



# A Family's Guide to Teaching Good Character

Grades 9-12

Trustworthiness · Respect · Responsibility · Fairness · Caring · Citizenship

# Parenting for Good Character

Good character doesn't just happen. It is a result of families who intentionally teach their children about character.

## What is character?

- **Moral character** includes values we need to be our best self, like the Six Pillars of Character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.
- **Performance character** focuses on values that help us do our best work, like positivity, learning, resilience, self-discipline, perseverance, and diligence.

## How to teach character with T.E.A.M.:

- **Teach Children that their Character Counts**  
We must teach our children about the Six Pillars of Character, what each Pillar means, and what it looks like and does not look like in action.
- **Encourage the Six Pillars of Character**  
Reward good behavior (usually praise is enough) and discourage bad behavior by imposing fair and consistent consequences.
- **Advocate Character**  
Continually encourage children to live up to the Six Pillars of Character by explaining and showing why demonstrating the Pillars matters.
- **Model Good Behavior**  
Everything you say and do (or neglect to do) sends a message about your values. Be sure that these messages reinforce your lessons about doing the right thing, even when it is difficult. When you slip, be accountable; apologize sincerely and do better!

## How to use this guide:

Our goal is to give families a variety of ways to teach character. Imagine a parenting toolbox where you can keep all of your parenting tools. This guide can provide you with more ideas for your toolbox.

This guide is organized by the Six Pillars of Character. For each Pillar, you will find:

- An introduction to the Pillar
- Ideas on how to teach, encourage, advocate and model good character
- A discussion starter
- An Excellence with Integrity™ tool. These strategies can help you talk with your children, and can be used with kids or adults, at home, school or work.

## About this guide:

A project of The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University, A Family's Guide to Teaching Good Character introduces families to the Six Pillars and provides ideas for adults to help teach good character in the home, school, and community.

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## Learn more:

For more resources, please visit us at [www.drake.edu/raycenter](http://www.drake.edu/raycenter), or call us at 515-271-1910.

# TRUSTWORTHINESS

- Be honest
  - Don't deceive, cheat or steal
  - Be reliable; do what you say you'll do
  - Be loyal
- Have the courage to do the right thing
  - Build a good reputation
  - Keep your promises

Trustworthy individuals are honest, courageous, and reliable.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Teach your teen about being trustworthy using the discussion starters and tools below.
- **Encourage:** Praise your teen when he or she demonstrates trustworthiness and offer fair consequences when he or she displays untrustworthy behavior.
- **Advocate:** Provide opportunities for your teen to practice trustworthiness and discuss why it matters to him/her, you, your family, and your community.
- **Model:** Be a good role model and demonstrate trustworthiness in all areas of your life.

## Discussion starters

What behaviors show you are a trustworthy (friend, daughter/son, sister/brother, employee)? How does the breakdown of trust impact relationships and the autonomy you enjoy? What does trust have to do with the quality of someone's character? What could you do better or differently to demonstrate trustworthiness?

## Excellence with Integrity Tool

SWOT Analysis

Every decision you make sends a message about how trustworthy you are. Sometimes, it's easy to do the right thing, but there are also instances when making the right decision is hard. Use a SWOT Analysis to think about: When am I really good at being trustworthy (strengths)? When am I not so good at being trustworthy (weaknesses)? What opportunities do I have to get better at being trustworthy (opportunities)? And what is going to threaten my ability to get better at being trustworthy (threats)?

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESS
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS

# RESPECT

- Treat others with respect; follow the Golden Rule
- Be understanding of differences
- Use good manners, don't use bad language
- Don't threaten, hit or hurt anyone
- Be considerate of the feelings of others
- Deal peacefully with anger, insults and disagreements

It is easy to demonstrate respect when you agree with the opinion of others. However, it can be challenging to demonstrate respect when you disagree with the other person's perspective. The respect you demonstrate is not a reflection of the degree to which you agree with the opinions or beliefs of others. Respect reflects who you are and how you choose to treat people.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Teach your teen about respect using the discussion starters and tools below.
- **Encourage:** Praise your teen when he or she demonstrates respect and offer fair consequences when he or she displays disrespectful behavior.
- **Advocate:** Provide opportunities for your teen to practice respect and discuss why it matters to him/her, you, your family, and community.
- **Model:** Be a good role model and demonstrate respect in all areas of your life.

## Discussion starter

When do you find it challenging to show respect? What is a respectful response when you feel disrespected in a collaborative project or conversation? Does everyone deserve respect? Why or why not? What could you do better or differently to demonstrate respect?

## Excellence with Integrity Tool

### Care-frontation Fundamentals

Respecting other people's beliefs can be challenging especially when you feel strongly about a topic. Therefore, it is important to understand how to attack problems, not people, and see things from their perspective.

