

Family Times

NEWSLETTER



NEWSLETTER FOR ADULTS WITH CHILDREN AGES 5-8

VOL. 2 / NO. 9

Developing Fairness

"That's not fair!!" Sound familiar? It's commonly said by people of all ages. We often think of situations that put us at a disadvantage as "unfair." Helping your child understand that life is not always fair can be difficult and sometimes heartbreaking. As much as we want to save our children from negative actions and pressures, these life experiences cannot be avoided.

From an early age, we all tend to have an opinion about what is fair and what isn't. One thing is clear: Fairness is often a matter of perception. Even though the underlying concepts of fairness and justice are simple, applying them in real life proves difficult.

We all want the best for our children. We envision our children as future adults with good values and character. But, good character doesn't just happen. Character development begins early in life. While your child adores and craves your attention, you have your best opportunity to teach and help him or her learn right from wrong and to shape your child's character. It is easy for kids and grownups to say "that's not fair" when they don't get what they want. Often, we see decisions that put us at a disadvantage as "unfair." However, if we begin to think about what fairness really means, we are on the road to better character.



Fairness means playing by the rules, taking turns, sharing, and listening. Fair people do not take advantage of others. They consider all sides before making decisions, and they don't blame others unjustly.

Fairness Do's

- Treat all people fairly.
- Listen closely to others and try to understand what they are feeling and saying.
- Consider all the facts, including opposing views, before making a decision.
- Use the same criteria, rule, or standards for everyone.
- Correct your mistakes.

Fairness Don'ts

- Don't take advantage of other people's mistakes or ignorance.
- Don't take more than your fair share.
- Don't let personal preferences, prejudices, or other feelings interfere with decisions that should be based on merit.

Teach, Enforce, and Model

How can I teach my very young child about fairness? You are your child's first and most important teacher. Young children are very impressionable. They watch everything you do. If they see you following the rules, sharing with and listening to others, and not placing blame, they are likely to follow your example. Teach your child about values and goodness.

Children want and need boundaries, and they need parents who set clear limits. Establish clear and reasonable rules. Enforce those rules consistently. You might want to post rules on the refrigerator door. When your child demonstrates the conduct you expect, give hugs, praise, genuine appreciation, and lots of positive feedback. Discuss good behavior and how difficult it is to do the right thing.

It is important to model the behavior you want to see in your child. Everything you do – and don't do – sends a message about your values. We all make mistakes and have little slip-ups in life. A fair and just person will correct the mistake and be accountable and sincerely apologetic.

"It is much more difficult to know what is fair than what is unfair. A just person is never knowingly unfair."

– Michael Josephson

– continued –

Help Children Understand

When introducing the concept of fairness to a child, make sure to emphasize that fairness means:

- Everyone has the same chance
- People aren't picked on because of how they look
- People aren't liked because of what they have or what they can do for you

Fairness is not easy for children to understand. There are a number of things you can do to help them.

Listen. Get down on the children's level so they know you are listening. This helps build a foundation for teaching fairness. Children who are listened to will learn they are important and valuable, and they will be likely to listen to others when they are older.

Share. Learning to share is not only necessary for making and keeping friends, but it is also essential to developing the virtues of fairness and compassion. Teach children to wait for their turn, to give everyone a chance, and not to be judgmental.

Make rules. It is common for children to test the family rules. Announce rules for the family in writing. Make sure your children understand the rules and decide upon the consequences for breaking those rules. It is also a good idea to involve them in setting some of the rules.



The Book Nook

Chubbo's Pool by Betsy Lewin

The Doorbell Rang by Pat Hutchins

It's Mine by Leo Lionni

Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes

Emphasize Fairness in Your Family

- Show fairness to one another by establishing and using criteria and guidelines for special privileges.
- Use fairness-related terms in conversation such as *fair*, *equality*, *standards*, and *rules*.
- Develop rules that are appropriate for different ages and skill levels.
- Have as few rules as possible but stick to them.
- Play games by the rules.
- Discuss fair ways to choose a movie, restaurant, book to read or vacation.
- Praise, hug, and show genuine appreciation when your child demonstrates the conduct you expect.
- Discuss "unfair" practices and together develop more fair procedures.

Be a Good Role Model

Behavior is learned. Make sure you are taking the time to teach your children the right way to behave. Remember, you are a powerful role model for your child. If you treat people fairly, that is what your child will learn from you. Modeling fairness is one of the best ways to teach fairness to your child – regardless of age. Since applying the rules of fairness is not always easy or clear, it is important for your child to see you making the effort to be open, honest, and objective in making decisions.

To Make a Difference

- **Be consistent.** The messages you give your children should be clear and consistent; repeat them frequently.
- **Be concrete.** Teach character and fairness using examples your children can relate to and have experienced themselves. Messages about good attitudes, character, and conduct should be explicit, direct, and specific.
- **Be creative.** Capitalize on the "teachable moment." Use games, role-plays, and everyday life to teach fairness. Actively involve your child in decision-making that has real consequences.

References

(www.charactercounts.org)

CHARACTER COUNTS!
4640 Admiralty Way, #1001
Marina del Rey CA 90292-6610
Telephone: (310) 306-1868

CHARACTER COUNTS! for Families,
Greve, Vikes; Jha, LaDeane; & Stockall,
Sandy, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Cooperative Extension.

Good Ideas Books, 2002-2003 Edition.

Operating Manual for Character Education Programs, Compiled by Nancy Reed, Hamilton County School District, Tennessee, 2001.

What's a Parent to Do? Basic Strategies for Parents Who Care About the Character of 4- to 6-Year-Olds, by Peggy Adkins for CHARACTER COUNTS!

CHARACTER COUNTS! and the Six Pillars of Character are service marks of the *CHARACTER COUNTS!* Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics (www.charactercounts.org).

This issue was written by Zona Hutson, Doddridge County WVU Extension Agent. To contact Zona: (304) 873-1801; Zona.Hutson@mail.wvu.edu. Programs and activities offered by the West Virginia University Extension Service are available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, political beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, and marital or family status. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Director, Cooperative Extension Service, West Virginia University.

ES06-15