

REAL LIFE SOLUTIONS



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Raise a Child with **Great Values**

Some psychologists think values are impossible to teach, and it's certainly true that telling kids to be more honest, or diligent, or considerate, doesn't work any better than telling adults to be. But if values are impossible to teach, they are too important to leave to chance.

"How do kids learn values?"

Children learn values by observing what you do and drawing conclusions about what you think is important in life. Regardless of what you consciously teach them, your children will emerge from childhood with clear views on what their parents really value, and with a well developed value system of their own.

"I've heard that peers are more important in shaping values than parents."

Parents aren't the only source from which children learn values, and peers certainly influence your kids. Research shows that the stronger your relationship with your child, the more her world is filtered through the values she's picked up from you.

"I thought values were things like honesty or being compassionate toward those less fortunate."

Values include both what you hold dear, such as family, education, or equal dignity for all people, and what you think it's important to be, such as compassionate, tolerant or honest.

"How do we teach values consciously?"

Teaching values consciously starts with considering what our values are and finding ways in daily life to discuss and live them

with our children. What your children will do when faced with difficult choices will depend more on who they are, than on what they say they believe.

Some ideas:

- 1. Be aware of what you're modeling.** It isn't what you say, it's what you do.
- 2. Help your child develop empathy.** The way kids learn empathy is by being treated empathically, and by watching you respond to others with compassion and kindness.
- 3. Talk clearly about your values and why they are important to you.** Helping children interpret the world is a crucial responsibility of parents.
- 4. Talk about why you make certain decisions based on your values,** whether you're volunteering or watching a certain television show.
- 5. Label and reinforce expression of values.** When you see your child demonstrating a value that's important to you, recognize your child for it, as specifically as possible.
- 6. Resist lecturing.** Try asking questions to find out more about decisions your child is making and the thinking behind his decisions and share your own views sparingly.
- 7. Make it relevant to their world.** Values seem almost theoretical until kids start talking about their own lives. Don't miss the opportunity to help your child grow by supporting her in making conscious decisions.
- 8. Model community involvement.** Your kids need to see that you're committed to the welfare of the larger community. Help them appreciate how the invisible work of others helps each of us daily.
- 9. Volunteer for community service projects as a family,** from coat drives to visiting the local nursing home on Valentine's Day.
- 10. Encourage your child's initiatives that express budding values.** When she decides to start a "Clean up the Park" club with her kindergarten friends, help her organize it in a way that's manageable and safe.
- 11. Confront cultural messages about money.** Responsible use of money is a value that is challenging to teach. You'll probably need to start by getting clear about your own values around money.
- 12. Use discussion starters.** Choose books to read and movies to watch with your child, with the express goal of building character and then have a discussion about what you just read or watched.
- 13. Consciously teach and model good sportsmanship.** Your help will make it easier for your child to find genuine solace in a game well played, and to mean it when he says "Good game!" whether he's lost or won.

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