

# Raising an Ethical Child

Steve Johnson

Markkula Center  
for Applied Ethics  
Santa Clara University

[www.scu.edu/ethics](http://www.scu.edu/ethics)  
[www.scu.edu/character](http://www.scu.edu/character)





# Character Basics

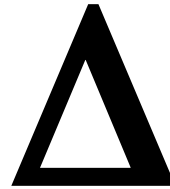
**How is character formed from values, thoughts and skills?**

**What are the ten opportunities parents, caregivers and teachers have to influence the character of people they care about?**

# Character

- The sum of my virtues and my vices.
- Who I am today as a result of everything I have become and overcome in my life so far, plus what I become and overcome today.
- The kind of human being that I am.
- Who I am.

## CHARACTER FORMATION



### VALUES

1. Role Models
2. Legends
3. Stories
4. Reinforcement

### THOUGHT

1. Problem Solving
2. Real: Undistorted
3. Reflection
4. Frameworks

### SKILLS

1. Coping
2. Cooperation

# Values

# Role Models



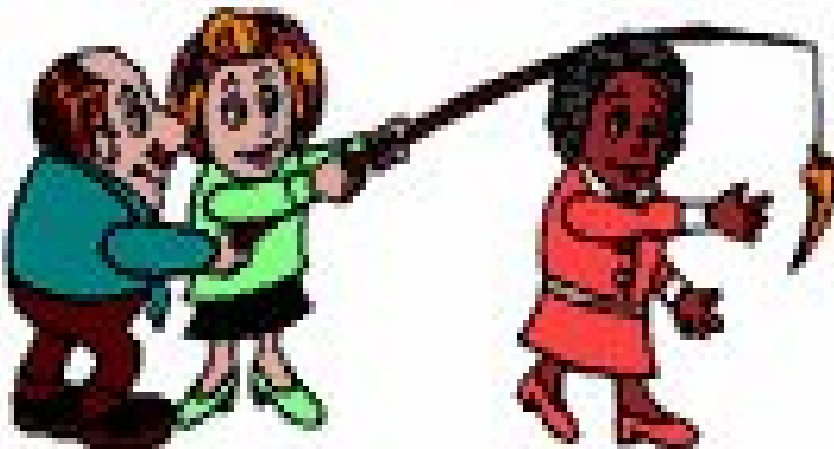
1. **Parents**
2. **Other adults**
3. **Peers**
4. **Mass media**

# Legends and Heroes



1. **Media, entertainment, sports**
2. **People you know and can learn from**
3. **Unknown effects**

