

Teaching Our Kids Character Habits That Last a Lifetime (Part 2)



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When we help our kids learn character habits at school and at home, they excel more at school and home. My first blog post discussed how to help kids develop effective perseverance and leadership skills. Summarized below are strategies parents can use to help their children develop the character habits of empathy, bravery, and ethical behavior.

Empathy: See, Listen, and Feel with the Heart

Empathy teaches children to step outside themselves, understand others' perspectives, and value diversity. It's a cornerstone of healthy relationships and inclusive communities.

Build empathy by:

Talking about feelings and naming emotions

Asking reflective questions after social situations:
“How do you think they felt?”

Reading diverse books that show different cultures, experiences, and points of view

Try this: Play “perspective switch”—have your child imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling in a situation.

Books to share:

I Walk with Vanessa by Kerascoët: A wordless book that shows a small act of empathy turning into a movement of kindness. Invites deep discussion across all ages.

Lubna and Pebble by Wendy Meddour: A touching story about a young refugee who finds comfort in a pebble and then chooses to comfort another. Beautiful for discussing empathy, courage, and friendship.

Bravery: Do Hard Things

Bravery isn't just for superheroes. It's for kids who try new things, speak up for what's right, and believe in themselves.

Nurture bravery at home by:

Encouraging your child to take healthy risks (like joining a new group or speaking in front of others)

Supporting them when they make mistakes or feel nervous

Helping them advocate for themselves at school or in friendships

Try this: Ask, "What's something brave you did today?"

Books to share:

Jabari Jumps by Gaia Cornwall: Jabari wants to jump off the diving board but has to face his fear first. A relatable and uplifting story of trying hard things.

Brave Irene by William Steig: Irene shows physical and emotional bravery as she battles a snowstorm to deliver a dress for her sick mother. A classic story of courage.

Ethical: Do the Right Thing

Ethical behavior means doing the right thing—even when no one's watching. It's about having integrity, especially when it's hard.

Teach ethics by:

Modeling honesty and fairness in your own choices

Discussing real-life situations and asking, "What's the right thing to do?"

Praising honesty—even when it comes with a tough consequence

Try this: Ask, "What do you do when no one is watching?" and celebrate those quiet wins.

Books to share:

Do Unto Otters: A Book About Manners by Laurie Keller: A humorous and engaging story about treating others the way you want to be treated. Fun, yet rooted in the golden rule.

A Bike Like Sergio's by Maribeth Boelts: A boy finds money and wrestles with doing the right thing. Excellent for discussing honesty, temptation, and ethics.

My next blog post will discuss how parents can reinforce the character habits of accountability, respect, and service at school and in daily life activities that can last a lifetime.