorry."

Keep a bag of tokens (such as bingo chips) handy. Each time someone in your family uses a polite word, give that person a token. At the end of each day, the person with the most tokens gets to hand them out the next day. Try this for a week or two, and watch politeness become a habit for your child.



Honest characters

Read books about telling the truth and being trustworthy. Talk with your youngster about the characters' actions and what it means to be honest. Here are two books to try:

■ In *A Bargain for Frances* by Russell Hoban, Thelma tricks Frances into buying her tea set. Frances then teaches her friend a lesson about friendship and honesty. (Also available in Spanish.)



■ *Sam Tells Stories* is about a preschooler who tells his classmates that Martians came to his house for dinner. Sam soon learns that he can't make friends by telling lies. A book by Thierry Robberecht.

As you read, ask your child why she thinks the character lied and what that person could have done differently. Also, ask her how she thinks she would act in a similar situation.

Generous volunteers

Raise a child who is willing to give to others by teaching her to volunteer. Explain that volunteering often means helping people she doesn't know and that her generosity will mean a lot to them.

Here are a few things you can do to get started. Ask your youngster to choose 10 items (gently used books and

toys, clothing she has outgrown) to give to a charity thrift store or homeless shelter, and go there together. Have her make cards and pictures for sick children in a hospital or residents in a nursing home. Or take part in a clean-up day at a nearby park.

For more ideas, check with your child's school or your local United Way (www.unitedway.org/take-action/volunteer).

Time for patience

Waiting patiently can be tough for little ones, but it gets easier with practice. Plan ahead for times when your youngster will have to wait. Together, come up with "waiting" activities he can do when you're in a restaurant or at the dentist's office.

Let him write and draw a picture of each idea on a separate index card. *Examples:* Whisper the alphabet forward and backward. Find five things the same color as my shirt. Rub my head and pat my stomach at the same time. Count how many different sounds I can hear.

Punch holes in the top left corner of each card, and use yarn to string together two decks of "waiting cards." Leave one deck at home and the other in the car. When your child has to wait, let him select a card and do the activity.

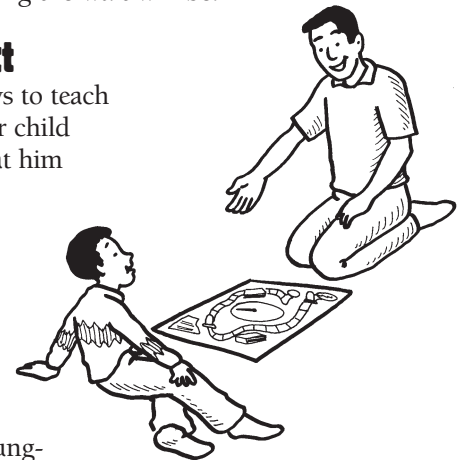
Tip: Waiting is easier if you can give your youngster a realistic idea of how long the wait will be.

Showing respect

One of the best ways to teach respect is to show your child what it looks like. Treat him with respect by using nice words and speaking calmly. Also, you can model respect by how you act toward your spouse, relatives, and friends.

Explain to your youngster that treating people with consideration means sharing, taking turns, and cooperating. For example, if you're playing a board game, say, "You go first this time, and I'll go first next time." Follow the rules, and expect him to follow them, too.

Before a playdate, remind your child of the things you've taught him. "Remember how much fun you and Jake had playing together last time? You shared the blocks so nicely. I know you can do it again today."



Early Years