



CHARACTER EDUCATION AND ITS BENEFITS TO OUR CHILDREN

The Definition

Character education involves teaching children about basic human values including honesty, kindness, generosity, courage, freedom, equality and respect.

The goal is to raise children to become morally responsible, self-disciplined citizens. Problem solving, decision making, and conflict resolution are important parts of developing moral character. Through role playing and discussions, children can see that their decisions affect other people and things.

Inclusive Concept

Character education is an inclusive concept regarding all aspects of how families, schools, and related social institutions support the positive character development of children. Character in this context refers to the moral and ethical qualities of persons as well as the demonstration of those qualities in their emotional responses, reasoning, and behavior. Character is associated with such virtues as respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Broadly, character education encompasses all aspects of the influence that families, schools, and other social institutions have on the positive character development of children. Character Education is the deliberate effort to help people understand, care about and act upon core ethical values.

What Does Character Education Look Like?

Character education looks like young people learning, growing, and becoming. It feels like strength, courage, possibility, and hope. Giving life meaning, purpose, and a future is the collective message educators are sharing with youth in a curriculum that ultimately says, "Together we can."

We need to practice moral education by means of explanation — not simply stuffing students' heads with rules and regulations, but engaging them in great moral conversations about the human race. The very existence of this dialogue helps make us human.

How can Children benefit

Embedded in character education are guidelines for successful living. The language of respect and responsibility navigates the journey to ethical fitness. Children explore education as life and life as learning positive approaches for setting and achieving goals.

Children learn that living each day to its fullest means more than waiting for moments here and there. Character education presents life with context, inviting them to listen, share, explore, and reflect. Cultivating knowledge for purposeful living, students learn through literature, art, humanities and throughout the existing school curriculum the benefits and consequences of behavior. They learn the power of choice. They learn to appreciate the qualities of being human and to share their appreciation at home, in school, and in the community.

Finding Time

Many stories in children's literature, for example, reflect lessons in morals and virtues; we can read and discuss these moral lessons without taking time from core subjects. Character education also fits well with social studies and health topics. Accepting individual differences, showing courage, developing citizenship, taking responsibility for oneself, and making positive, so the hurdle of finding time for character education becomes less intimidating. Also, talking about good character traits fits naturally into the scheme of setting up a successful primary classroom. When we introduce games in math, we could review the ideas of fairness and cooperation.

Practicing Cooperative Learning Techniques

Partner and small-group learning activities are natural complements to character education, providing children with opportunities to practice cooperation, respect, teamwork, and responsibility. Children usually enjoy cooperative activities, and working with peers is a brain-friendly technique that enhances learning (Jensen, 1996).

School staff members serve as troubleshooters between students and the individuals or agencies in need of assistance. Such service programs teach valuable humanitarian skills. Through these activities, abstract concepts like justice and community become real as students see the faces of the lives they touch. Children begin to appreciate the need to couple moral thinking with moral action.

Does It Work?

Can character education really make a difference? Teaching about character is just as important as teaching the basics of writing, math, and reading. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education" (1947). Educators should work in partnership with families and communities to give children every opportunity to grow into people of good character, and especially to counteract society's potentially negative influences. Character education cannot cure all the world's evils, but it can improve and influence children in positive ways, giving them the skills that they will need to be successful adults.

Expectations of Excellence

Children need standards and the skills to achieve them. They need to see themselves as students engaged in a continuing pursuit of excellence. These standards of excellence in school work and behavior will encourage students to develop qualities like perseverance and determination, and those virtues will affect every aspect of the children's lives as they mature.

Academic studies change rapidly; what we discuss in class today becomes passé tomorrow. But the values, moral influences and noteworthy characteristics we model and discuss will outlast academic facts and figures. We can leave our children a legacy that will remain constant throughout life: to know the good, love the good and do the good.