



Helping Your Child Become a Responsible Citizen

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Communications and Outreach, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools

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As parents, we all want our children to grow up to be responsible citizens and good people. We want them to learn to feel, think and act with respect for themselves and for other people. We want them to pursue their own well-being, while also being considerate of the needs and feelings of others. We want them to recognize and honor the democratic principles upon which our country was founded. We want them, in short, to develop strong character. The cornerstone of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is academic achievement and professional success built upon a foundation of moral strength and civic virtue. As Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings has said, “A quality education provides citizens with the tools to participate fully in their society.” And the payoffs for encouraging our children’s character development are enormous. Research has shown that children who grow up with strong, positive values are happier and do better in school. They are also better able to balance their personal wants and needs against those of others and to make positive contributions to society. On the other hand, if children do not learn proper values and behavior when they are very young, problems can develop. These problems can mushroom with serious consequences as children grow older—dropping out of school, drug use, teenage pregnancy, violent crime—the list goes on. The most important thing we can do for our children is to help them acquire values and skills that they can rely on throughout their lives. In doing so, they will have the best chance to lead good lives as individuals and as citizens of their communities and of America. This publication provides information about the values and skills that make up character and good citizenship and what you can do to help your child develop strong character. It suggests activities that you and your school-aged children can do to put those values to work in your daily lives and tips for working with teachers and schools to ensure that you act together to promote the basic values that you want your child to learn and use. Finally, it provides an extensive list of books and other resources with character-related themes that you can read and discuss with your child to encourage character and citizenship development.

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