



Character Development in 4-H

4-H is NOT about winning. It's NOT about doing better than others. 4-H IS about doing the best you can. It IS about being the best you can be. It IS about making this world the best it can be. IT'S ALL ABOUT CHARACTER!

4-H helps youth develop the skills they need to be successful, community-minded citizens. One of the ingredients of a successful individual is good character.

What is Character?

Character is the moral substance of a person that identifies him or her as a good person. The choices a person makes and the actions a person takes define his or her character. Good or strong character must be carefully developed in our youth by adults who provide clear and realistic expectations, good examples, and reinforcement.

Character development is primarily the responsibility of the parent, but it takes an entire community to raise a child. No parent, educator, religious, or youth organization can do the job alone. The importance of character must be taught and constantly reinforced through clear expectations and consequences as well as through the good example of many adult role models. As a 4-H volunteer, you are an excellent role model for 4-H members. You have a responsibility not only to clearly communicate expectations of good character on the part of 4-H members, but also to model your own good character.

The Six Pillars of Character

Michael Josephson, founder of CHARACTER COUNTS!™ and the Josephson Institute of Ethics, convened a group of individuals representing every socio-economic, cultural, youth, and religious group in this country. The group agreed that the following "Six Pillars of Character" are the building blocks of good character as accepted in the United States of America:

- *Trustworthiness.* Be honest, be a person of integrity, be loyal, be reliable, build a good reputation, don't repeat gossip or say things that will hurt the reputation of others.
- *Respect.* Treat others with respect, be tolerant of differences, follow the Golden Rule, be considerate, use good manners, deal peacefully with disagreements, don't use foul language.
- *Responsibility.* Do what you are supposed to, follow through on commitments, be accountable, think before acting, consider the consequences, persevere, be self disciplined, use self control, do your best.
- *Fairness.* Follow the rules, be open-minded, listen to others, do your part, share, don't take advantage of others or unfortunate situations, give credit where due.
- *Caring.* Be kind and compassionate, express gratitude, forgive others, help others, show you care by your actions, be a peacemaker.
- *Citizenship.* Obey laws and rules, respect authority, cooperate, do your share to make your community better, stay informed, vote, protect the environment and those who can not protect themselves.



4-H Develops Good Character

The New Jersey 4-H Youth Development Program is a member of the National CHARACTER COUNTS!™ Coalition, a group of over 500 youth and civic organizations who wholeheartedly endorse the "Six Pillars of Character." The 4-H pledge and motto support character development.

The 4-H Pledge

I pledge My head to clearer thinking, My heart to greater loyalty, My hands to larger service, and My health to better living for my club, my community, my country, and my world.

The 4-H Motto

"To Make the Best Better!"

Incorporating the Pillars with Your 4-H'ers

Youth need to know what is expected of them at meetings and 4-H events. The easiest ways to incorporate character development into club meetings are setting clear expectations, holding young people accountable for their actions, and having reasonable consequences for breaking the rules or not being responsible. Club leaders and parents can help integrate the pillars in club meetings by:

- Setting the expectations and consequences as a group.
- Discussing one pillar per month.
- Sharing experiences the members have that relate to the pillars and how those experiences made them feel.
- Discussing the pillars prior to election of officers, emphasizing the connection between good character and a good officer and the pillars officers need to exemplify.
- Encouraging members to do presentations related to the pillars.
- Planning community service activities. Do a two minute service project at each meeting. Make the world a better place by doing something to improve every place you go.
- Discussing pillars in preparation for the fair: i.e. . . . following the rules, doing your own work, respecting judges' decisions, helping younger members with their projects, displaying good sportsmanship, etc.
- Making an exhibit for an event (fair, window display, community days, bulletin board, etc.) that focuses on one or all of the pillars.
- Discussing quotes of character and letting the youth develop their own character quotes as well as one that can be a club motto. Quotes of character can be found on the website: www.charactercounts.org.



Decision Making with Character: Doing the Right Thing

When faced with a tough decision or one that may be ethical in nature, use the following CHARACTER COUNTS!™ model. For example: a committee member decides not to follow through on a commitment. Answer the following questions:

- Who will be affected? How will they be affected? Anyone who is affected by the decision is a stakeholder in that decision.
- Run the decision through the Six Pillars: Is it trustworthy, respectful, responsible, fair, and caring? Does it exemplify good citizenship?
- If living up to one or more of the six pillars means violating another, am I doing what is best for the greatest number of people or society as a whole?
- If everyone did it, would it be a good thing?
- If your decision was published on the front page of the newspaper, would you be proud of your decision?

Your Role in Developing Character

Helping your 4-H members develop good character is an important responsibility of the 4-H Leader. Be prepared as a leader to demonstrate good character yourself. Teaching by example is the best approach. Always remember, your 4-H'ers are watching!

Words to Ponder & Quotes of Character

- *Trustworthiness.* How many times can a person lie to you before you consider them a liar? If you find out that someone you trusted twisted the truth to keep you from being upset, would you be happy? Would you still trust that person? If you have ever twisted the truth to protect someone else's feelings, do you think that person would be happy with you if they found out? Would they trust you?
- *Respect.* "Sir, I will treat you like a gentleman, not because you are one, but because I am one." — Sir Winston Churchill
- *Responsibility.* "All that is necessary for the forces of evil to win is for a few good people to do nothing." — Michael Josephson
- *Fairness.* "Everything we do and say makes a difference. It can start a chain reaction that affects the actions and decisions of hundreds of others. Everything you do sends a message. What messages are you sending?" — Michael Josephson
- *Caring.* "The best way I know to overcome an enemy is to make him a friend." — Abraham Lincoln
- *Citizenship.* "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has." — Margaret Mead.



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References

CHARACTER COUNTS!™ Josephson Institute of Ethics, www.charactercounts.org.

For more information on New Jersey 4-H, please visit www.nj4h.rutgers.edu.

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