



Personal Development

Building Character



OBJECTIVES

- Provide learning exercises and activities that build character.
- Develop skills in listening, decision making, and citizenship.
- Allow children to understand the importance of respecting others.
- Provide understanding that everybody is different and that it is natural to make mistakes.
- Identify people children can trust.
- Introduce responsibility.
- Develop social skills and facilitate cooperation by having children work in groups.
- Enhance self-esteem.

GROUP SIZE: 6–8 children per adult volunteer

TIME FRAME

This lesson is designed for a group meeting between 30 and 60 minutes. Each activity will take about 5–15 minutes to complete.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this curriculum piece is to strengthen the character of children through group activities and interaction. Building character is essential in increasing self-esteem of young children. How children define and view themselves begins early in life. Children ages 5–8 are sensitive about how others view them and consequently how they view themselves. These activities will help children to develop a positive self-awareness for building character.

LIFE SKILL AREAS

- There will be opportunities for developing learning skills through hands-on experiments.
- Social interaction will be promoted by children working together.
- Development of fine-motor skills will be emphasized by the use of scissors and markers.

IDEAS FOR VOLUNTEERS

- Choose one or two of the following activities from each section.
- Bring in adults or older children to talk to the group about their future, how they respect others, why it's important to be polite, honest, and set goals.
- For additional curriculum on character building, contact ACES for a series of curricula titled, *Character Counts*.



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GETTING STARTED

ACTIVITY *I'm a Good Listener*

Materials: none

This activity will help introduce listening skills and the importance of listening to one another. Begin by using rhymes, games, and/or songs to warm up the children to listening to adults or other children. Encourage active listening through short rhymes or songs that the children are not familiar with so that they have to listen to learn. Begin with a game of "Simon Says" or the game of "Telephone" to encourage children to use both ears and brain to listen. These rhymes, games, and songs will show the children the importance of paying attention and listening to one another.

Application Get some feedback about listening skills and its importance by asking the children the following questions:

- Why do we need to listen to one another?
- What could happen if we are not good listeners?
- Are you a good listener? Why?
- What makes you a good listener?

Digging Deeper

ACTIVITY *R-E-S-P-E-C-T*

Materials: construction paper, two banners with the names "RESPECTFUL" and "DISRESPECTFUL," and a list of respectful and disrespectful statements

Divide the meeting room into two sections, "RESPECTFUL" and "DISRESPECTFUL," and label for the children to see. Take the respectful and disrespectful lists provided below and others that you add and write them separately on strips of construction paper. Make each statement seem positive, making no reference to whether it is respectful or disrespectful. Give each child a strip of paper and let him/her decide whether it is either respectful or disrespectful by having him/her stand on that side of the room. Go around the room to each child and read aloud his/her statement and discuss as a group if he/she is on the correct side of the room. Make

this a great learning experience for the children by elaborating on each statement, asking questions, and/or getting feedback or reactions.

RESPECTFUL

- * Be nice to everyone
- * Be polite to others
- * Let people be themselves
- * Accept individual differences
- * Be honest
- * Help others whenever you can
- * Honor the rules
- * Do not bully others
- * Do not curse

DISRESPECTFUL

- * Insult others
- * Hurt others
- * Mistreat or be mean to others
- * Make unkind comments about people
- * Take advantage of other people
- * Always get what you want
- * Cheat on a test
- * Lie to parents or friends
- * Make fun of people

Application A portion of character building of young children deals with showing respect. This character building activity will either introduce or reinforce the concepts children should hold about respecting others. Respect can be described very simply to children by asking the following question:

How do you want people to treat you? The answer is probably how others want to be treated. This is showing respect.

Children need to show respect not only to people, but to property, rules, differences in opinions and abilities, and to the environment.

ACTIVITY *Everybody Makes Mistakes*

Materials: none

Ask the children what mistakes they made yesterday or last week. If they think hard enough, they can think of quite a few. Were these mistakes fixable? How? What mistakes did they learn from? Have the children share their experiences.



