



Building Character

Family and Consumer Sciences
and 4-H Youth Development

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*What is right is right even if no one is doing it.
What is wrong is wrong even if everyone is
doing it.*

Advisory groups throughout Oklahoma have asked the Cooperative Extension Service to help families and communities get involved in character education. They want children and youth to show respect, use good manners, and be responsible. Through character education we can strengthen the parenting role, improve the quality of life, and develop a civil American society. By building character, we impact an individual's development as well as families, schools, sports, and entire communities. In character education programs there are positive changes in children's behavior, specifically in helping each other, being truthful, and not blaming others.

OSU responded with a statewide character education program based on the **CHARACTER COUNTS!**sm framework. This framework is the largest character education program in the nation with almost 500 collaborating agencies. It is the framework selected by the Cooperative Extension Service in other states.

A 1998 Josephson Institute survey of young people found that nearly half are thieves and 70% cheated on exams. Nearly 92% lied to their parents, and 91% were not satisfied with their own ethics. Teachers and counselors report that children do not know the meaning of terms related to character. In 1950, a 14-year-old's vocabulary included 25,000 words, and in 1999 that number declined to 10,000.

To develop the **CHARACTER COUNTS!**sm framework, the Josephson Institute of Ethics brought a diverse group of educators, youth leaders, and ethicists to a conference in Aspen, Colorado. Their discussions produced the six pillars of character that form the basis for the Institute's ethical framework.

Making Ethical Choices Based on the Six Pillars of Character

- 1) Have I thought about the way my choices are likely to help or hurt others, the stakeholders?
- 2) Am I living up to the ethical principles of the "Six Pillars of Character" by being trustworthy, respectful, responsible, fair, caring, and a good citizen – even if I have to give up things I want?
- 3) If I cannot find a way to live up to one of the six pillar principles without violating another, am I making the choice I think will be best for society in the long run?

Community and Family Involvement

The **CHARACTER COUNTS!**sm framework includes the family and community as integral part of character education. It is important that children and youth see and hear the six pillars in action in the family, school, businesses, government, law enforcement, media, church, sports, and youth programs. Extension seeks to include all of these entities in the development and implementation of local character education classes and events.

For further information:

Visit our website fcs.okstate.edu/parenting. Select Parenting Made Easier; Children Building Character.

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service Video Tape Library:

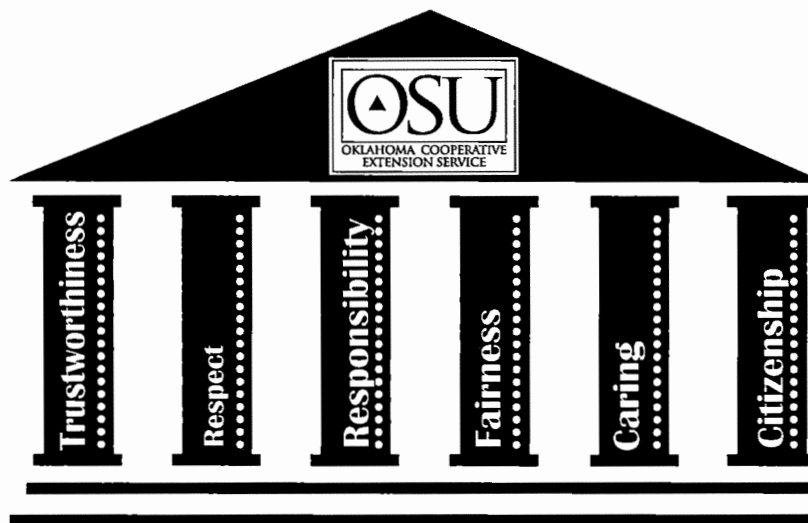
- VT-941 Choices Count
- VT-942 Kids for Character
- VT-943 Let's Get Involved: What you should know about **CHARACTER COUNTS!**sm
- VT-944 Making Ethical Decisions

Curricula Available from Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service:

Character Critters – Six lessons for preschool children and their parents with take home activity sheets. Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service.

Exercising Character – Learning activities for grades K through 12.

Showing Character – Ethical concepts for ages 9 to 19 involved in 4-H livestock projects.



Character Education

Trustworthiness

- Be honest.
- Don't deceive, cheat, or steal.
- Be reliable — do what you say you'll do.
- Have the courage to do the right thing.
- Build a good reputation.
- Be loyal — stand by your family, friends, and country.

Respect

- Treat others the way you want to be treated.
- Be tolerant of differences.
- Use good manners, not bad language.
- Be considerate of the feelings of others.
- Don't threaten, hit, or hurt anyone.
- Deal peacefully with anger, insults, and disagreements.

Responsibility

- Do what you are supposed to do.
- Persevere; keep on trying!
- Always do your best.
- Be self-disciplined.
- Think before you act — consider the consequences.
- Be accountable for your choices.

Fairness

- Play by the rules.
- Take turns and share.
- Be open-minded; listen to others.
- Don't take advantage of others.
- Don't blame others carelessly.

Caring

- Be kind.
- Be compassionate and show you care.
- Express gratitude.
- Forgive others.
- Help people in need.

Citizenship

- Make your school and community better.
- Cooperate.
- Stay informed; vote.
- Be a good neighbor.
- Obey laws and rules and respect authority.
- Protect the environment.

References:

Hanson, W. (1992). The Aspen Consensus: Youth leaders, educators find core values. *Ethics*, 19-20.

Josephson Institute of Ethics. (1996). A report card on American integrity. Marina Del Ray, CA: Josephson Institute of Ethics.

McDaniel, A.K. (1998). Character education: Developing effective programs. *Journal of Extension*, 36:2.

CHARACTER COUNTS! is a service mark of the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics.

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