

Teaching Guide

Find your way to Character Heights

Goals

1. Learn the key elements of helping children make better decisions.
2. Identify specific ways to apply those elements to my relationships.
3. Make a plan to help my children make better decisions.

Preparation:

Provide a Character Heights Travel Guide for each participant.

Study the Teaching Guide and Travel Guide. Consider stories you might share.

Make copies of the evaluation at the end of this Teaching Guide.

Introduction:

Each unit in the Parenting Journey can form a 30 – 90 minute lesson. This guide will provide you with specific ideas for teaching Character Heights.

Welcome:

Welcome to Character Heights along the Parenting Journey.

[Give any necessary instructions for housekeeping tasks. You might add a get-acquainted activity, if you have the time and you want to build the relationships among your participants. Look for icebreaker activity ideas at www.cyfernet.org .]

Start by Stating the Main Idea:

Your experiences at Character Heights can turn your responses to children's misbehavior from actions that make things worse to actions that make things better. You can learn how to teach your children to become capable and sensible rather than resentful and rebellious. Spending time in Character Heights will teach you how to help your children become adults you will be proud of!

It can take a long time and a lot of work to get to Character Heights. Good character doesn't happen in a moment or by accident. It is more likely to happen when we love our children, teach them good ways to act and help them to be good people.

Points of interest

1. Teach good ways to act.

Many children do things we don't like simply because they don't know any better. They spill the milk because they are not skilled. They hurt others because they have not learned to be aware of the needs of others. We can patiently teach them. It takes a long

time to learn to be a good human! We help them wipe up their spills, and we help them understand other people, their needs and feelings.

[Share a story of a time when you had to make allowances for your child to learn an important lesson, or ask a participant to share a story.]

Children also do things we don't like because we have set them up for failure—we have put them in a situation that is very difficult for them. For example, we may expect children to sit and be quiet in a long meeting. That is almost impossible. Children are wired to be active and explore. They don't do very well at sitting quietly. Maybe we can provide quiet activities for them to enjoy rather than expecting them to sit with nothing to do. We can set them up for success by working with their maturity level and personality.

How do you plan ahead to keep you child from getting bored? What activities do you take with you or plan for them when you know boredom will be an issue?

2. Make sensible rules.

Most of us make some rules carelessly. We just start telling children to not touch this or never to do that. Children do not know if we are serious about the rules until they see how we act. If we enforce rules sometimes and not others, children become confused. They may not think we're serious about any rules. We shouldn't make a rule unless it is important enough to enforce it.

What are some examples of sensible rules?

What are some examples of rules we make that are not sensible and should be forgotten?

Sometimes using distraction is better than making a rule. Imagine a small child banging on pans. At some point, we get tired of the noise. We can make a rule about banging on pans—or we can distract the child with another activity. For example, we might get out some clay and invite the child to the new activity.

How have you effectively used distraction to keep your child out of trouble?

3. Establish Consequences

When children do things that bother us, we often want to punish them. Punishment focuses on making children suffer for their mistakes. But suffering often does not lead to better behavior. Teaching is better than punishing.

For example, if our child grabs a toy from another child, we can spank our child. But that will probably make our child angry and resentful. Instead we might say, "Katy is

very sad because she doesn't have a toy to play with. How can we help her?" It is good for children to learn how their actions affect other people.

[Share a story of a time when you patiently taught your child how their actions affect other people instead of just punishing them, or ask a participant to share a story.]

A child may have certain chores such as washing the dishes. If the child fails to wash the dishes, a reasonable consequence might be that the child can't watch TV or play until the dishes are washed. The purpose of consequences is not to make children suffer but to help them learn that it is good to do what we are assigned to do.

What are some examples of appropriate consequences for misbehavior?

Some people like to use time-out with children. But making a child sit in a chair doesn't necessarily help the child learn. Sometimes it is more helpful to sit with children and help them think about their decisions. Time-out should be used mainly to help children and adults get peaceful so they can talk with each other calmly.

As children get older, we allow them to make more decisions. While we work with young children to help them clean their rooms, we might decide to give teenagers more freedom about the décor and tidiness of their rooms. We allow children to make choices that are safe and appropriate for their maturity.

What kind of choices do you allow your child to make?

What might be some other choices you can allow your child to make?

We let children make decisions that are safe even if they are different from what we would do. We let children wear colors or patterns we don't prefer, but we don't let children wear unsafe or suggestive clothing.

4. Establish routines.

Strong families have many different kinds of routines. One important kind of routine is doing chores. As soon as they are able, all family members have ways they help the family. One child may set the table. Another may feed the dog. We all make a contribution to help our little society we call a family.

There are also routines for gathering people. Some families gather every day at dinner time. They talk about their day and share their feelings. This can be a good time to reconnect. Some families gather before breakfast or bedtime. Some families gather weekly to share their highs and lows from the week. Some families have a weekly activity together. Having enjoyable time together is a vital part of strong families.

[Share a story of a routine your family uses to feel close to each other.]

What routines does your family use to feel close to each other?

A very important kind of routine is one-on-one time. When parents take time to do things with children individually, it can make a big difference. The key to a successful one-on-one is that the parent and child do something together that the child enjoys (and the parent doesn't hate). One child may like crafts, another may like biking. Each child is different. Taking time with children in enjoyable activities builds memories and strengthens relationships.

There are also routines that deliberately develop and promote values. Children do not develop values where none are taught. Values must be carefully cultivated. Some families have traditions of talking about their best experiences together. Some families have routines of worshiping or praying together. Others share stories of heroes. Some families have service projects together. Some families visit relatives and study their family history.

What routines do you use to reinforce family values?

Each family can carefully choose or create those routines and traditions that will help family members stay connected, cultivate character and serve their communities. This doesn't happen by accident. It takes thoughtful, consistent effort.

Plan your stay.

[These questions could be answered by each participant directly on their Character Heights Travel Guide.]

After you have discussed the four main ideas in Character Heights, think about the things you have learned. Here are some ideas for helping your child make better decisions:

Notice the stresses, disappointments and challenges each child faces.

Show compassion for children's challenges.

Give children lots of opportunities to make choices.

Give children lots of opportunities to find solutions for their problems.

Help children learn to be responsible for their actions.

Give positive energy toward better choices.

Map out the details of your plan. What exactly do you plan to do? When will be the best time? Do you need to do anything to prepare yourself? For example, do you need to ask other families about their traditions so you have more ideas for what you could do?

Decide some small thing you can do this week and write out your plan:

What you plan to do:

The best time to do this:

Ideas to prepare my child:

How I can prepare myself:

People who can help me:

Character Heights is essential to every parenting journey! We hope you will have a great time here AND become an expert at finding your way around. Maybe you want more help to explore Character Heights. If so, you might:

- Read about time-out, learning respect, teaching values, setting limits, using consequences, giving children choices, using distraction or teaching responsibility at www.arfamilies.org.
- Look for a class in your area on service, consequences or teaching values to children.
- Read a book about understanding children such as Haim Ginott's "*Between Parent and Child*," or Foster Cline and Jim Fay's "*Parenting with Love and Logic*."
- Get ideas from another person who is very good at cultivating character in children.
- Get more ideas by going to the national extension family Web site, www.cyfernet.org, and searching on discipline, values, time-out, routines or traditions.

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Evaluation

Find Your Way to Character Heights

As a result of participating in this workshop, I . . .

learned new ideas about how to help my children make better decisions

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>			<i>Strongly Agree</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>

identified a specific new idea for helping my children make better decisions

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>			<i>Strongly Agree</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>

made a specific plan for something I want to do this week

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>			<i>Strongly Agree</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>