



### Activities to Teach Children Values That Lead to Economic Success

These activities and modeling behaviors can be used by any caring adult that interacts with young children. The more children see these behaviors, the more likely they are to adopt them. Sample activities and modeling behaviors appear below under each value.

#### 1. Self-Reflection and Empathy:

Activity 1: Once teachers, parents, grandparents and other adults become aware of and begin to practice self-reflection they can encourage it in their children. Toddlers and teens can simply be asked, “What happened?” Once the adult listens carefully to the child (with eye contact and no distractions), the child can be told, “I am sorry you bumped your head. I know that hurt.” “What will you do differently next time?” This teaches both the practice of self-reflection (What was my role in this?) and empathy (the ability to share and understand the feelings of another). The child experiences the adult putting themselves in the child’s place and understanding the pain of bumping one’s head. It frees up the child to find acceptance and take responsibility for learning from mistakes.

Activity 2: Help teachers, parents and grandparents learn to teach children to ask questions, to identify emotions and to express empathy for others. “How do you think your doll is feeling today?” “Why is she happy?” “Why was the boy in the story sad?” “What could he do that might help him feel better?” Daily conversations that ask children to think and talk about themselves and the world around them is solid footing for cultivating beliefs and behaviors that lead to success. The good news is, children are naturally curious and usually have a deep concern for others. Our work as supportive adults is to simply not squelch what comes easily.

#### 2. Belief in the importance of individual effort: Start where they are. Encourage play, discovery, problem-solving and persistence.

Activity 1: One way to promote belief in the importance of individual effort is to encourage problem-solving. The ability to stay calm and to persist even when the answer is not coming easily can be promoted through play and creativity. This goes for both children and adults. Listen to music, read stories and poems that include word play. A good example of word play can be found in the song, *Poor Anna*, by *Shel Silverstein*. Listen to the song. Make a list of all the names of fish and other sea creatures you hear in the story told in song. See how many you can get. Consider doing this activity with a family or class that you are working with. It is a fun way to break the ice, laugh, increase vocabulary and stimulate other important skills all at the same time.

Listen to the song, Poor Anna here. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8l\\_mcn-JdYw&list=PLgl4swHKtNaz3BswvK9T\\_b6g7VAqOjfy1&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8l_mcn-JdYw&list=PLgl4swHKtNaz3BswvK9T_b6g7VAqOjfy1&index=6)

Activity 2: Provide opportunities to make things and fix stuff together.

Another example of problem-solving that falls under developing a belief in the importance of individual effort is making and fixing things. Help children and families get in the habit of discussing problems, sharing ideas and fixing things that break. Problems could include finding lost socks, sewing a hole in a shirt, making our own Playdoh when we are low on funds or taking turns feeding the dog or fish at the same time every day. A four-year old can participate in all these activities. Getting in the habit of solving these kinds of everyday problems prepares folks to participate in the new economy that is grounded in making things and solving problems.

Maker spaces are part of the new economy. Click the link and read the preface of the book Maker City <https://makercitybook.com/preface-building-a-nation-of-makers-9b4dc609530e> to get an idea of what it's all about.

Informal opportunities to make and fix things are available at many libraries, schools, after-school programs, colleges and universities. Some pop-up sites are being established in vacant buildings in small towns and larger cities. Encourage families to engage in available, age-appropriate programs or create opportunities at home and school to make things, fix things and solve problems together.

Activity 3: Puzzles are a good example for working with preschoolers and young children. It allows the child and adult to think together to solve a problem.

Activity 4: Make a game. Collect a variety of containers (water and juice bottles, plastic lunch meat containers, etc.) Encourage the children to match lids to a variety of containers. The more containers and lids you have and the closer they are in size and type increases difficulty and the persistence required to complete the task.

3. **Trust:** Encourage outdoor activities where the whole family or class participates. Laughing together, trying new things and experiencing nature are all ways to build healthy kids and adults. The more we are in nature, the more we are able to reduce stress, increase health and build the capacity to recover quickly from setbacks. Engaging in fun activities that help us develop a greater understanding of ourselves and the world around us is good clean fun.