For strong relationships and high performing partnerships:

1. Attack the problem, not the person: Name the problem and what needs to be done differently or better. Care more about getting it right than being right.
2. When in doubt, do it: Speak up sooner and more consistently. Conflicts delayed and deferred turn little things into big things.
3. Use "I" statements/Avoid "you" statements: Honestly and respectfully express your thoughts and feelings: be solution-centered, and clarify the goal or expectation (e.g., "I think..., I want..., I need..., I feel..."). Avoid using You statements that casts blame on others.
4. Seek win-win: Balance your needs and interests (I want) and the needs and interests of others (You want).
5. Own mistakes and missteps: It won't always be smooth and perfect, so be ready to apologize, make-up, and move on.

*Adapted from David Augsburger, Caring Enough to Confront*

# RESPONSIBILITY

- Do what you are supposed to do
- 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 choices

Demonstrating responsibility is challenging in a teenager's fast-paced world. Therefore, goal setting, embracing where your feet are, and building in time to dream big, can help motivate them to follow through on commitments.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Teach your teen about being responsible using the discussion starters and tools below.
- **Encourage:** Praise your teen when he or she demonstrates responsibility and offer fair consequences when he or she displays irresponsible behavior.
- **Advocate:** Provide opportunities for your teen to practice being responsible and discuss why it matters to him/her, you, your family, and community.
- **Model:** Be a good role model and demonstrate responsibility in all areas of your life.

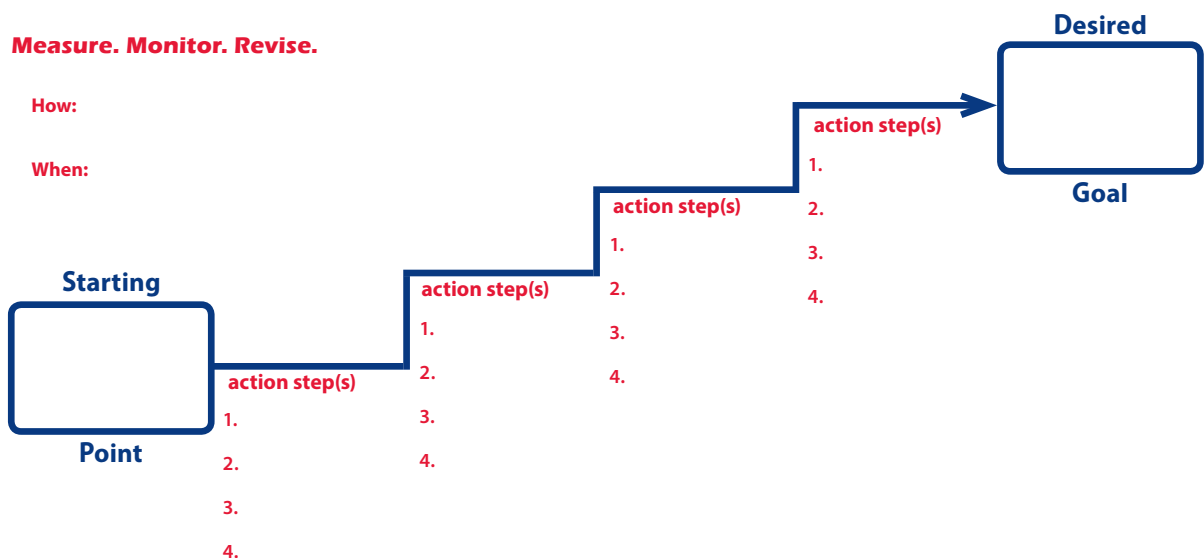
## Discussion starter

What is a responsibility that brings you joy? What is a responsibility you are struggling to balance? How can creating a goal achievement plan help you follow through with your responsibilities? What could you do better or differently to demonstrate responsibility?

## Excellence with Integrity Tool

### Goal Map

Use the goal map below to establish the steps you need to take to go from your starting point to your desired goal.



### Support & Challenge:

Expertise, Encouragement, Accountability

Who:

When:



# FAIRNESS

- Play by the rules
- Take turns and share
- Be open-minded; listen to others
- Don't take advantage of others
- Don't blame others carelessly

Being fair can be a challenge in all settings and can be dependent on attitudes, perspectives, and situations. So, it is important to know when to compromise and negotiate.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Teach your teen about being fair using the discussion starters and tools below.
- **Encourage:** Praise your teen when he or she demonstrates fairness and offer fair consequences when he or she displays unfair behavior.
- **Advocate:** Provide opportunities for your teen to practice fairness and discuss why it matters to him/her, you, your family, and community.
- **Model:** Be a good role model and demonstrate fairness in all areas of your life.

