

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

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## Educational Objectives

- To increase the awareness that the current and future well-being of our society requires an involved, caring citizenry having good moral character.
- To become familiar with Character Counts!
- To become familiar with the Six Pillars of Character<sup>SM</sup>.
- To understand the duties, rights, conduct, and responsibilities of a citizen.

## What Is CHARACTER COUNTS!?

CHARACTER COUNTS! is a national grassroots 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.

## Introduction to CHARACTER COUNTS!

In 1992, the Josephson Institute of Ethics hosted an invitation-only, three-day conclave of 30 of the nation's top experts in character education.

The result was the *Aspen Declaration*, a seminal character development document consisting of eight principles about the nature, content, and importance of character education and articulating a common vocabulary of six core ethical values defining character (called the Six Pillars of Character).

## Aspen Declaration

1. The next generation will be the stewards of our communities, nation, and planet in extraordinarily critical times.
2. The present and future well-being of our society requires an involved, caring citizenry with good moral character.
3. People do not automatically develop good moral character; therefore, conscientious efforts must be made to help young people develop the values and abilities necessary for moral decision-making and conduct.
4. Effective character education is based on core ethical values which form the foundation of democratic society, in particular, respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, justice and fairness, and civic virtue and citizenship.
5. These core ethical values transcend cultural, religious, and socioeconomic differences.
6. Character education is, first and foremost, an obligation of families; it is also an important obligation of faith communities, schools, youth and other human service organizations.
7. These obligations to develop character are best fulfilled when these groups work in concert.
8. The character and conduct of our youth reflect the character and conduct of society; therefore, every adult has the responsibility to teach and model the core ethical values, and every social institution has the responsibility to promote the development of good character.

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“*Citizenship . . . is not a spectator sport.*” –Anon.

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## The Six Pillars of Character . . .

The Six Pillars of Character resulted from a search for enduring moral truths that allow us to distinguish right from wrong and define the essence of ethics and good character.

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

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 character and ethical behavior in ways an individual can understand how a person of character thinks and behaves.

**Trustworthiness** means being honest; having integrity; not deceiving, cheating, or stealing; and being reliable and loyal.

**Respect** means following the Golden Rule; being tolerant of differences; using good manners; not using bad language; being considerate of the feelings of others; and dealing peacefully with anger, insults, and disagreements.

**Responsibility** means doing what you are supposed to do, persevering, always doing your best, using self-control, being self-disciplined, thinking before you act, and being accountable for your choices.

**Fairness** mean playing by the rules, taking turns and sharing, being open-minded, listening to others, not taking advantage of others, and not blaming others carelessly.

**Caring** means being kind, being compassionate, showing you care, expressing gratitude, forgiving others, and helping people in need.

**Citizenship** means doing your share to make your community better, cooperating, staying informed, voting, being a good neighbor, obeying the laws and rules, respecting authority, and protecting the environment.

Character education works best when it is pervasive and when ethical values are consistently taught, enforced, advocated, and modeled (T.E.A.M.) throughout the school and all facets of our communities.

### What CHARACTER COUNTS! Is NOT . . .

- A means to introduce religion into public education, although it is consistent with and in no way hostile to religious and spiritually based beliefs about right and wrong.
- Just a “feel-good” or “do-good” program stressing personal happiness and success. It stresses the need to discern right from wrong and the acceptance of a moral obligation to honor the Six Pillars of Character.

## What Can Be Done . . .

**Individuals:** Consciously incorporate the teaching and modeling of the Six Pillars of Character into everything you do, especially when children are involved.

**Social and Service Organizations:** Get all the organizations to which you belong to take an active role in supporting Character Counts! activities.

**Schools and Communities:** Be a leader in bringing Character Counts! to your school system and community. Organize school-based or community training.

### Citizenship

Being a good citizen means going beyond our own interests and demonstrating a concern for the needs of others. Good citizens recognize their obligations to make their homes, schools, neighborhoods, communities, and country the best they can be. Good citizens learn that they can make a difference when they follow rules, voice opinions, vote, and work and play cooperatively with one another. They stay informed, listen, do their part for community endeavors, respect authority, and volunteer.