Activity 1: Listen to Shel Silverstein and Pat Daily make fun of the gruesome task of cleaning fish after a successful outing before a great dinner. Fish Guts– Shel Silverstein and Pat Daily. Underwater Land.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIVfqd8Eol8&index=7&list=PLgl4swHKtNaz3BswvK9T\\_b6g7VAqOjfy1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIVfqd8Eol8&index=7&list=PLgl4swHKtNaz3BswvK9T_b6g7VAqOjfy1) After listening to the song, ask who has gone fishing before? What was it like? What were the best parts? What part of fishing did they not like? What are some things we take with us to keep us safe while fishing? What do you talk about while fishing? What have you learned while fishing? How does it make you feel to go

fishing? Has anyone ever cooked the fish they caught? What did it taste like? Close with asking kids to draw a picture of something they fun they do together with the important adults in their lives.

Activity 2: Have a family supper or fun day at school. Set out yard games like 4-Square, corn hole and kickball. Count off randomly so that families and kids meet other families and kids. Before the games set ground rules that encourage simple fun, laughter and supporting one another. You are reminding adults and children enjoy time together.

Activity 3: Cooperative Games such as:

- **Look Ma, No Hands!** Students try to pass a designated object (Frisbee, stuffed animal, etc.) around the circle without using their hands and without letting the object touch the floor. *Teaching Tip:* Begin with smaller groups of 8-10 students each, so that “wait times” are not too long for younger children. Also, try adding additional objects (of different shapes or sizes) to be passed, so that more children are actively involved.
- **Balloon Bop:** Players (children and adults) stand in a circle—holding hands. A balloon is dropped into the circle and players see how many times they can tap the balloon into the air without losing connection (everyone in the circle must continue holding hands). This will require that the circle move and players work cooperatively to keep the balloon in the air. Players may contact the balloon with hands, arms, heads, shoulders, chests, or knees—but not feet. If the balloon falls to the ground or is touched by feet, start the count over. *Teaching Tip:* Try teaching balloon-tapping skills with children in pairs. (Use interactive modeling to teach and practice light and gentle tapping of the balloon.) Once they are successful at keeping their balloon in the air without dropping their partner’s hands, slowly increase the group size.
- **Hot/Cold** otherwise known as, I Spy. I spy an object that is blue. Players take turns guessing. Hot means close. Cold means far away. Other terms may be used, like getting warmer or getting cooler. This may be done with real objects that are hidden or played using the imagination such as in the car.

4. **Generalized morality.** Morality is about developing and acting on principles that distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. It is about teaching what is good and bad behavior, good choices and bad choices. Help parents and other caring adults understand child development to lessen judgement and increase the likelihood of appropriate adult support.

Activity 1: Play *The Button* game. In this game, children have to determine who is not telling the truth. Which person is holding the button, even though everyone is saying they are not?

Activity 2: Play *Memory Match*. This game requires perseverance, patience and honesty. It is also a game about learning what is right after trial and error, similar to the process of developing character and morality.

Activity 3: Play guessing games that encourage children to guess the correct answer. Guessing encourages trying, failing and trying again. It also encourages children to read clues in the environment such as facial expressions and language cues.

Activity 4: Games with high levels of chance such as Trouble offer easily available opportunities to cheat and high frustration points (like being sent back to the beginning). They offer moments for players to choose between what is right and what is wrong and the use of self-control. It gives adults many chances to talk about the minute-by-minute choices we all have and to offer support in the struggle.

5. **Autonomy:** Autonomy is the ability to govern one's own words and actions. Autonomy is self-control. [Help parents learn to encourage autonomy in their children.](#)

Activity 1: Praise children when they demonstrate self-control and point out areas they need to work on. Listening, knowing when and how to interrupt, anger control, reporting back after completing a task—all require self-discipline. Teach these skills. Model these skills.

Activity 2: Encourage children to take on activities which build self-discipline. Activities like games, learning a skill, caring for a classroom pet, memorizing a poem or helping to keep a space clean are all good opportunities to learn self-control.

Activity 3: When a child receives a reward like a star on a chart or a special treat, talk about self-discipline. External rewards give a great opportunity to talk about internal rewards. The real benefit is not the reward, it's the building of self-discipline. Say things like, *"You are pretty determined and responsible to help get the snacks ready each day."* *"That shows self-discipline."*

Bright Horizons' website has tips to promote the development of autonomy in toddlers. <https://www.brighthouse.com/family-resources/e-family-news/children-developing-independence-right-balance>

6. **Ethic of hard work:** Help kids learn to be hard workers. Work with parents through conversation to help them understand what it takes to raise kids that work hard. Below are a few suggestions parent and grandparents might consider. Do this in your classroom.

