

Developing Moral Competencies:
A Task for Parents and Youth Development Professionals
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You teach your child how to respect others. You teach your child how to behave in public. You teach your child manners at the dinner table. Parents may teach moral development, values, ethics, and character without even knowing or, in most cases, are not focusing on it when there is a strong need to do so. Pace (2003) believes, “the quality and nature of the environments in which children are developing and learning contribute significantly to their ability to understand, internalize, and apply ethical values to the context of their lives,” (p. 249). In addition, most parents be confused because they do not understand how to teach or even define morals, values, ethics and character.

This makes people question; who is responsible for teaching youth moral and ethical values? Is it parents? Is it teachers? Is it youth development professionals, e.g., Boys and Girls Club Program Development Director, 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent, etc.?

With the belief that this generation of youth is more likely to treat their peers poorly, disregard authority figures and rules, and use foul language, many also believe that these youth need more character education in order to positively influence them. Therefore, the responsibility is placed less on the parents and is placed more on the influential and caring adults that the youth work with during their adolescent lives. By working with these adults who have specialized careers in providing youth with the leadership, citizenship and life skills needed they will be more likely to become “physically, emotionally, and morally healthy individuals,” (Pace, 2003, p. 250)

This does not mean that the responsibility should be placed on the youth development professionals entirely. As mentioned by Pace (2003) earlier, “the quality and nature of the environments in which children are developing and learning,” is important. Therefore, moral and ethical development should be encouraged by youth development professionals and supported by parents in the home.

Together youth development professionals and parents can work simultaneously to create morally sound youth by integrating the six Cs of community youth development into the way youth are molded can help create positive youth. The six Cs are as follows and defined below: competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, and contribution.

Supporting an individual’s **competence** includes more than skills and accomplishments but also their cognitive and behavior development. Competence plays a heavy part on the youth’s ability to make moral and ethical decisions in everyday life. Adults working with youth to build confidence should create environments that include reflection, discussion, solving ethical problems with peers and adults (Pace, 2003, p. 256). In order to develop **confidence** in youth, they must be included in their own development by helping them identify themselves, become independent, and realize their self-worth. An important point that Pace (2003) makes is that when it comes to self-esteem, it is necessary to avoid “overemphasizing *feeling* good and underemphasizing *doing* good,” (p. 257). Identity development is crucial as it includes creating one’s personal belief and value system and youth should be given the opportunity to determine what is right and wrong.

Connections must be made between youth and positive influences including adults, family, community, etc. It is not enough that these connections are made but highly important

that these connections positively benefit the youth involved. The opportunity for youth to develop morally arises when they are able to use ethical and moral principles as well as decision-making skills related to social contexts in which they are involved with. The responsibility of providing youth with **character** education has been under debate for many years. Many are starting to believe that it is the responsibility of parents, families, youth organizations, schools, faith-based groups and other organizations as a whole. Although the responsibility may be spread, it is important that those in which youth receive character education from are all teaching similar styles. In addition, in order for youth to develop their character they must be fully active in their moral growth (Pace, 2003, p. 262).

Youth must also be **caring and compassionate** in order to successfully develop. The ability to be empathetic increases an individual's likeliness of acting morally and altruistically. If youth become caring and compassionate then they will be more likely able to work alongside diverse groups of youth and adults. The last skill that youth need to be successful is the ability to make a **contribution** to their community. Youth should strive for meaningful involvement, contribution and learning (Pace, 2003, p. 263). When provided with positive relationships with adults and their peers, youth are able to practice their ethical and moral decision making skills.

The use of the six Cs by parents and youth development professionals can help create healthy, emotional, social, and morally sound youth.

Definitions:

Morals: a system of beliefs and behaviors that are controlled by what is considered right or wrong.

Values: personal beliefs that determine an individual's behavior. These valued beliefs are generally shared by many and they tend to benefit the society as a whole.

Ethics: based on morality and guide how one should act to live a moral life.

Character: decides ones moral choices. This includes moral knowing, moral feeling and moral behavior.

References

Pace, K.L. (2003). The character of moral communities: a community youth development approach to enhancing character development. In F.A. Villaruel, D.F. Perkins, L.M. Borden, & J.G. Keith (Eds.), *Community youth development: programs, policies, and practices* (248-272). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.