

Parents Developing Youth through the Six Cs

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The process of educating our own children to be moral and ethical may not seem like an easy task for parents. Research done by Richard Lerner helps show the need for youth development organizations and support systems to influence the five Cs: competence, confidence, connection, character, caring and a sixth C added by K.J. Pittman, contribution (Perkins, Borden, Keith, Hoppe-Rooney, & Villaruel, 2003, p. 12).

The five Cs defined by Lerner include “(1) competence in the academic, social, emotional, and vocational arenas; (2) confidence in who one is becoming (identity); (3) connection to self and others; (4) character that comes from positive values, integrity, and a strong sense of morals; and (5) caring and compassion” (Perkins et al., 2003, p. 12). The sixth C added by Pittman includes contribution, with youth “contributing to their families, neighborhoods, and communities, and through participating in youth programs, youth are afforded practical opportunities to make use of the other five Cs” (Perkins et al., 2003, p. 12). It may be easier to hand off the responsibility of instilling these six Cs to youth development professionals but here are some ways you as parents can assist:

Youth will develop **competence** in moral thinking, if given the opportunity, especially when they have the chance to reflect, discuss, and solve the ethical problems they face in everyday life. Allow your child to help set the rules they must follow within the household and encourage them to make moral decisions. It is also important to allow them to provide input on the consequences if they were to break those rules.

It is imperative to allow youth to be a part of creating their own moral identity, or the “sense of being or becoming a moral person” (Pace, 2003, p. 256) by doing this you are helping to ensure they become **confident** individuals. Although risk-taking behaviors may not seem like something you would want your child to participate in, it is important that they are given the opportunity to experience these behaviors so that they can effectively learn from their mistakes. Keep in mind that rebelliousness “is often a reaction in adolescence to a demanding conscience at work,” meaning that youth may not be aware of laws and lack morals (Pace, 2003, p. 258).

Providing youth with **connections** gives them more opportunities to apply their ethical knowledge and decision making skills with their families, at school, in their faith, in youth organizations, and within their community. It is important to understand that the “do as I say, not as I do” parenting approach is ineffective, and it is just as important for parents to model the type of character they wish to develop in their children.

In order for youth to develop **character**, work must begin at birth and continue throughout their life. Parents must be sure to include the youth, and all those around them, in the journey to develop their character. It is also important to understand that youth will have a better chance at positive development if the values they hope to achieve are shared by those close to them, and are included in the activities and organizations they are a part of (Pace, 2003, p. 262).

Youth who are **caring and compassionate** are more able to express empathy toward those who have had painful and undesirable life experiences (Pace, 2003, p. 262). In order to achieve this developmental stage, youth must be exposed to individuals who are different than them in order to allow them to become comfortable working with people from different backgrounds.

Lastly, youth must have the encouragement to combine the knowledge gained from the previous five Cs and find an outlet for **contribution** to one's community. Pace (2003) explains, "learning and living ethical values through moral action, service to others, and meaningful contributions are critically important to healthy character development" (p. 263). In addition, youth must be provided with the opportunity to work for something, paid or not, that allows them to meaningfully contribute to their community and learn from their experiences. As parents, it is important to give support and as much freedom as necessary to allow youth to exercise their character and moral development.

By helping to instill these traits in your youth, it will be much easier to work alongside the youth development professionals whom your children will come in contact with.

Pace (2003) states, "adults need character education as much, or more than, the young people whose lives they touch, so that adults may deepen their understanding of the importance of modeling and the role they play in creating social climates that promote character development" (p. 259).

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.
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