

The Fourth and Fifth Rs

Respect and Responsibility

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Parenting for Good Character

Dr. Helen LeGette, Character Education Consultant

Your child is playing in a Little League game and the parents are yelling obscenities at the umpire. Your daughter tells you that her best friend plans to have sex with her boyfriend. Your teenager is invited to a party at which you suspect alcohol will be served.



In moments such as these, parents have opportunities to share their beliefs about respect, compassion, premarital sex, substance abuse, and other issues. In his book *Between Parent and Teenager*, Haim Ginott emphasizes adults' responsibility in this regard. He says, "Our message to our children should be: 'We value integrity more than popularity. We put personal decency above success.'"

Ninety-year-old Oseola McCarty has a message which is applicable to all parents. Forced to drop out of school at age twelve, she earned meager wages as a laundress. Living a simple, frugal, and prayerful life, she accumulated a life savings of \$150,000 which she recently assigned to fund scholarships for needy students after her death. In her book, *Simple Wisdom for Rich Living*, Miss McCarty says, "I think the way we live matters, not just for now but for always. There is an eternal side to everything you do." Surely there is an eternal side to the work of parents. The way we live and the lessons we teach will have lasting effects on our youth, our communities, and our world. □

*Helen LeGette is the author of **Parents, Kids and Character: 21 Strategies to help Your Children Develop Good Character** (Character Development Group, Phone: 919/967-2110) She can be reached at (336) 584-9479.*

Twelve Tips for Parents

1. Model good character in the home.
2. Tell your children where you stand on important matters.
3. Show respect for your spouse, your children, and other family members, and insist that all family members use good manners.
4. Have family meals together (without television) as often as possible.
5. Assign home responsibilities to all family members.
6. Plan as many family activities as possible; involve your children in the planning.
7. Worship together as a family.
8. Set clear expectations for your children and hold them accountable for their actions.
9. Don't provide access to drugs or alcohol for your children. Model appropriate behavior regarding alcohol and drugs.
10. Don't cover for your children or make excuses for their inappropriate behavior.
11. Know where your children are, what they are doing, and with whom.
12. Learn to say no and mean it.

—from Helen LeGette's *Parents, Kids and Character*

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Middle School Character Education

Tom Lickona, Director, Center for the 4th and 5th Rs



How can we foster character development in the middle school years, when developmental changes lead kids to be so hard on themselves and others?

1. A caring teacher-student relationship. Good teachers establish a personal relationship with each student, especially those in trouble. There is no greater motivation for students than thinking that at least one adult at the school knows them well and cares about what happens to them. The 1997 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health found that two factors protected students against high-risk behaviors such as sexual activity, substance abuse, and violence: a feeling of closeness to parents and a feeling of closeness to someone at school.

2. High expectations. An important part of character education is to foster the virtue of diligence by setting high standards. When our older son Mark was a 6th-grader in Brookline, Massachusetts, his teacher Dave Pradell required two pieces of writing a week: a book report on Monday (the book could be fiction or non-fiction, of any length) and a piece of creative writing (such as a short story or poem) on Thursday. Mark's writing that year took off.

3. Character across the curriculum. All teachers can find character connections with their subject matter. A math teacher can discuss the importance of honesty on tests and use cooperative learning to promote the virtue of helpfulness. A science teacher can discuss the virtues (curiosity, perseverance, a commitment to truth) needed to be a good scientist and illustrate those qualities with examples of men and women of scientific achievement. History and literature are especially rich in moral meaning. Do we want our children to know what courage means? Then we should teach them about Joan of Arc and Harriet Tubman and the underground railroad.

4. A focus on friendship. Students are more motivated to develop good character when they can see the relevance of the virtues to their lives. Nothing is more important in the lives of middle schoolers than friendship. What virtues are needed to make and keep a friend? In Manlius, New York, Wellwood Middle School began its Virtue a Month program in September with **friendship**. Students read and discussed literature selections on friendship from William Bennett's *Book of Vir-*

tues for Young People and were challenged to reach out to students new to the school. Assemblies, posters, and quotes on friendship amplified the theme.