## Discussion starter

What is a rule or requirement you find unfair? How would you negotiate the rule to be more equitable? How is fairness different from equality? What could you do better or differently to demonstrate fairness?

## Excellence with Integrity Tool

### Win-Win Negotiation Guide

To negotiate a fair solution, we must first understand what each party desires or wants. Start by asking questions so you understand the perspective of others. Then express what you want or need, and work towards a solution together that works for all parties.

Think of a time that you and another member of your family disagreed about what was fair. Identify what you wanted in that situation, acknowledge what the other person wanted, and discuss what could have been done to satisfy both parties.

Communicate so your  
needs are understood.



Communicate so you understand  
the needs of others.



Be creative to  
find a compromise.



# CARING

- Be kind
- Be compassionate and show you care
- Express gratitude
- Forgive others
- Help people in need

Caring for others matters, but we cannot care for others if we are burned out and distressed. Thus, it is important to recognize when we need to care for ourselves and when we have hit the tipping point between good stress and distress.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Teach your teen about being caring using the discussion starters and tools below.
- **Encourage:** Praise your teen when he or she demonstrates caring and offer fair consequences when he or she displays uncaring or unkind behavior.
- **Advocate:** Provide opportunities for your teen to practice caring and discuss why it matters to him/her, you, your family, and community.
- **Model:** Be a good role model and demonstrate caring in all areas of your life.

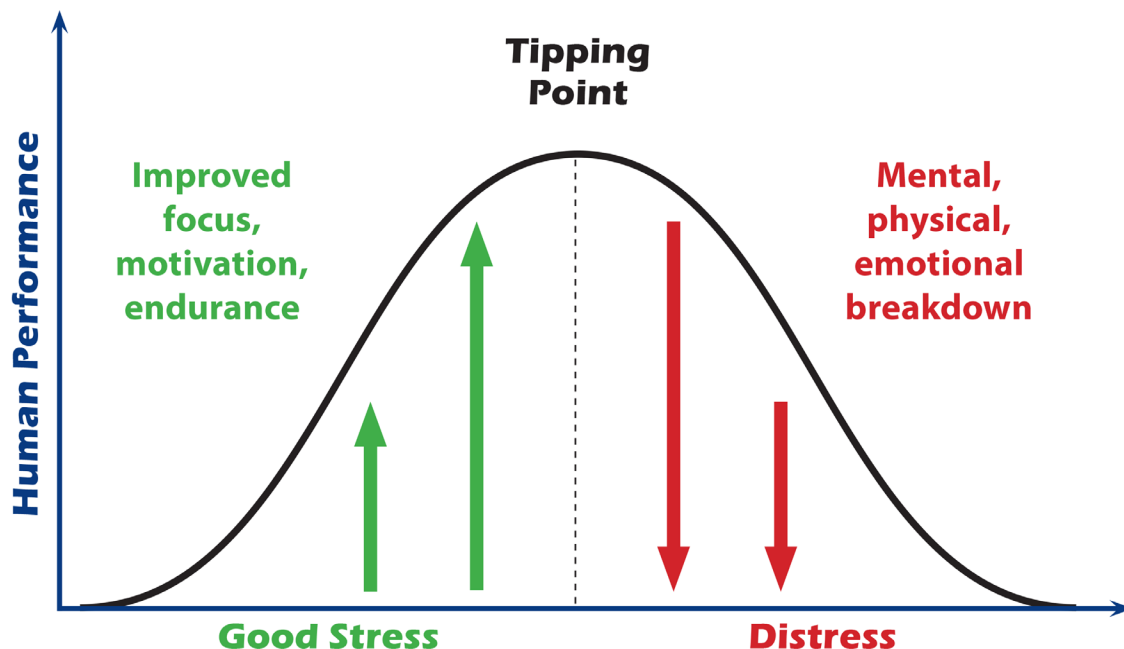
## Discussion starter

How do you know the difference between when you are feeling stressed and when you are just busy?  
What could you do better or differently to proactively manage your stress (exercise, journal, meditate)?

## Excellence with Integrity Tool

Good Stress Distress Continuum

Name some challenges in your life that drive and motivate you (good stress). What challenges cause you to cross the tipping point and breakdown (distress)? What should you do when you feel yourself getting close to the tipping point?



*Based on the work of Hans Seyle*

# CITIZENSHIP

- 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

What is good character and how do citizens model it? These are important questions we must answer if we want to advocate and serve our community. Finding the truth about who you are and what you stand for can guide you as you seek opportunities to demonstrate character as an active citizen in your community and world.

