

# Raising Moral Children

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Parents often wonder why some children seem to have an innate moral compass, while others lack any sense of morality. Why does this happen? Is there some foolproof formula for raising moral children? The good news is—there are many ways that parents can shape the morality of their children. The bad news is—when it comes to raising children, nothing is foolproof!

Even if children are well behaved, honest, truthful, and respectful, they may not yet be moral—they may simply be obedient. So how do we help children to become moral individuals? How can we move from seeking obedience to building morality?

First of all, in order to become moral people, we must recognize our connection to God, to others, to our place in the larger community. If we are unable to relate to God and to others, we care only for ourselves. How, then, can a parent help their child to develop as a moral person?

As with so much of human development, moral development grows over many years and begins with one's developing sense of being connected to other people. From birth, an infant's relationship to others is based on need. An infant needs to be fed, warm, and dry; and other people will fulfill those needs. Early in life, a baby relates to family members from this basis of need.

The first step into an unselfish connection to another is when we invite a toddler to share a toy. It is in this family setting that children become sharing individuals who can relate to others without biting, pushing, pulling hair, or hitting.

In early childhood the ability to choose begins to develop. Toddlers love to choose the clothing they will wear and the foods they will eat. While these choices may sometimes be bothersome to a parent, it is these first choices that lay the foundation for later, more critical choices the child will make.

As children advance in age, they begin to develop their ability to make decisions. Whether sound or flawed, it is these early decision-making attempts that prepare children for the significant decisions they will be called upon to make in the future. Gradually, children develop confidence in their own ability to make good choices.

By the time children are in the middle grades, they are developing the ability to predict the results of their behavior. This means that a child can logically predict the outcomes of particular actions. Although this is an important piece of moral development, it can be problematic for children since they seldom stop to think before they act. This difficulty continues even into adolescence and beyond.

Moral development is a gradual and a lifelong process. Here are some ways that parents can nurture their child's moral growth:

- Help your child develop genuine care and concern for other people both within your family and in the broader community. Foster both the ability to get along with other people and the traits of being a good friend.
- Help your child make good choices. Do not rescind the privilege of choosing in the wake of a poor choice. Simply suggest that your child make a better choice.
- Always affirm good decisions your child makes.
- Remind your child often to stop and think before acting.
- When your child does something wrong, take the time to discuss the situation without anger. Help your child see some of the ways a better choice or decision might have been made and the wrongdoing avoided.
- Be an example of what it means to live as a moral person.