

CHARACTER BUILDERS

It takes patience and practice to teach good character to your child. These tips and ideas can help you encourage respect, kindness, honesty, and other important traits.

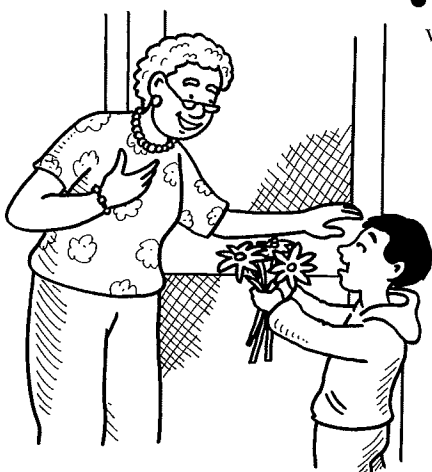


RESPECT

- Use play food to open a “drive-through restaurant” with your youngster. Take turns being the customer and the clerk. While you play, have her practice speaking respectfully by saying please and thank you. *Examples:* “Thank you for waiting. May I take your order?” “May I please have a slice of pepperoni pizza?”
- Following rules is another way your child can show respect. Together, list a few household rules, such as “We use nice words.” Ask her to post the rules on the refrigerator as a reminder for everyone.
- Help your youngster name different ways she shows respect for herself, like eating healthy foods and getting exercise. Let her cut pictures from old magazines to stand for each idea (an apple, a bike). She can glue them on paper to make a collage.

KINDNESS

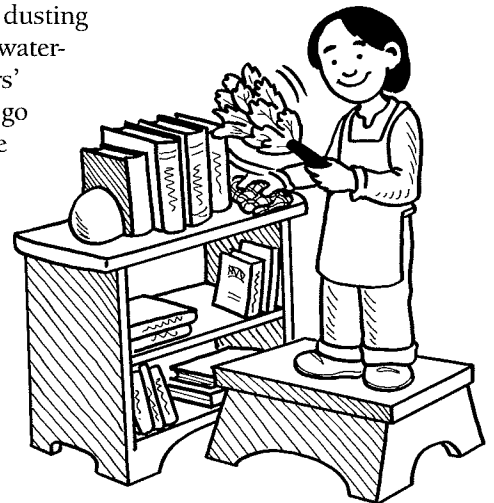
- Perform kind acts together. You and your child might pick flowers from your garden to brighten up a neighbor’s day or make a get-well card for a sick relative.
- This dinnertime activity will get your youngster thinking about kindness. Pass a small object (ball, paperweight) around the table, and have each person hold it while they tell one nice thing they noticed during the day (“Liam helped Sam when he fell on the playground”).



- Can your child do kind deeds for others “just because”? Start a habit in your house of secretly doing considerate things for each other. Your youngster might make his brother’s bed, or you could put a thoughtful note on your child’s breakfast plate.

RESPONSIBILITY

- Let your youngster make coupons for jobs like dusting your furniture or watering your neighbors’ plants when they go away. She can give the coupons as gifts to friends and family members. When they cash in the coupon, she is responsible for doing the job she promised.
- Give your child a pretend job as a person who helps others, such as a veterinarian, doctor, or crossing guard. Play along as she acts out the job and describes her responsibilities (“It’s my responsibility to keep you safe while you cross the street”).
- Have your youngster make a responsibility poster. Take photos of her doing responsible things, like replacing the cap on the toothpaste. She can glue the photos on poster board as a reminder of what responsibility looks like.



