

## Teaching Values

What kind of a person do you want your child to grow up to be? Honest? Kind? Curious? Generous? Persistent?

Here is a list of some values. Check those you want your child to have? Then circle the top five values that are most important to you.

<input type="checkbox"/> Ambitious	<input type="checkbox"/> Honest
<input type="checkbox"/> Capable	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent
<input type="checkbox"/> Cheerful	<input type="checkbox"/> Kind
<input type="checkbox"/> Clean	<input type="checkbox"/> Loyal
<input type="checkbox"/> Courageous	<input type="checkbox"/> Loving
<input type="checkbox"/> Creative	<input type="checkbox"/> Obedient
<input type="checkbox"/> Curious	<input type="checkbox"/> Persistent
<input type="checkbox"/> Forgiving	<input type="checkbox"/> Polite
<input type="checkbox"/> Generous	<input type="checkbox"/> Responsible
<input type="checkbox"/> Helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Thoughtful
<input type="checkbox"/> Other - list your own _____	

The way you answer that question shows your values. Values are the ideas you have about what is important and what is not; what is good and what is bad; what is right and what is wrong.

You may never have stopped to think about your values. Nevertheless, they are there, standing behind your beliefs, attitudes, interests, and goals. Values give meaning and direction to every part of your life, especially how you parent your children. Values are at the core of our being.

Your children will end up with many of the same values as yours.

- ▶ Are you proud to pass these values onto your children?
- ▶ Do you tell your children what you believe and what you stand for?
- ▶ Do you explain why you make certain decisions and choices?
- ▶ Are your children getting the same messages from both you and the other parent?
- ▶ Do you practice what you preach?

Your values have a great effect on your children. But your children also pick up other ideas about values from everything and everyone around them. Take an active role in helping your child learn what's important.

### Building a Value System

Experiences and relationships in the early years form a foundation for the system of values a person has in later years. A warm, accepting love on the part of parents helps nurture desirable attitudes and feelings. Children learn values in their growing up years. However, a complete value system is not developed until late adolescence. Children learn about values in small doses, day in and day out.

### How You Can Teach Values

**Modeling.** Children have a hard time sorting out which parental behaviors to copy and which to disregard. A child usually learns more from the attitudes and actions of his parents than from verbal teaching. Albert Schweitzer said that adults teach children in three important ways: "The first is by example. The second is by example. The third is by example."

**Story problems.** It's hard to teach values without sounding preachy, but if you share real events from your childhood, kids will listen and perhaps remember. Tell a

story about how you “learned a lesson” when you were young that would help your child better understand between right and wrong. You can also use books. Ask your preschooler questions that address issues of rules, justice (right and wrong), or consequences for behavior.

**Discuss.** Explain your reasons for what you say and how you act. Listen to your child’s view. Talking together helps each of us understand each other better.

Some parents don’t like having to explain themselves to their children. When they set a rule, they don’t want to have to explain why. But these explanations are really important. Children actually follow rules better if you explain why you have the rule.

When you give an explanation, you are showing your child how you use your values to make decisions. “I don’t want you playing in back of the shed. Why? Because there is broken glass back there that could cut you.” Your child sees how you are not just being mean when you limit where they may play; rather, you are applying the value of “safety” to making a decision. The importance of this is that it displays your values for your children to see, and it teaches children how to make decisions based on values. This is crucial, because no parent could possibly make a rule for every situation a child will face, so you must teach your children how to use their own judgment, hopefully with values that you share.

### **The Practical Side of Transferring Your Values**

Responsibility is one of the values many parents want for their children. Responsibility is taking on an obligation, making choices because of the obligation, and living with the consequences. You can help your preschooler begin to gain a sense of responsibility within the home and family. For example, children usually want bicycles. Ownership carries with it responsibility--storing out of the rain, parking off the walk, riding on the right side of the road. Many children love animals and want a pet. Caring for a pet teaches responsibility--watering, feeding, grooming.

The family household does not just run itself. There are many activities that can be done. Children can learn cooperation by participating in some way--folding clothes, setting the table, raking leaves. Some families have a weekly activity calendar. Family members have activities for which they are responsible. Activities are alternated.

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### **Values Differ**

Sometimes parents may differ on what they think is important. One father said his wife believed that children should go to bed every night at the same time. She felt it built discipline and helps children go to sleep. The father felt that was fine for preschoolers, but that when children became school-aged, they need to learn to go to bed when they feel tired. The parents discussed the situation and compromised by establishing regular bedtimes for school nights and open bedtimes on vacations and non-school nights.

Values between families also differ. Willie is playing next door with his friend Derek. In Willie’s family the children get paid for making their beds, picking up clothes and toys, emptying trash, etc. So when Derek’s dad said, “Come help me move this table into the garage,” Willie asked, “How much will you pay us?” Derek’s dad said, “In our house we don’t get paid for helping each other. Come on, give me a hand with this table.”

You are Willie’s mother. He tells you what happened. How do you answer? What values are you expressing?

You are Derek’s mother. Derek says, “Willie gets paid for helping.” How do you respond? What values are you expressing?

### **Discussion Starters**

To initiate a discussion in your family, ask:

- ▶ If you could spend one day doing anything you wanted, what would you do?
- ▶ If you had \$100, how would you spend it?
- ▶ What is one thing you would like to do to help the world?

Share your responses with your family, including your preschooler in the discussion. Help your child build values and strengthen your own. The family values you share will stay with your child as he/she grows and develops.

#### **Sources:**

“Teaching Children Values.” Oregon State University Ext. Serv. 1993.  
Elizabeth Crary. Pick Up Your Socks and Other Skills Growing Children Need. 1996.

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