

# CHARACTER COUNTS!<sup>SM</sup> – *Respect*

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It makes sense that our communities benefit when people understand the importance of being involved and caring citizens and “doing the right thing.”

CHARACTER COUNTS! is a national grass-roots initiative based on voluntary citizen action. It has no ideological or political agenda other than strengthening the moral fiber of the next generation by promoting ethical values.

An effective character education program encourages individuals to do the right thing by incorporating the following core ethical values in their daily lives:

- Trustworthiness
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Fairness
- Caring
- Citizenship

These six pillars describe how a person of character thinks and behaves.

## Respect

The essence of respect is to show solemn regard for the worth of people including yourself. There are two aspects of respect:

- What you think of others
- How you treat others

## Are you a respectful person?

Answer true or false to the following statements.

- I treat other people the way I want to be treated.
- I am considerate of other people.
- I treat people with civility, courtesy, and dignity.
- I accept personal differences.
- I work to solve problems without violence.
- I never intentionally ridicule, embarrass, or hurt other people.

The ethical duty is to treat everyone with respect, not to respect everyone in the sense that we hold all people in high esteem or admire them. Treating people with respect means letting them know that their safety and happiness matter and that they are important and worthy simply because they are fellow human beings.



### *The seven basic rules helping us understand respect are:*

- 1. Honor the individual worth and dignity of others.**  
People are not things. All of us have a basic right to be treated with dignity. Value and honor all people for themselves, not for what they can do for you or to you. No person should be used simply as an instrument of another's needs. Manipulating, mistreating, abusing, exploiting, or taking advantage of others is disrespectful.
- 2. Be courteous and civil.**  
Using good manners and being courteous and civil are basic rules of respect. The simple ritual of saying “please,” “thank you,” and “excuse me” acknowledges the importance of others entitled to respect.
- 3. Honor reasonable social standards and customs.**  
Judge others on their character, abilities, and conduct and not on such matters as race, religion, gender, where they live, how they dress, or the amount of money they have. Our behavior toward others should be based on accepted notions of taste, propriety, and decency. We honor traditions, customs, and beliefs important to others.

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**Seven basic rules helping us understand respect** (continued)

**4. Live by the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.**

- Confucius: *What you do not want done to yourself, do not do unto others.*

*“The Golden Rule, in one version or another, has a prominent place in all major religions. The nearly universal acceptance of the Golden Rule by persons of considerable intelligence and divergent outlooks provides evidence that it is a fundamental ethical truth.”*

– Marcus Singer

- Aristotle: *We should behave to others as we wish others to behave to us.*
- Judaism: *What you dislike for yourself, do not do to anyone.*
- Hinduism: *Do nothing to thy neighbor which thou wouldst not have him do to thee thereafter.*
- Islam: *No one of you is a believer unless he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.*
- Buddhism: *Hurt not others with that which pains thyself.*
- Christianity: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

The Golden Rule also gives us a framework to understand and deal with issues of privacy. The duty of respect requires us to honor a desire for privacy. The claim to privacy is a matter of dignity, but it is not an absolute “right.” There are times when it is morally justified and legally proper for parents, teachers, and police to invade privacy to advance a greater good.

**5. Accept differences and judge on character and ability.**

People should be judged on their abilities and their character rather than their race, religion, gender, or political ideology. Intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination are disrespectful attitudes. Be tolerant, respectful, and accepting of those who are different from you. Listen to others and try to understand their points of view.

**6. Respect the autonomy of others.**

The duty of respect requires us to honor the inherent right of all people to autonomy. It is disrespectful to withhold information people need and want for making informed decisions about their own lives. All people, including maturing children, should have a say in decisions that affect them. We show respect and teach responsibility by providing young people with the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect them.

**7. Avoiding actual or threatened violence.**

It is disrespectful to abuse, insult, demean, or physically harm any person. Resolve disagreements, respond to insults, and deal with anger peacefully and without violence.

*“We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another.”*

– Jonathan Swift

Character education works best when it is pervasive and when ethical values are consistently taught, enforced, advocated, and modeled throughout the schools and all facets of our communities.

*“The true measure of an individual is how he treats a person who can do him absolutely no good.”*

– Ann Landers

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Looking for Extension-produced character education materials? Check the Web ([www.reeusda.gov/4h/curricul/character-edu.htm](http://www.reeusda.gov/4h/curricul/character-edu.htm)).

CHARACTER COUNTS! and the Six Pillars of Character are service marks of the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics ([www.charactercounts.org](http://www.charactercounts.org)).