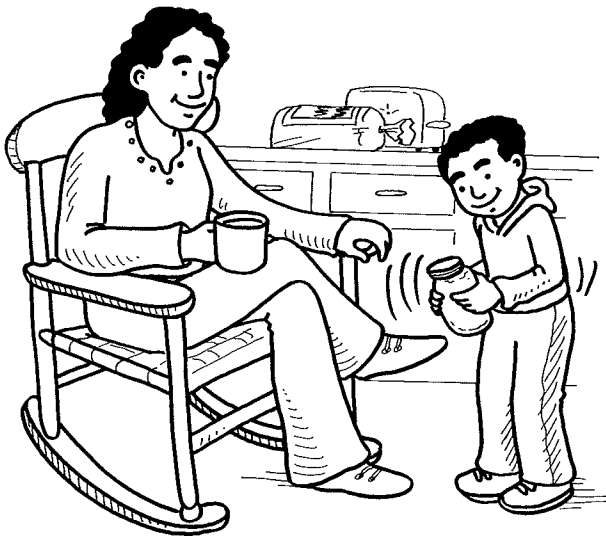
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HONESTY

- Take turns thinking of examples of honesty, such as returning money someone dropped or not bragging to a friend that you can ride a two-wheeler if you really can't. Your child will learn more ideas about being honest as you talk.
- Encourage honesty by making your youngster feel safe telling the truth. When she owns up to a mistake, like taking your keys to play with them, thank her for being honest. Together, discuss what she could do next time (ask to play with them).
- Teach your child to make honest compliments. If she's writing a thank-you note for a gift she doesn't like, for instance, help her think of something nice to say about it without lying ("This shirt has my favorite cartoon character on it").

PERSEVERANCE

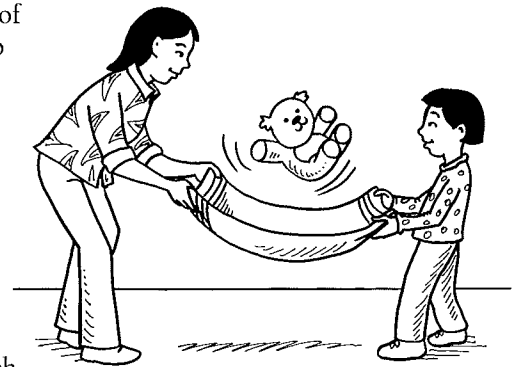
- Help your youngster practice bouncing back when things go wrong. Pretend to be frustrated about something, and together, think of ways to keep going. You could say, "I can't catch the ball!" And your child might add, "Let's keep practicing until you get the hang of it."



- Did you know that making butter can teach perseverance? Take turns shaking a container of cream until it forms a lump of butter—it will take a lot of shaking! Then, use the butter on toast. Your youngster will see the reward of staying with a job until it's done.
- When your child is learning to do something that's hard for him (say, read), cover a paper towel tube with plain paper. Each time he takes a step toward success, like recognizing a new word, let him add a sticker to his "stick to it" stick. Can he cover the whole tube with stickers?

COOPERATION

- This fun activity shows the power of cooperation. Grab one end of a towel while your youngster grabs the other. Place a small stuffed animal in the center. How many times can you toss the toy in the air and catch it without dropping it? You'll have to work together to keep the stuffed animal from falling.



- Suggest that your child and a playmate use teamwork to draw a picture. One can choose what to draw. Then, they can take turns adding to the picture. If they decide to draw a duck, for instance, your youngster might draw the body, and her friend could add the head.
- When you play with your child, take turns asking, "What should I do next?" Try to follow the other person's directions. Your youngster will practice the give-and-take that makes cooperation work. She might have you put her doll in a stroller, and then you could ask her to push it.

EMPATHY

- Here's a way for your child to practice recognizing others' emotions. Take turns making faces at each other. You might say, "Show me your surprised face." After he makes the face, he could ask you to do one ("Show me your sad face").



- Name something that people in your family feel differently about (say, bugs). Let each person describe how he feels. You'll help your youngster understand that people may have different feelings than he does. *Example:* "I like spiders, but they bother Mommy."
- What can your child do if someone is upset, angry, or afraid? Encourage him to consider responses to people's feelings. You might say, "Trevor looks unhappy. Maybe playing a game with you would cheer him up."