

The “Better Angels of Our Nature”

—Abraham Lincoln



*Some things you must never stop refusing to bear.
Injustice and courage and dishonor and shame.
No matter how young you are or how old your have got.*

—William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*

In this blog, I am adding to Faulkner’s suggestion that children, teens, and adults “must never stop refusing to bear”—to include kindness, respect, apology/forgiveness, and integrity.

You may recall that my blog for October, “There is No Debating Civility,” addressed the issue of civility. I follow-up with five resources teachers and others might use for teaching “civility” in the November issue of *News You Can Use*. Next, came the popular November blog, “The Masks of Character,” in which I discussed the virtues of commitment, responsibility, gratitude, perseverance, empathy, and faith.

Tis the season to underscore a few other virtues during this celebration of the holidays.

KINDNESS

Kindness is not an inherited trait; it is a learned behavior.

—Katie Couric

An article in *Scientific American* (February 26, 2009) titled “Forget Survival of the Fittest: It Is Kindness That Counts,” features an interview with Dacher Keltner author of *Born to be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life*. Keltner noted that humans have remarkable tendencies toward kindness, play, generosity, reverence, and self-sacrifice.

The interviewer asked Keltner about “take-aways” from his study. His science-based conclusion was that emotions are “the core of our capacities for virtue like cooperation, love and tenderness,” and that “emotions that bring out the good in others and in one’s self can readily be cultivated” [taught and learned, observed and practiced, modeled and mentored].

In the link below, two elementary school teachers (Pinger and Flook) discuss the HOW question by sharing their lessons from a “kindness curriculum” for young students (K-3).

http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/what_if_schools_taught_kindness

The research suggests that “acts of kindness” may help increase and strengthen student relationships, social engagement, and broaden their social networks.

RESPECT

A child can teach an adult three things: to be happy for no reason, to always be busy with something, and to know how to demand with all his might that which he desires.

— Paulo Coelho

Generally speaking, there are two kinds of respect people reveal through their behaviors—respect for oneself and respect for others. Both are learned behaviors as are all character virtues/traits.

Steve and Lisa McChesney publish and produce a daily self-esteem and self-confidence building newsletter for both children and adults. Lisa is a public school teacher and Steve manages three karate schools. Visit them at <http://www.bullyfreekids.com>.

They say that “schools teach children about respect, but parents have the most influence on how respectful children become. Until children show respect at home, it's unlikely they will show it anywhere else.”

“How can you [parents and teachers] show respect to your child?

- *Be honest. If you do something wrong, admit it and apologize.*
- *Be positive. Don't embarrass, insult or make fun of your child.*
- *Be trusting. Let your child make choices and take responsibility.*
- *Be fair. Listen to your child's side of the story before reaching a conclusion.*
- *Be polite. Use ‘please’ and ‘thank you’.*
- *Be reliable. Keep promises. Show your child that you mean what you say.*
- *Be a good listener. Give your child your full attention.”*

FORGIVENESS (APOLOGY)

*It's not an easy journey to get to a place where you forgive people.
But it is such a powerful place, because it frees you.*

— Tyler Perry

*In this life, when you deny someone an apology,
you will remember it at the time you beg forgiveness.*

— Toba Beta

In an article titled, *Leadership, Equity, and Pandemic*, Joseph Davis (Ferguson-Florissant School District) noted that “many people and communities carry hurt and anger because of racism and injustice, thus learning to feel empathy and build connection between people is key. We need to teach forgiveness....” *Forgiveness*

can't be forgotten, because so many of us have been wronged in so many different ways, and we carry that toxicity with us. We need to learn to forgive people so we can move on, and that allows you to engage and to grow in ways you couldn't before."

Davis also noted that those in "positions of power" should respond to the call for "action" and be ready to set an example in this work. *"It may not be your fault, but it is your fight,"* he said.

<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/education-now>

Author Marlee McKee writes: *"How to apologize can be the key to getting true forgiveness and moving a relationship forward in a positive way."* She offers these seven tips for apologizing sincerely and successfully:

1. *Ask for permission to apologize.*
2. *Let them know that you realize that you hurt them.*
3. *Tell them how you plan to right the situation.*
4. *Let them know that inherent in your apology is a promise that you won't do what you did again.*
5. *After you've talked through things, formally ask them for forgiveness.*
6. *Consider following up with a handwritten note.*
7. *Now it's time for both people to go forth and live out their promises.*

<https://www.mannersmentor.com/gracious-living/how-to-apologize-the-7-steps-of-a-sincere-apology>

INTEGRITY

"Real integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody's going to know whether you did it or not."

—Oprah Winfrey

One of the "better angels" we need watching over us are people who consistently demonstrate that they are **trustworthy, honest, and kind**. Integrity is one of the cornerstones of character. Thus, like other character strengths/trait, we need to work on it, test it, define it, teach it, model it, and practice it.

"What then, are the "traits" of integrity? Here are the main behaviors that reveal if someone has the kind of integrity you want in your colleagues, friends, family, students, coworkers, and leaders.

1. *Taking responsibility for their actions*
2. *Putting others' needs above their own.*
3. *Offering to help others in need.*
4. *Giving others the benefit of the doubt.*
5. *Choosing honesty in all things.*
6. *Showing respect to everyone.*
7. *Manifesting humility.*
8. *Being able to admit they're wrong.*

9. *Showing regular reliability.*
10. *Conveying true kindness.*

<https://www.powerofpositivity.com/integrity-traits/>

A writer put it this way: *“The good news about integrity is that we're not born with it—or without it—which means that it's a behavior-based virtue we can cultivate over time. We can set a goal to show more integrity in everyday life and we can reach that goal by practicing the behaviors above, as well as countless others which too often go unnoticed.”*

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We'd like to hear your **thoughts, questions and feedback**: character@sandiego.edu
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