Application Everybody makes mistakes, even adults. People make mistakes everyday, but that’s okay. Many mistakes that we make can be fixed. For example, when you get in trouble with your parents for not sharing with your little brother or sister, even though that was a mistake, it can be fixed by apologizing and sharing with them next time. Other mistakes cannot be readily fixed, but we can learn from them.

ACTIVITY *Everybody’s Different*

Materials: none

Discuss with the children that everybody in this world is different in some way. Everybody is unique. People like, wear, and eat different things, and even watch different shows on television.

Explain that it is good that people like different things. Just think about a world where everybody liked the same thing. Would that be a boring place to live?

Application Bring out the differences among the children. Go around the room and have them address their likes and their differences. It could include differences in their appearances, tastes, hobbies, or recreational activities. Maybe have older children list them on paper. The overall learning objective is that everyone is different and we can learn from each other because of our differences.

Looking Within

ACTIVITY *The People I Can Trust*

Materials: a long sheet of crepe paper or poster board, crayons, and markers

Have the children create a mural on crepe paper or on poster board. Allow the children to draw pictures of those people who they can trust in the community (police officers, fire fighters, ministers). Brainstorm as a group and offer the children suggestions.

Application Good people are people you can trust. They tell the truth, help you whenever they can, and never do anything to hurt you or do

anything bad. There are many people around the community that you can trust.

Ask the children the following questions:

- Who do you trust?
- Why do you trust them?
- What makes you want to trust them?

ACTIVITY *Making Decisions*

Materials: none

Walk the group through a scenario of a typical day for one of the children.

From deciding what to wear in the morning to whether they want ketchup or mustard on their sandwich at dinner, have the children think about all the decisions they make in a day.

Discuss as a group some of the possible decisions that could come up. Have the children list them on paper. Stress the importance of using your brain to help make good decisions.

Application Good decision making is very important in life. Many decisions can be the difference between right and wrong. Most often we need to make decisions in split seconds, but it is important that we take time to think out the options. Just think about all the decisions you make during one day. We make hundreds of decisions each day without even realizing it.

Reaching Conclusions

ACTIVITY *Good People Are Good Citizens*

Materials: none

People of good character are good citizens. They should be kind and think about other people.

Good citizens are committed to the welfare of their neighborhood, state, country, and planet.

Application Brainstorm with the children to find out what they could do to be good citizens in their town, state, or country. What kinds of activities would benefit their community and its people.



ACTIVITY *Responsibility*

Materials: paper and pencils

Have the children compile a list of “Things I Can Do Myself.” Have them list individually those things that they do for themselves at home. Provide the children with paper and the heading so that they may list what they do for themselves. Encourage them to write down everything. Adults and parents will need to help younger children list the things that they do to be responsible. Children can be responsible too.

Application A person has good character when he/she takes responsibility. Responsibility means doing your part in anything you are supposed to do. You can be responsible by doing the things that you are capable of doing and working your hardest at it. Cleaning up your own messes, helping people, saying good things, and thinking before you speak or do are other ways you can be responsible. It all boils down to doing your part.

Going Beyond

ACTIVITY *What I Want to Be When I Grow Up*

Materials: construction paper, crayons, and markers

- Have the children gather around the volunteer so that all children can see each other. Ask them to think about the following questions:
- What do you want to be when you grow up?
- What do you want to do for a living someday?
- Why do you want to do this?

Have each individual child tell the others what he/she wants to be and why. Depending on the number of children present, it may be wise to divide them into smaller groups with adults leading each group. Give each child the opportunity to express their beliefs and why they are interested in this career.

Application After the children have finished sharing what they want to be when they grow up, have them express their occupation on paper. Provide construction paper, crayons, and markers so the children can create pictures of what they want to be when they grow up. Some of the smaller children may need help in getting their drawings started. Encourage creativity.

Reading Adventures

This listing of reading materials can be used as background information, for sharing before the group activity to set the stage for learning, or for sharing afterwards to reinforce the activity.

Manners, by Alik

Don't Do That!, by Barry Louis Polisar

Psychology For Kids, by Jonni Kincher

Chicken Soup For The Kids Soul, by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Patty Hansen, and Irene Dunlap

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