

What Is a Comprehensive Approach to Character Education?

1. A comprehensive approach to character education defines character comprehensively to include its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Good character consists of moral habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action.
2. It asserts that these moral habits, or virtues, are acquired through practice. This process is captured by James Stenson's statement, "Children develop character by what they see, what they hear, and what they are repeatedly led to do."
3. It seeks to provide students with repeated, real-life experiences that develop all three parts of character.
4. It provides these [character-building experiences](#) through all phases of school life, including the formal as well as the informal ("hidden") curriculum. Schools maximize their moral influence when they use all parts of school life as deliberate opportunities for character development.
5. It asserts that there is no such thing as value-free education. A school teaches values in everything it does—including the way teachers and other adults treat students, the way the principal treats teachers, the way the school treats parents, and the way students are allowed to treat each other. ("One of the most powerful forms of moral education is the treatment we receive"—Peter McPhail.)
6. It is proactive—creating opportunities for teaching values and character—as well as responsive to opportunities (teachable moral moments) that spontaneously arise. Character education does not wait for something to go wrong before teaching what is right.
7. [A school committed to a comprehensive approach to character:](#)
 1. Publicly stands for core ethical values
 2. Defines these values in terms of observable behavior
 3. Models these values at every opportunity
 4. Celebrates their occurrence in and outside of school
 5. Studies them and teaches their application to everyday life, including all parts of the school environment (e.g., classrooms, corridors, cafeteria, playing field, school bus)
 6. Holds all school members—adults and students alike—accountable to standards of conduct consistent with the school's professed core values.