5. An effective advisory program. A strong middle school advisory system provides both adult mentoring and positive peer relationships. At Shoreham-Wading River Middle School in Shoreham, New York, advisors meet with their advisory groups twice a day: for 12 minutes in the morning and for 15 minutes during lunch. The group discusses school issues, shares what's been happening in the lives of its members, plans group activities, and discusses current events. Students testify that their advisory group was the single most important aspect of their middle school experience. Advisors meet formally with parents three times a year and other times as needed and keep parents updated on their child's academic progress and school problems. Following implementation of this advisory system, discipline problems declined, parent involvement increased, and staff morale went up.

6. Storytelling. Stories enlighten and inspire; they attract the listener to goodness. Tim Kent, a 6th-grade teacher in Clovis, California tells 1-minute stories at various times of the day. Taken from *Reader's Digest*, books, and his own life experiences, his stories teach lessons about love, honesty, courage, and perseverance. "Kids remember stories," he says, "and they don't even know they're being taught a moral lesson."

7. Moral discipline. The challenge of discipline is to help students internalize rules. Pat Grant, a 7th-grade math teacher in Dryden, New York, says she prevents a lot of discipline problems by being well-organized. "I post my daily plans for the full week so my students can see what I want to accomplish. The first day they come in we discuss rules. The students derive the rules themselves. I write them on the board, and they copy them down in their notebooks. This way, they take ownership." If a student breaks a rule, she gives a non-verbal signal or says in a friendly tone, "Dan, do we have to go over the rules again?" That usually gains compliance. But if a student continues to disrupt, she asks him to meet after school to discuss the problem. "Together, we decide on a solution that is fair. If the student continues to misbehave after our agreement, I send a

letter home to the parents explaining the problem and asking for their help in solving it.”

8. The class meeting. The class meeting enables students to share responsibility for making the classroom the best it can be. Many middle school teachers hold their class meeting during the last 15 minutes of the week and use it to discuss issues such as tardiness, homework, or how to do better on the next test. Some teachers have a Suggestion Box so that students can anonymously propose topics. In one 7th-grade class in Montreal, several girls put angry notes in the box about “fanny-grabbing” by the boys. When the teacher read aloud the girls’ complaints about this at the class meeting, the boys were surprised to learn how angry it made the girls feel. After the meeting, this offensive behavior stopped.

A 7th-grade math teacher held a class meeting to discuss the problem of people talking out of turn. He asked students to write down their suggestions for preventing this disruptive behavior and recruited five volunteers to stay after school, review the ideas, and come up with a proposal. Says the teacher: “The system adopted by the class was quite similar to one I’d been using, but when it was the students’ own plan, it worked much better.”

9. Setting character goals. Especially as students enter adolescence, we need to help them realize, “Building your character is a personal responsibility; no one can do it for you.” Goal-setting and self-assessment are an important part of this process. An 8th-grade English teacher in Chicago explains how she fosters this: “After we discuss the traits of the characters in a novel, I ask my students: (1) *What is a character trait you’re proud of?* (2) *What is a character trait you’re not so proud of and would like to correct? Make a plan for how you’ll try to change that.*”

10. Cooperative learning. Cooperative learning contributes to character in many ways. It teaches students the skills of cooperation and builds community in the classroom. In a Canadian 6th-grade classroom, the class was torn apart by racial conflict. The school psychologist recommended that the teacher set up structured cooperative learning groups. “Put together children who have trouble getting along,” he said. “Give them joint assignments and projects with roles for all members. Rotate responsibility for being the process observer (giving the group feedback on how well they are cooperating). Stick with the groups even if they don’t seem to be working in the beginning.” The teacher had students work together in 3’s or 4’s on different subjects for part of each day. “It took them two months

to really make this work,” she said, “but they finally got it together. What’s more, their test scores went up.”

