



Will Your Kids Be Of “Good Character”?

At some point most parents think about the kind of person their child will grow up to be. This is different from what they may do for a living. This involves issues of integrity, honesty and caring for others. Will your child grow up to be of good character?

The answer to the question can be determined by examining parental behaviour from very early on. As parents nurture their children and act in their presence, they provide powerful lessons that will set the tone for what kind of adults their children will turn out to be.

Two key ingredients can go a long way to developing your child to be of good character:

1. Helping them to take responsibility for their actions;
2. Helping them to participate in doing good deeds.

When two-year-old Jacob spills his juice, the parent has several choices in how to respond. Jacob can be scolded; ignored; helped to clean up the mess or the parent can clean it up alone. Each response carries its own message to Jacob. Scolding is upsetting in itself and teaches Jacob to avoid getting caught. Ignoring suggests the spilled juice doesn't matter and the behaviour can be repeated. The parent cleaning up for Jacob suggests Jacob has no responsibility what-so-ever for his actions and thus he can do as he pleases. Finally, the parent engaging Jacob in the cleaning process without scolding suggests there is a natural consequence to behaviour and he must assume some responsibility for restoring or repairing the situation.

When Jacob is four-years-of-age and he aggressively takes a toy from another child, again the parent has choices in how to respond. However, if the parent explains to Jacob how he hurt the other child's feelings, has him apologize, return the toy and then negotiate sharing, Jacob learns the impact of his behaviour on others, restitution and then negotiation.

Based upon these experiences, when six-year-old Jacob breaks a window playing ball, you have increased the likelihood that Jacob will return to you on his own to report the accident and seek your help to clean the mess and correct the situation. He will have learned that you are caring, reasonable and responsible and he will be following the behaviour you modeled and taught him. He will act less with a concern of punishment and fear and more with a concern for caring and responsibility.

To further their children's good character, parents are advised to encourage their children to join them in practicing “good deeds”. A good deed is when someone does something for someone else without being asked or without expecting anything in return. We teach children about good deeds by their observing our good deeds. We also teach about good deeds when we ask our children to help out, with only providing our thanks in return. Our thanks can of course include expressions of affection!

Through good deeds, children learn that the world doesn't just revolve around them, but includes other who may benefit from our help. At first the reward may come from our praise, but as the child ages, they learn to derive satisfaction themselves from helping others. Children can help clear the table, help the neighbour with the yard, share a toy and join us when we do our volunteer work.

Being of good character doesn't need to happen by chance. Parental behaviour that encourages children to take responsibility for their actions, correct situations and practice good deeds can go a long way to assuring kids grow up to be of good character.

Gary Direnfeld, MSW, RSW
(905) 628-4847

gary@yoursocialworker.com
www.yoursocialworker.com

Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.