## T.E.A.M.

- **Teach:** Teach your teen about being a good citizen using the discussion starters and tools below.
- **Encourage:** Praise your teen when he or she demonstrates citizenship and offer fair consequences when he or she displays contrary behavior.
- **Advocate:** Provide opportunities for your teen to practice citizenship and discuss why it matters to him/her, you, your family, and community.
- **Model:** Be a good role model and demonstrate citizenship in all areas of your life.

## Discussion starter

What does it mean to have good character? How does someone with good character model citizenship? What is a way we can serve our community as engaged citizens? What could you do better or differently to serve our community as an engaged citizen?

## Excellence with Integrity Tool

### Personal Character Touchstone

Use the word map below to select four or five traits that describe how you would like to live your life and be remembered by others. Be sure to select a mix of performance character words (on the left) and moral character words (on the right). Then, write a motto that expresses the moral and performance character values defining the core of your identity and guiding your behavior.



Adapted from Lickona & Davidson (2005).



# A FAMILY PACT

A family pact is an agreement of your values. It focuses on what is most important in your lives and relationships.

Having a written copy of your pact provides your family with a reminder of the expectations in your home. Every family's values are different and so every family's pact will be different. Here are two examples:



## The Davidson Way

☞ We don't whine, complain, or make excuses; instead, we work hard, focus on the positive, have a can-do attitude, and hustle while we wait.

☞ We commit to be honest & trustworthy, kind, and fair. We don't lie, cheat, steal, or intentionally hurt others.

☞ When we make a mistake we own it, make up for it, learn from it, and move on.

☞ We work to keep our minds, bodies, and souls healthy, strong and pure; We discipline ourselves so that others don't have to.

☞ We commit to learn and grow in our faith through consistent practice and an unwavering trust in God's goodness and His particular plan for our unique potential.

☞ We are fun-loving, healthy risk-takers. We live deliberately with an attitude of gratitude and joy. We laugh often, and love generously, wisely, and well.

**☞ Remember who you are—  
wherever you go, whatever you do.**

## How to create your family pact

- Explain that a pact is an agreement between everyone in the family. This pact will be an agreement on what values are most important in your family.
- Ask each family member to contribute ideas to the pact. As a family, go through the ideas and determine which items reflect your most important family values.
- Turn those values into statements. How will you act?
- Post your family pact in a prominent place in your home. Or, you may want to make multiple copies and give them to each family member.
- You could have each member of the family sign the pact.
- Don't forget to regularly talk about your pact and make any updates to your pact as needed.

## How to use it

Your family can use your family pact as a reminder of expected behavior. You can also refer back to it as issues arise. For example, "Our pact reminds us to take care of our pets; I would like you to please feed the dog." Or, "We agreed in our pact that we would always tell the truth. I would like you to please tell me the truth about what happened at the park."

We'd love to see your Family Pact! Share it by emailing it to us at [RayCenter@Drake.edu](mailto:RayCenter@Drake.edu).

# HOT TOPICS

Families will encounter a wide range of issues, which can include stress management concerns to risky behaviors or decision-making. The strategies in this book can provide you with a starting point to address some of these topics.

For example, if your teenager is having difficulty managing his or her stress levels you can help him or her complete a Stress Management Plan. If your teen is struggling with risky decision-making utilize a SWOT analysis to evaluate strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Plus, you can always refer back to your family pact to guide family discussions.

Here is a hot topic that can be addressed using the Six Pillars of Character and the strategies in this guide.

## Risky Behavior

Risky behavior/decision-making is a hot topic many families, who have teenagers, may struggle to address. Below are ideas to support your teen in the decision-making process using the tools presented in this guide.

### SWOT

- Utilize a SWOT analysis to evaluate their decision-making skills. When are they strong or weak? What are the opportunities to make better decisions? What are the threats that can affect their healthy decision-making ability?

### Care-frontation

- It is easier for teenagers to make unhealthy choices and demonstrate riskier behaviors when their friends are involved. Discuss with your teen ways to circumvent risky behaviors or choices when they use care-frontation strategies to have difficult conversations.

### Goal Map

- Work on a goal map with your teen and discuss how risky behaviors like drinking, drug use, and poor academic performance could negatively impact their ability to achieve the goal.

### Win-Win Negotiation

- As a parent you are trying to prepare your teen to go into the world and make smart decisions. Therefore, you must allow for some autonomy to practice making good decisions with support. Create opportunities for your teen to negotiate safe choices as part of your commitment to guide and support his or her transition from adolescence to adulthood.

### Stress Management

- Our ability to make good decisions goes down when we are under stress. Use the Stress Management tool to help your teen become more aware of their stress level. Discuss how stress can lead to negative coping mechanisms or risky behavior, and coach them through positive ways to manage their stress.

### Touchstone

- Recommend your teen use his or her touchstone to guide his or her decision-making. Encourage him or her to ask the question, "Is the decision I am about to make in alignment with my touchstone?"