11. A voice in the school. Two counselors at a St. Louis middle school established “The Breakfast Club.” They drew 20 students’ names from a hat and invited them to meet with them for 20 minutes the first thing on Thursday. Milk and homemade cookies were provided. Seated in a circle, students were each asked, “*What is one thing you like about our school? What is one thing that would make it better?*” Students’ comments were recorded, typed up, and distributed to all staff and the student body; many of the suggestions were later implemented. Before leaving the meeting, students signed their names on the Breakfast Club members list and drew 20 new names to be invited to the next week’s meeting. “Word quickly spread,” the counselors said, “and even tough kids were asking how you get to go to this Breakfast Club. It was a simple thing, but it created a different atmosphere in the school.”

12. Character-based sex education. Middle-schoolers need clear guidance, not a mixed message (such as, “*Don’t have sex—but here’s how to do it fairly safely*”) to guide them in this highly vulnerable area of their lives. The February, 1991 issue of *Pediatrics* reported that sexually active 12- to 16-year-old girls are six times more likely to attempt suicide than girls who are virgins. There are now many good resources (see Kristine Napier’s *The Power of Abstinence*) for teaching students the truth: Abstinence is the only medically safe, emotionally healthy, and morally responsible choice for unmarried teens.

Loving Well, a curriculum developed by Boston University, uses an anthology of short stories, poems, essays, and folk tales to help students reflect on romance, love, commitment, and marriage. In a federal evaluation, 92% of those students who had the *Loving Well* program were still sexually abstinent two years later, compared to 72% of the control group. Elayne Bennett’s *Best Friends* program, for grades 5-9, has had dramatic success in reducing sexual activity and pregnancy among inner-city girls. *Love and Life at the Movies* uses film classics such as “*Souder*,” “*High Noon*,” and “*It’s a Wonderful Life*” to inspire middle school students to strive for good character in all areas of their lives, including sexuality. □

See p. 6 for Middle School Resources.

Educating for Character at The Summit

Mary Brinkmeyer, Assistant Head

The Mission of The Summit Country Day School is to challenge every student, faculty, and staff member to share fully the gifts that have been given to them by God; to grow in grace and wisdom; to develop spiritually, academically, physically, socially, and artistically; and to become people of character who value and improve the world they inherit.

A school is far more than a building. We want our graduates to leave our campus with an intrinsic set of values and an ethical framework for life. Although we are a Catholic school and consider that identity central to our work, we think that many of our character education strategies are also applicable to public schools.

Fourteen strategies (see Box) define our comprehensive, pre-K-12 program. As a Catholic school we continually emphasize the spiritual development of our students. In addition, each year we focus on one or more of our Educating For Character strategies. *We believe that*

this approach of emphasizing just one or two things a year has been extremely helpful to us as a staff in making progress on a comprehensive program.

During our first year of implementation, 1995-96, we focused on the strategy, **The Teacher As A Role Model**. We felt that it was very important to start with ourselves. Mary Warnock has observed, "For the young to become moral, they must be in the presence of people who take morality seriously." We defined "teacher" as "everyone at school" who supports our students throughout their education. We identified practices of good role models—including patience under stress—and, indeed, did practice them. Within months you could witness the students imitating our example.

During our second year, we concentrated on **Student Work Ethic: Doing One's Personal Best**. All four divisions of our school agreed to allow students more time for in-depth study and more opportunities to reflect on their work. During this year we also focused on **Diversity: Our Unifying Heritage**. We examined how we integrate cultural studies into all curricular areas.

During our third year, we began work on our **Drug and Alcohol Prevention Program**. We provided a series of workshops for all students, parents, faculty, and staff and are initiating a peer counseling education program. We also considered how best to implement the **Cooperative Learning** strategy and brought in a national expert in the field to begin work with the faculty.

Are we successful? A Summit parent comments: "I have seen students develop a responsibility and sensitivity to others. They volunteer to give up their Saturdays for Christian Service. They clamor for opportunities to be on the leadership team to plan volunteer activities. They want to be a part of the world beyond their school." □

Mary Brinkmeyer coordinates the character education program at The Summit Country Day School (2161 Grandin Rd., Cincinnati, OH 45208; Phone 513/871-4700).

