

Teaching Your Child to Be Ethical

Every parent would love to draw an imaginary halo around their child's head. Especially if it came with the behavior to go with it. Unfortunately, there will come a time when your child will lie. Or cheat. He's only human. It's a parent's job to set up a system of values, and then enforce those values every day. According to Michael Josephson, father of five and Founder and President of the [Joseph & Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics](#) in Los Angeles, there are two central pieces to teaching a child about ethics. "One is that parents need to have a focused notion of what values are important to the family. Two is consistently enforcing those values by associating positive and negative consequences to your child's actions."



Josephson's Institute of Ethics outlines what they call the Six Pillars of Character.

- **Trustworthiness** - Be honest. Don't deceive, cheat or steal. Be reliable - do what you say you'll do. Be loyal.
- **Respect** - Treat others with respect. Be tolerant of differences. Use good manners, not bad language.
- **Responsibility** - Do what you are supposed to do. Use self-control. Be self-disciplined and accountable for your choices.
- **Fairness** - Play by the rules. Take turns and share. Be open-minded. Don't take advantage of others.
- **Caring** - Be kind. Be compassionate. Express gratitude. Forgive others. Help people in need.
- **Citizenship** - Do your share. Stay informed; vote. Be a good neighbor. Obey laws and rules. Respect authority. Protect the environment.

As important as it is to define values for your family, even more important, says Josephson, is how you enforce them with your child. His advice to parents:

- Teach your children that character counts - that their success and happiness will depend on who they are inside, not what they have or how they look.
- Enforce your values by rewarding good behavior (usually, praise is enough) and discouraging all instances of bad behavior by fair, consistent consequences. I.e. every lie should be treated in the same way and have the same consequence.
- Be an advocate for character. Don't be neutral about the importance of character or casual about improper conduct. Be clear and uncompromising that you want and expect your children to be trustworthy, respectful, responsible, fair, caring, and good citizens.
- Finally, model the behavior you'd like to see in your child. Be careful and self-conscious about setting a good example in everything you say and do. Everything you do and don't do sends a message about your values. And you're bound to slip up, so be accountable when you do. For example, even though it may seem that your lying about your child's height to get him on an amusement park ride is insignificant, you're actually teaching him that it's okay to lie to get what he wants. Says Josephson, "Whatever you allow, you encourage."

Building character doesn't happen overnight. It's certainly not easy, and there's always room for improvement. If you're unsure about where to begin, start with trying to do the right thing in every situation. Little by little, by modeling the behavior you'd like to see in your child and policing yourself in

tempting situations, you will show your child how to live the values you deem important.