Activity 1: Give kids jobs. A toddler can pick up a cup and put it on the table. Put a napkin in the waste basket and put a toy on the shelf. Start early.

Activity 2: Engage children in the task at hand. A 3- year-old can help sweep the floor with a broom their size. A 4-year-old can choose the day's outfit, dress themselves and put things back where they belong. The sooner that kids learn to take care of some things on their own, the more confident they become. Don't do everything for them, even if it is faster in the short-run. Self-confidence comes from being capable of taking care of oneself.

Activity 3: Do chores together as a family or classroom. Work together to plant a pot of flowers. Start the laundry together. A 2-year-old can help carry the dirty clothes to the washer and stand on tippy toes to put a shirt in the washing machine. The more that children see their adults working, the more likely they are to want to work, too.

Activity 4: Tips to help parents and grandparents manage and model the ethic of hard work.

There are a few simple steps that adults can take to manage and model work ethic. Parents and grandparents you work with might be interested in these few simple tips.

1. Write down your appointments in a calendar. Check the calendar after dinner each night to see what is scheduled for the next day. Get together any information you might need so that you are ready to go tomorrow.
2. Be on time. Learn to make it a habit to be where you are supposed to be a little before you are supposed to be there.
3. Develop a chore list. Make sure to do at least two things on your list each day. For example; sweep the floor, change the sheets, wash 1 load of clothes.
4. Use time wisely. Stick with a task until it is completed. Put your children to bed at the same time each night. Earlier is better. Use that time once they're asleep to complete a more complicated chore that they cannot help with.
5. Take care of yourself. Get enough sleep. Eat well. Exercise. Having a good work ethic means having balance in your life and staying healthy. Most young parents find this one extremely difficult, yet the example that is set for their children will last a lifetime.

**7. Thrift:** Thrift is the value of taking care of what you have, saving part of what you earn and taking care not to waste. When we learn to wisely use food, money, time, toys, tools, energy and toilet paper, we are practicing thrift. Being a good steward of the resources we have helps us develop an appreciation of the gifts we are given whether they are material or immaterial, both have value.

Here are some tips to teach kids and their adults how to practice thrift.

- Ask toddlers to put their cup in the sink when they are finished. To teach this habit, do it with them the first few times. Be consistent with your expectation that they do this each time they finish with a dish. After a while, it becomes habit.

- Teach toddlers and other children to pick up their toys when they are finished playing. Tricycles get put where they belong after each use, out of the weather.
- If children are given a gift of money, begin the practice of putting half in the piggy bank or open an account at the bank. This establishes the habit of saving.
- Let kids help clean. Talk about how many paper towels to use when wiping a spill.
- Show kids how many bubbles to add to the bath or dish water. Help them squeeze out just enough. Remind them that when we use just enough and no more, we will have the pleasure of lots more bubble baths and clean dishes.
- Put a small amount of food on the child's plate rather than allowing them to sit with bags or boxes. This teaches portion control and healthy eating habits and establishes the idea of not wasting food we cannot eat at one sitting. Talk to your children about this as you do it.

As adults important to kids (parents, grandparents and teachers) consider these tips about thrift.

- Reflect on your habits. Make a list of your activities for one week. How did you spend your time and money? What did you use (gas, time, money, energy) in doing these activities?
- Save spare change in a jar and take it to the bank when it is full and open a savings account or add it to a savings account you already have.
- Fix things that are broken or sell them to a junk yard or parts store.
- Gather up clothing that no longer fits or is worn out. Give the good clothes away to someone that can use them, turn the others into rags or cut them up to patch holes in blankets, jeans or jackets.
- Turn off the lights when you leave a room. Don't leave the television on unless someone is watching it. Run only the amount of water you need for the task. When rinsing dishes, rinse several at once.
- Keep toys and tools clean, dry and ready for the next use. Clean them up and put them away for safe-keeping each time you use them.

**Other Resources:** There are books available for ages 3-8 years of age that teach a variety of values. Check them out at <http://character-in-action.com/character-products/character-companions-series/#ccs08>

Find cooperative game books for sale from the Northeast Foundation for Children. [\*99 Activities and Greetings\*](#) and another called [\*Energizers!\*](#). These books *include* activities that younger and older students can play in the classroom, outdoors or in a gym.