The Summit's Character-Building Strategies

1. *Spiritual Development*
2. *The Teacher As a Role Model*
3. *Work Ethic: Achieving One's Personal Best*
4. *Teaching Values Through the Curriculum*
5. *Code of Conduct*
6. *Student Leadership*
7. *Diversity: Our Unifying Heritage*
8. *Christian Service*
9. *Cooperative Learning*
10. *Computer Ethics*
11. *Sportsmanship*
12. *Drug and Alcohol Prevention*
13. *Human Sexuality*
14. *Parent/School Alliance*

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Teaching Kids About the Value of Respect

Ron Seigel, Director, Greater Detroit Respect Month Committee

Long ago in my school days, I overheard a teenage girl standing up to her peer group—something never easy to do. She was refusing to go out with her friends. On such occasions, this group often mocked and ridiculed alcoholics on the street. She did not want to be a part of that or even be present when it occurred.

This incident emphasized in my young mind the importance of respect—respect for others as well as respect for values and ideals. The scornful reaction this girl received from her friends made me realize that those who show respect must often face disrespect—that respect was becoming unfashionable while rudeness and callousness were actually admired.

Perhaps this is why, years later, I was impressed by a letter written to a local newspaper columnist by Virginia Evans, an African-American mother. Ms. Evans suggested that one reason for the growth in youthful destructiveness—from vandalism to teenage killings—was the failure of young people to learn respect for others. She suggested that civic leaders designate a special time each year when adults could talk to teens about the value of respect.

Those who show respect must often face disrespect.

Acting on that idea, a committee of civic organizations and business people joined forces with the Greater Detroit chapter of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and persuaded the governor of Michigan and the mayor of Detroit to designate October as "Respect Month."

Our committee began sending schools suggestions for teaching respect. We have in turn received many ideas from teachers. Librarian Viola Ndenga noted that most great children's stories inherently deal with respect, but the storyteller must bring this out. For instance, many characters in fairy tales have faced crushing disrespect. Many have to find a strength within that allows them to overcome the prejudice of others. Sometimes fairy tale heroes and heroines are ridiculed for showing respect to others who are scorned and despised (like the poor). In-

triguingly, it is the people they help and don't brush aside, who often turn out to be the ones who assist them in their efforts and enable them to triumph.

Stevie Dorfman, a West Bloomfield teacher, says reading youngsters stories from other cultures can help them learn respect for these cultures. She suggests the Native American story of *Hiawatha* illustrated by Susan Jeffers and the Jewish story of *The Golem* by Beverly Brodsky McDermott. I recommend *Afro-American Folk Tales, Stories from Black Tradition in the New World* (Roger D. Abrahams, Editor), appropriate for students 6th-grade and older.

For teens, Ms. Dorfman suggests a book of short stories by Chris Crutcher called *Athletic Shorts*. She says teens also respond to movies about prejudice, such as "Gentlemen's Agreement," "School Ties," "The Wave," and "Ghosts of Mississippi."

Michigan Senator Carl Levin has introduced a resolution in the U.S. Senate to make "Respect Month" a national occasion and to get October 30th proclaimed "Respect Your Neighborhood Day," a time for people of all ages to show respect for their communities by performing concrete acts of service. This day has been proclaimed annually in Michigan for nearly 10 years. The Senate resolution needs at least 30 co-sponsors to be considered. We hope you will write your own senators urging them to co-sponsor it.

After the Littleton massacre, the country has become tragically aware that there is a link between disrespect among peers and school violence. Giving adults with influence over young people an occasion to talk with them about respect may help change the psychological climate in schools and prevent some acts of violence. □

Ron Seigel is a free-lance columnist. For a free packet on the Respect Month program, send a self-addressed envelope to the Respect Month Committee, P.O. Box 03015, Detroit, Michigan 48203.

MIDDLE SCHOOL RESOURCES

1999 National Schools of Character: Best Practices & New Perspectives. Washington, DC: Character Education Partnership (800/988-8081), 1999.

The Art of Loving Well (anthology of literature). Boston University: The Loving Well Project (617/353-4088), 1993.

