

## GOOD CITIZENSHIP

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As teachers and parents, we expect that the education we provide our children will make them “good citizens”. Usually education is seen as something good citizens must have in order to make good decisions. However, a formal education does not insure that a person will grow-up into a good citizen. It is the development of certain characteristics over time that contributes the most to good citizenship. Though educators can facilitate the growth of these characteristics, parents have the most influence over their development in their children. What are those characteristics? Many people believe that they are a combination of the following traits:

- **Honesty** is the basic theme of good citizenship. A person must be honest with others, and with himself or herself, in order to be a good citizen.
- **Compassion** is the emotion of caring for people and for other living things. Compassion gives a person an emotional bond with his or her world.
- **Respect** is the act of holding something or someone in high esteem. An important aspect of respect is *self*-respect. Respect is also directed toward inanimate things or ideas as well as toward people, such as laws, environment, cultures, etc.
- Out of honesty, compassion, and respect comes **Responsibility**, which includes both private, personal responsibility and public responsibility. Individuals and groups have responsibilities. Responsibility is about *action*, and it includes much of what people think of as good citizenship.
- Finally, the theme of **Courage** is important to good citizenship. Human beings are capable of moving beyond mere goodness toward greatness. Courage enables people to do the right thing even when it’s unpopular, difficult, or dangerous. Many people—including Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Martin Luther King Jr., Susan B. Anthony, and Mohandas Gandhi—have had the courage to change the rules to achieve justice. *Education World*  
[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_curr/curr008.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr008.shtml)

These traits need to be taught, and parents have a critical role in teaching them. Parents can foster the development of these traits by praising their children when they exhibit them, by being a good example and demonstrating them, by talking about values and the importance of them, and by using the examples of others who emulate them. There are web sites that offer activities for children of all age levels regarding good citizenship. These sites provide suggestions for parents and teachers that are worth exploring. The web site **Good Citizen** is one of these sites, and it identifies 100 citizen actions. Some suggestions of actions you can take to show good citizenship are: Do your share to make your school and community better, show empathy toward others, cooperate with others, get involved in community affairs, stay informed, vote, be a good neighbor, obey laws and rules, respect authority, protect the environment and volunteer.

There are so many different opinions regarding the qualities of a good citizen. Theodore Roosevelt felt that the first requirement of a good citizen was for a person to be able to “pull his own weight.” Others believe it is doing something on a day-to-day or week-to-week basis that keeps our communities and

democracy strong. Still others believe good citizenship is caring for and ensuring the “common good” of all. Good citizenship encompasses all these things and more, but no matter how you define it for yourself and family, be sure your children practice it in your home, in their school and in our community.