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Letters to New Leaders

Letter 5



Adding Character to Your 4-H Club Program

In this letter you'll find:

- Suggestions for teaching the Six Pillars of Character
- Suggestions for modeling the Six Pillars of Character

Dear Leader,

This letter will answer some questions you may have about the 4-H character education program. This letter will also give you some tools and ideas you can use to teach and model as you work with youth. The foundation for the 4-H character education program is the Josephson Institute's CHARACTER COUNTS!sm Initiative. The initiative is based on Six Pillars of Charactersm: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.

Here are brief definitions of Six Pillars of Character:

Trustworthiness

- **Honesty** – Tell the truth; be sincere.
- **Loyalty** – Stand by, stick up for and protect your family, friends, school and country. Be a good friend; keep secrets of those who trust you. Don't betray a trust; don't ask a friend to do anything wrong or spread rumors or gossip that could hurt others.
- **Promise keeping** – Honor your words and commitments, do what you are supposed to do, be dependable, return what you borrow and pay your debts.
- **Integrity** – Stand up for your beliefs; follow your conscience; be honorable and upright; live by your principles no matter what others say. Have the courage to do what is right.

Respect

- **Nonviolence** – Solve disagreements, deal with anger peacefully and without violence. Don't use

threats or physical force to get what you want or to express anger.

- **Golden Rule** – Treat others the way you want to be treated. Value and honor all people for themselves, not for what they can do for you or to you. Don't use or manipulate others or abuse, demean or manipulate anyone.
- **Tolerance and Acceptance** – Judge others on their character, abilities and conduct, not on such matters as race, religion, gender, where they live, how they dress or the amount of money they have. Be tolerant, respectful and accepting of those who are different from you.

Responsibility

- **Duty** – Acknowledge and meet your moral and legal obligations.
- **Accountability** – Accept responsibility for the consequences of your choices, not only what you do but what you don't do. Think about consequences for yourself and others before you act. Set a good example. Don't look the other way when you can make a difference.
- **Self-control** – Take charge of your own life. Set realistic goals. Keep a positive outlook. Know the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do.
- **Pursue Excellence** – Do your best. Persevere. Work hard.





Fairness

Be open-minded and impartial. Hear people out, listen to them and consider what they have to say. Be fair and just; treat people equally. Make decisions without favoritism or prejudice.

Don't take more than your fair share nor take advantage of or blame others unfairly.

Caring

- **Concern for Others** – Be compassionate and sympathetic. Be kind, and considerate. Be thankful and express gratitude for what other people do for you. Forgive others for their shortcomings. Don't be mean, cruel or insensitive.
- **Charity** – Give time, money, support and comfort just for the sake of making someone else's life better, not for praise, reward or gratitude. Help people in need.

Citizenship

- **Respect authority and the law** – Play by the rules. Observe just laws. Honor and respect principles of democracy.
- **Be a volunteer** – Help your school and community be better, cleaner, safer. Protect the environment. Participate in making things better. Vote, serve on committees and pay taxes.

Once you have reviewed, studied and internalized these concepts, please try to incorporate them in everything you do with youth. If you feel you need more information or training for the 4-H character education program in Louisiana, please contact your parish CHARACTER COUNTS! coordinator at the LSU AgCenter Extension Office.

Ways to Teach the Six Pillars of Character

Our Words of the Week calendar is available through the LSU AgCenter Extension employee who coordinates CHARACTER COUNTS! for your parish. Each month of the school year, we would like for everyone in our state to focus on the same Pillar of the Month. Please discuss the pillar when you are working with members, parents and other volunteers. Incorporate

the word in your club meetings, while traveling with members or when assisting with projects. Each month, display posters created by members, if possible, that define and illustrate the pillar of the month wherever you meet or work with groups or individuals.

Use character education materials developed and made available by the LSU AgCenter to present character-building activities. Such materials include two series of activity-based lessons for pre-K through high school titled *Exercising Character in Schools* and *Exercising Character in the Community*, a series of seven lessons titled *Showing Character* written for livestock project participants and their parents, and several other easy-to-use items. Your parish CHARACTER COUNTS! coordinator can provide a complete list of these materials and perhaps have materials for you to preview. The lessons in the kits are simple to follow and can be prepared and presented by youth as well.

Adding Character to Your Club Meetings

We cannot reinforce good character often enough. You can have the pillars or posters on the wall for each meeting, or at least the pillar of the month. Assign one of the words to each of your officers and committee chairs. Have them use the word during their club reports and presentations. Members can learn CHARACTER COUNTS! songs and teach to younger children. Lyrics and music can be ordered from the CHARACTER COUNTS! Web site, www.charactercounts.org. Your parish LSU AgCenter Extension office may have copies of some of these.

You might emphasize "trustworthiness" and "responsibility" in conducting a club fund-raising project. Emphasize "responsibility, caring and citizenship" when planning, conducting and reporting on community service activities. If your club uses campaign speeches as part of the officer election process, you might have your candidates base their speeches on the six pillars.

Use the six pillar language when instructing members on how to conduct themselves in meetings, while working with their projects and when participating in 4-H activities. Conduct an educational program at a club meeting on good decision-making skills using the six pillars. Have members prepare short skits for

meetings using the Exercising Character lessons that focus on ethical behavior: doing the right thing. Use examples of what you observe members doing at meetings and 4-H activities to reinforce positive and negative behavior. Recognize members who are "doing the right thing."

Initiate and involve youth in community service activities as part of citizenship, caring and responsibility.

Host a parents' night where you introduce the six pillars to them. Conduct impromptu skits involving members and parents using the Exercising Character activities. Encourage parents to reinforce the six pillars at home.

Have members nominated for demonstrating the appropriate behaviors of the pillar for that month. Give awards at the end of the year 4-H achievement program for those who have demonstrated they are 4-H members of character.

How to be a 4-H Leader of Character

As important as teaching the six pillars is, nothing will have long-term impact on 4-H members unless they observe adults who model desired behavior daily. It is essential that 4-H leaders be individuals of integrity. Make a decision to commit to be such a model.

- Act trustworthy – Be honest with your members and follow through with all promises you make.
- Show respect. Be respectful of your members (even when they get on your nerves), listen to their suggestions and involve them in your decision making.
- Act responsible. Set realistic goals for your club and yourself, follow through with your commitments and know the difference between doing things right and doing the right thing.
- Show fairness. Be open-minded and impartial, listen to all of your members and be consistent in your decision making.
- Be caring. Show your members how to care for others and their community, show your members you value them and show sensitivity to your members.

- Model good citizenship. Encourage your members and parents to play by the rules, share ownership for your 4-H club with your members and involve your members in the 4-H citizenship project and 4-H activities.
- Hold members accountable for the decisions and mistakes they make. Let members experience the consequences for not following through with their responsibilities. Be firm, fair and compassionate. If you realize your actions have been unfair at anytime, be willing to apologize and correct your error. If at all possible, take extra time and give special consideration to members with special needs.
- Never raise your voice or lose your composure with judges, activity and event coordinators or staff. When settling disagreements or conflicts, use six pillar language to defuse the situation. Walking your talk can be challenging and demanding. But your actions are the most powerful message you can give your members. Have fun with your 4-H club, celebrate good work and reinforce perseverance!

This is what 4-H is all about: the personal development of the boy and girl.

Welcome to the world of 4-H!
4-H volunteer leaders are lay faculty of the LSU AgCenter and Southern University

