

What Character Qualities Do Teens Value Most?

In early June, it was my privilege and joy to teach hundreds of seventh graders about their identity. Because, I wanted them to understand how multi-faceted they are. I wanted them to choose to invest in all of themselves. It matters partly because identity controls behavior.

Consequently, if children only know a part of themselves, they'll struggle greatly if that part fails them. For instance, last Monday, I wrote about children's social identity. If that's all they have to depend on, what will they do when they feel only negative about it? Isolate. Separate. Treat peers and others badly. And more.

What Your Teens Are Saying:

When I asked these young teens to tell me a high compliment they could receive if someone described their character identity, groups listed these qualities:

- Kind, encouraging
- Trustworthy, kind
- Charismatic
- Good, kind-hearted
- Honest, truthful
- Sweet, loyal, integrity
- Humble
- Perky, always happy, encouraging, bubbly, friendly, peppy, humble, helpful, careful, kind, loving, compassionate heart
- Loyal, respectful
- Easygoing, positive, problem solver
- Open-minded
- Hardworking

- Diligent, respectful, responsible
- Courageous
- Good role model

What Do You Think?

I think these are great kids! Can you imagine if all of us consistently exhibited these qualities? Seriously!

So be grateful with me that these teens want to be known as having these qualities. Perhaps ask your children the same question. What character qualities do they highly value? Then, let's ask ourselves how we can help them. Picture yourself talking with them about these. Which ones will we be better at modeling? Will accountability help us model those that aren't natural strengths of ours? How can we teach these character qualities?

Teaching is a key. It's absolutely essential that we talk about the character qualities we want our kids to choose. While modeling them prevents the hypocrisy that angers children. But, teaching matters because these qualities aren't easy to embrace 24/7.

4 Ways You Can Help Your Children:

- Starting with the old-fashioned dictionary might be wise. Definitions often reveal fine differences between qualities.
- Since contrasting the qualities with their opposites is effective teaching. Share an example of someone being courageous and an example of someone not being brave. Teach about loyalty vs. someone giving up quickly on a friend. Also, contrast kindness with rude behavior. What does encouragement sound like and look like? What about discouragement? You get the idea.
- Would role-playing or making up dramas with your kids help them understand why and how to live out these qualities? Especially if they're body smart and people

smart, this could be great fun and very effective. What about watching favorite movies or shows and looking for examples of positive and negative character qualities? We could do the same thing with stories they're reading.

- Since there are numerous examples of many of the qualities these teens mentioned in the heroes we know from the Bible. I imagine the same thing will be true regarding qualities your children identify as important. Look for examples together. Did Jesus use that quality? When was He courageous? Encouraging? Respectful? Responsible? Was Paul hard-working? Who can you think of who demonstrated loyalty? How does a study of significant men and women from Scripture inform our ideas about humility?

So What Can You Do as Parents?

If you engage your children in discussions like these, I'd love to know how they go.

Most of all, let's not just expect our kids to wake up another day with better character. Children tell me they don't want us to "tell and yell." They want to be taught. They need to be taught. It honors them. I pray God blesses you as you persevere.

Dr. Kathy Koch *is the author of* Screens & Teens: Connecting with Our Kids in A Wireless World.

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