Beedy, Jeffrey. **Sports Plus: Developing Youth Sports Programs that Teach Positive Values.** Covington, GA: Project Adventure, Inc. (770/784-9310), 1997.

Bennett, William. **The Book of Virtues for Young People.** Parsippany, NJ: Silver Burdett Press, 1996.

Best Friends. Washington, DC: Best Friends Foundation (202/822-9266), 1995.

Character Building Site. www.usoe.k12.ut.us/curr/char_ed/chbldr/update.html (Stories that build character.)

Dotson, Anne and Karen Dotson. **Teaching Character: Teacher's Idea Book for Middle School Grades.** Chapel Hill, NC: Character Development Group (919/967-2110), 1997.

Foster, Maryann. **Talk-Time: A Method for Teaching Values in the Classroom.** Burlingame, CA: California Educational Publications, 1993.

The Giraffe Project (360/221-7989 or www.giraffe.org/giraffe/). Langley, WA. (Stories about everyday heroes)

Kilpatrick, William and Gregory and Suzanne Wolfe. **Books That Build Character.** New York: Touchstone, 1994. (Excellent annotated bibliography)

Lickona, Thomas. **Educating for Character.** Bantam, 1991.

Lockwood, Alan and David Harris. **Reasoning with Democratic Values: Vols. 1 and 2.** New York: Teachers College Press, 1985. (Moral dilemmas from American history)

Love and Life at the Movies: Our Power to Love. Front Royal, VA: Educational Guidance Institute (540/635-4420), 1998.

Napier, Kristine. **The Power of Abstinence.** New York: Avon, 1996.

Reasonable Reasons to Wait. Chantilly, VA: Teen Choice (703/263-1102), 1991.

Sadlow, Sarah. **Advisor/Advisee Character Education: Lessons for Teachers and Counselors.** Chapel Hill, NC: Character Development Group, 1998.

Sunburst Videos, **Respect and Responsibility Series.** (800/431-1934).

Urban, Hal. **Life's Greatest Lessons.** (790 Barbour Dr., Redwood City, CA 94062-3014; Phone: 414/366-2882), 1992. (A great book that can be read by anyone 12 and up.)

Wood, Chip. **The Responsive Classroom in the Middle School.** Northeast Foundation for Children (800/360-6332), 1997.

Summer Conferences in Character Education

FOUR-DAY INSTITUTE \$350 Early bird fee

June 26-29, 2000 (ends 1:15 pm, Thurs.)

Featured speakers include:

- □ Tom Lickona, "The Comprehensive Approach"
- □ Phil Vincent, "School-Community Partnership"
- □ Deb Brown, "Character: A Call to Excellence"
- □ Bill Parsons, "Schoolwide Strategies"
- □ Hal Urban, "Creating a Caring Classroom"
- □ Clifton Taulbert, "The 8 Habits of the Heart"
- □ Matt Davidson, "Character Ed. Assessment"
- □ Patsy Boone, "Character Ed.: Heart and Soul"

1-DAY CONFERENCE OPTION \$125 Early bird

Tuesday, June 27, 8:30 am - 4:45 pm

Eve., 7:30-9:00 pm, "Sex, Love, and Character"

Workshops include:

- □ Schoolwide Programs by 3 of the 1999 National Schools of Character
- □ Teaching the Character Message in the Classroom
- □ Building Character Through Literature
- How to Lead a Moral Discussion
- □ Character Education Assessment
- □ Emotional Literacy
- □ Character Education in the H. S. Classroom
- □ Learning Standards and Character Education
- □ and more

HIGH SCHOOL CONFERENCE \$125 Early bird

Tuesday, June 27, 9:00 am - 4:00 pm

Eve., 7:30 - 9 pm, "Sex, Love, and Character"

Featured speakers:

- Hal Urban, "Building Character in Your Classroom: The Daily Four"
- □ Bill Parsons, "Developing a High School Character Education Program"

See registration flier for full details, or contact Center: Phone: 607/753-2455; or e-mail: c4n5rs@cortland.edu.