# Reinforcement



- People value what they desire to get and avoid getting



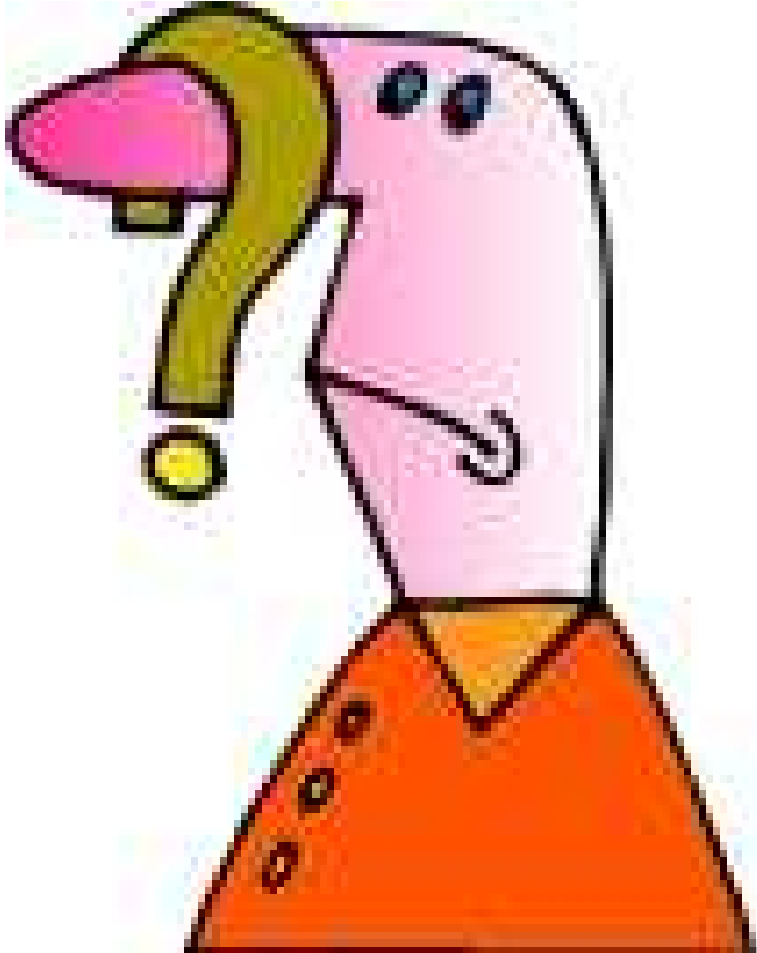
# Narrative: Stories



- Family stories
- Bedtime stories
- Novels, poems, plays, biography
- TV, films, videogames
- Peer stories

# Thoughts

# Problem Solving



1. Identify problem
2. Define
3. Brainstorm solutions
4. Choose solution
5. Implement
6. Check solution

# Reflection



- Learning from experience
- Levels of reflection from surface to deep
- Ability to acquire wisdom

# Frameworks



- Ability to use formal ethics frameworks when I genuinely don't know what to do

# Thinking straight



- Avoiding cognitive distortions like all or nothing thinking, mollification or entitlement.

# Skills

# Coping



- Anger control
- Emotional management
- Impulse restraint



# Cooperation



- Social skills
- Language routines
- Skills to get along
- Success skills

My kids?



Can we impact the character of our children?



My kid?

Can we impact the  
character  
of our kids?

# A Simple Framework

If I **do**/**don't do** this:

1. What kind of person do I become?
2. Will I do more good or harm?
3. Will I treat others with dignity and respect?
4. Will I be fair and just?
5. Will the community, as a whole, be better off?

# Thinking straight



- Avoiding cognitive distortions like all or nothing thinking, mollification or entitlement.

# Skills

# Coping



- Anger control
- Emotional management
- Impulse restraint

# Cooperation



- Social skills
- Language routines
- Skills to get along
- Success skills



# WHAT WON'T AND WHAT WILL GET YOU IN THE CONVERSATION

Pair up with one other  
person and decide who will  
be “A” and who will be “B”

# WORKING WITH A PARTNER

- A: talk about something that is really important to you.
- B: gradually back away from A.

# WORKING WITH A PARTNER

- B: talk about something that you need.
- A: do everything but listen: answer your cell phone, comb your hair, check your makeup, look in your organizer, etc.

# WORKING WITH A PARTNER

- A: talk about something totally trivial and unimportant that happened.
- B: be so empathic and understanding that you actually scare A.

# WORKING WITH A PARTNER

- B: talk about something that happened today.
- A. maintain direct eye contact at all time no matter what happens.

# WORKING WITH A PARTNER

- A: talk about a problem.
- B: don't let A finish, or even fully explain the problem; as soon as you have any idea what it is, start giving advice; don't worry about whether it makes any sense, just advise, advise, advise.

# WORKING WITH A PARTNER

- B: talk about a problem.
- A: whatever it is, top A. If A cut his or her finger, you lost your arm, etc.

# WORKING WITH A PARTNER

- A: Talk about a problem.
- B: Point out how this is completely A's fault, sparing no details. Extra points for sarcasm.



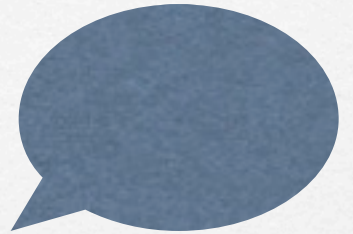
# WORKING WITH A PARTNER

- B: talk about a problem.
- A: point out that none of your other children, nephews, nieces, friend's children, have this problem, no one else is having this difficulty; it is only you.

# How can I communicate effectively?

**By being available and credible;**

- we have to be willing to talk to kids
- when they want to talk,
- about what they want to talk about.



# How can I communicate effectively?

**Don't eyeball:  
maintain a triangle  
when you want to talk.**