**Being a good citizen means:**

- Fulfilling your civic duties
- Doing your share
- Playing by the rules
- Respecting authority and law
- Attempting to pursue civic virtues

**Civic duties include:**

- Playing by the rules, obeying the law, and paying all taxes.
- Participating in the democratic process by voting, serving on a jury, reporting crimes, and testifying as a witness.
- Doing one's share to protect the environment by conserving resources and minimizing waste and pollution.

**Doing your share:**

- Be a good citizen and a good neighbor.
- Care about and pursue the common good.
- Be a volunteer—help your school and community be better, cleaner, and safer.
- Protect the environment by conserving resources, reducing pollution, and cleaning up after yourself.
- Participate in making things better by voicing your opinion, voting, serving on committees, reporting wrongdoing, and paying taxes.

**Playing by the rules:**

- An ethical person plays by the rules as a matter of citizenship.
- A good citizen follows the rules even when it is disadvantageous to do so.
- By their nature, some rules are arbitrary (e.g., youth sports leagues that establish age standards); however, on the theory that the line has to be drawn somewhere, it is a reasonable standard and one that should and does apply to everyone.

**Respecting authority:**

- Play by the rules.
- Obey those who have been given authority.
- Observe just laws.
- Honor and respect principles of democracy.

**Civic virtues:**

- Running for office, accepting appointments to office, working for candidates or issues.
- Giving time and/or money to charitable and other social causes.
- Conducting oneself in a way that is desirable and praiseworthy but not morally mandated.

**Honoring and respecting our country and our flag:**

- Encourage and promote displaying of the American Flag.
- Stand with pride when reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to our flag.
- Study and learn about our country so that you will know and understand what makes America strong and why we need to protect that strength.
- Practice democratic principles in elections.

**Suggested Activity**

Let's talk about citizenship:

- Name someone who is/was a good citizen and explain why you think so.
- Talk about how good citizens demonstrate dependability.
- Discuss what each of us can do to promote good citizenship.

**Additional Activity Ideas**

1. Address community problems. List problems you might find in your neighborhood. Your list might include homelessness and hunger, drug abuse, gang violence, vandalism and graffiti, litter, theft, domestic violence, and child abuse.

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*“Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.”*

– John Fitzgerald Kennedy

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2. Discuss the following:

- What circumstances might lead someone to contribute to this problem?
- Do certain groups contribute to the problem? If so, why?
- What effect would this problem have on those who contributed to it?
- Who suffers most as a result of this problem?
- Does anyone suffer indirectly? If so, who?
- What will it take to solve the problem?
- How can concerned citizens contribute to the solution?
- Make a family plan to work on the problem.

3. Identify ethnic groups in your community and find out about them. Where is their country of origin? Find out about their clothing, food, recreation, agriculture, and technology. How do they celebrate special events?

4. Get acquainted with a family from a different ethnic background. Invite them to your home and share an activity or meal with them.

5. Attend an ethnic celebration in your community.

## Resources

[www.charactercounts.org](http://www.charactercounts.org)  
CHARACTER COUNTS!  
4640 Admiralty Way, #1001  
Marina del Rey, CA 90292-6610  
Phone: (310) 306-1868

*CHARACTER COUNTS! Character Development Seminars Notebook, On-Site Training Materials.*  
West Virginia Department of Education.  
November 27-29, 2001

*Operating Manual for Character Education Programs.*  
Compiled by Nancy Reed, Hamilton County School District, Tennessee, 2001

*CHARACTER COUNTS! for Families,* Greve, Vickers, Jha, LaDeane, & Stockall, Sandy, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Cooperative Extension

*CHARACTER COUNTS! for 4-H Clubs,* Nebraska 4-H Youth Development, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension

*Flag Etiquette,* Louisiana State University Agriculture Center, Research and Extension.

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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)).