



# Forest Charter School

*A Personalized Learning Program*

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## MARCH CHARACTER TRAIT



This month we chose to share excerpts from an article by Marilyn Price-Mitchell, PhD. She is founder of *Roots of Action* and author of *Tomorrow's Change Makers: Reclaiming the Power of Citizenship for a New Generation*. She writes this: Integrity is our ability to act in ways consistent with the values, beliefs, and moral principles we claim to hold. Beyond a single ability, integrity is a collection of virtues, including honesty, courage, honor, respect, responsibility, restraint, and authenticity. Despite societal forces that test integrity, most people agree that children deserve a world that values truth, honesty, and justice. As the basis of social harmony and action, integrity plays a critical role in civil society as well as democracy. So how do children develop integrity?

While kids are influenced by many out-of-home factors in today's world, research shows that families are still the primary teachers of integrity and the behaviors associated with it. This article highlights the role families play in the development of integrity and why integrity is vital to children's success. Children are not born with integrity or the behaviors we associate with it, including humility, social responsibility, and the courage to stand up for what they believe is right. It is derived through a process of cultural socialization— influences from all spheres of a child's life. This process begins at home. Below are ways you can start today to foster integrity in your child!

### 9 Ways to Grow Your Child's Integrity

#### 1. Articulate family values.

What are your family values? Can your child discuss and defend them? Family values impact healthy child and adolescent development in profound ways. Most families have positive values that are steeped in their cultures or religions. Their values elicit habits of thinking and behaving that honor human strengths, weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and imperfections.

#### 2. Develop a moral vocabulary.

Words like *honesty*, *trust*, *fairness*, *respect*, *responsibility*, and *courage* are core to centuries of religious, philosophical, and family beliefs. Use them and others to express and reinforce your family values. Teach children the behaviors that flow from these principles. Use quotes to ignite meaningful dinner conversations and encourage kids to talk about these values.

#### 3. Reward respectful behavior.

When children feel good about doing what's right, they learn to measure the quality of their lives beyond grades and extra-curricular achievements. Parents who let children know that courage, honesty, and respect for others is more highly valued than quantifiable wealth or intelligence help kids understand the true meaning of being wholly human. When your children show integrity, tell them what you admire about their behavior. Applaud processes, not outcomes. When options are risky, good decisions can have bad results. Show that you're tolerant of risk, as long as the reasons for taking risks are sound: *"That didn't work out, but you made the right call! I would have made the same decision."*

#### 4. Explore consequences.

Learning integrity takes practice. Like all learning, failure produces consequences. When children explore, understand, and accept the consequences of failure, critical learning occurs. When integrity is taught at home from a young age, it becomes part of a child's character. Ideally, children learn integrity when the consequences are small. Having integrity doesn't mean children will always be honest, responsible, or respectful. What it does mean is that they will understand the consequences of their actions on themselves and others and, with that understanding, will make informed choices about how they live out their own values in the world.

## 5. Respond appropriately.

Parents cannot control their child's behavior, but they can respond with *consistency* when reinforcing family values. When learning is considered the foremost goal, dishonest or disrespectful behavior becomes a *teachable moment* for parents. What's most important is that your child reflects on and gleans meaning from their behavior. Talk with them. Listen and show respect for your child's thinking, and then restate your expectations that dishonesty or disrespect is never acceptable in your family. Consequences should be consistent and clearly understood.

## 6. Be a role model.

Children often name parents as their role models. Research shows that role models live their values in the world. They help children understand how values, like integrity, are part of a successful and rewarding life. Review what you say or share on social media. Does it reflect your values? Is it hurtful to others? Are there more respectful ways to share what you believe? Children are watching and learning from their adult role models. Practice Random Acts of Kindness!

## 7. Teach digital etiquette.

More than ever before, parents should teach all aspects of [digital citizenship](#) from an early age, including social networking etiquette, digital literacy, and standards of moral conduct. While it is difficult for children to stand up to disrespectful behavior online, they should always know that they can seek support from an adult when they feel threatened, bullied, or fearful. This is one way they can act with integrity and safely stand for what they believe.

## 8. Share meaningful stories.

Examples of integrity are contained in human stories everywhere. When you read books with your kids, listen to stories about their peers, watch TV or movies together, or talk about what's going on in the world, ask your kids to find examples of how individuals stood up for their beliefs in ways that made a difference for themselves or the world around them. When you make a decision, explain how you came to that conclusion. For possible options, spell out the pros and cons, their importance, and how likely they are to happen. Make sure that the risks you take are worth the rewards they could deliver. Talk about what would be the best- and worst-case scenarios—and which scenario is most likely: *"If we go out, we will probably enjoy a sunny afternoon at the beach together, but there's also a small chance we'll get caught in rain or traffic. If we stay home, we'll almost certainly order pizza, turn on a movie, and stare at our phones."*

## 9. Instill self-efficacy.

Children who stand up for principles in which they believe have high degrees of self-efficacy which is the belief in one's ability to accomplish goals and influence the future. Parents instill self-efficacy in children when they help kids be guided by their own internal compasses, allow them to grow from their relationships, and appreciate children for who they are, not just for what they achieve. When kids admit to doing something wrong, respond kindly. Help them acknowledge the dishonesty, discuss it, and pledge to act differently at the next opportunity. Encourage them to reflect on the importance of trust and find ways to create reminders about these principles. And take advantage of the calendar: a new semester, a new month, or even a new day can be a fresh start for integrity.

## Learn More About Integrity

Check out the following books to learn more about developing integrity and wholeness of character in your kids, and why it's so important to your child's success and well-being:

[The Road to Character](#), by David Brooks

[Parenting from the Inside Out](#), by Daniel Siegel and Mary Hartzell

[Parenting with Love & Logic](#), by Foster Cline and Jim Fay (Online classes are available free to ALL FCS Parents, just ask your ST!)

## Books for Children

[Stand Tall! A Book About Integrity](#), by Cheri Meiners and Elizabeth Allen (Ages 4-8) Read aloud: <https://youtu.be/uu7DgHF6Gzo>

[Say Something](#) by Peter H. Reynolds read aloud [https://youtu.be/U\\_-rP-0aRpY](https://youtu.be/U_-rP-0aRpY)

[If Everybody Did](#) by Jo Ann Stover read aloud at <https://youtu.be/GMESXYcW6Io>

[Teach Your Dragon Integrity](#) ages 4-10 by Steven Herman Read aloud at [https://youtu.be/\\_DWz-rYmXAo](https://youtu.be/_DWz-rYmXAo)

[What Do You Stand For? For Kids: A Guide to Building Character](#) ages 7-11 by Barbara A. Lewis

[The Empty Pot](#) read by Rami Malek <https://youtu.be/a9K-sAKdk2Y>

Cartoon Video lessons for young students on Integrity <https://youtu.be/O5oZ-P1yH7M> <https://youtu.be/UqNA6XSmyiU>

[The Witch of Blackbird Pond](#) ages 10-12 by Elizabeth George Speare

## Resources for Parents

Digital Citizenship Website <https://mikeribble.godaddysites.com/>

Check out Character Lab Actionable advice for parents and teachers—

based on science <https://characterlab.org/>

Read about five qualities of role models that matter most to teens <https://www.rootsofaction.com/role-model/>