

Add Character To Your 4-H Club



Quick Character Education Activities For Monthly 4-H Meetings

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“Everything you do sends a message about who you are and what you value.”

Have you ever thought about what message your actions are sending? The quote above is by Michael Josephson who founded the CHARACTER COUNTS! program, and his quote is a good reminder that our actions do send a message to others about our values.

Hi, my name is Danika Gordon, and I am a member of the Crow Peak Valley Rangers 4-H Club in Spearfish, South Dakota (Lawrence County). Throughout the 2013-2014 4-H year, I served as the Character Education Coordinator in our club. This was a new officer position we created for the year to help share the important message of Character Education with members at each monthly 4-H meeting.

Using several Internet resources, I developed a monthly lesson/activity focused on one of the six pillars of character – **Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship**. The lessons were about 5 minutes long and added some fun – as well as thoughts to ponder – to our 4-H club meetings.

I have put together this Character Education Idea Booklet to encourage other 4-H Clubs across South Dakota to add a Character Education lesson and/or officer position to their monthly club meetings. In this booklet there are two activities for each of the six pillars of character, for a total of 12 lesson ideas. On page 9 of this booklet you’ll find a listing of websites where you can find more activities related to Character Education.

An additional idea for your 4-H club to share Character Education with youth in the community may be to combine a few of these lessons into a mini-workshop for elementary and middle school students. I have presented Character Education activities to students in the after-school program and in the summer library program. These workshops were very well received and helped reach a youth audience outside 4-H.

Working with my club, we also held a “Character Counts Carnival” for about 60 youth in the summer program in Spearfish. We had six activity stations – one for each of the six pillars of character. The students were divided into six groups and rotated to each station to do a Character Education activity led by 4-H club members. It was a great opportunity for leadership and learning.

I believe that through efforts to build character and leadership among ourselves and others, we can reduce bullying and poor choices and make a positive impact in the world. I hope you and your 4-H club will join me in reminding others that CHARACTER COUNTS!

Danika Gordon
Crow Peak Valley Rangers 4-H Club

Trustworthiness

Activity 1 – Building a tower of trust.

- Ask for 10 volunteers. Give them each a Jenga block with a piece of masking tape on it.
- On the tape ask them to write with a Sharpie an example of an activity that builds people's trust in others. *Examples, show up on time, don't gossip, tell the truth/be honest; don't cheat, don't steal, be loyal, be reliable, etc.*
- Ask each individual to share what they wrote, and briefly discuss how that character quality builds trust. Then have the volunteers stack their blocks one on top of the other on a table in front of the meeting area.
- Discuss the fact that this great tower has been built based on all those trustworthy traits. Emphasize that it can take a long time to build a reputation like that.
- But then what happens if one day, the person tells a little white lie? Take one of the blocks off the top of the tower.
- Then, what if you were supposed to do your homework, but you watch TV instead. Take another block off the top of the tower.
- Then the person steals something from someone else at school. Take a block out of the middle of the tower and watch it topple.
- Explain to the group that trust is something that can be lost in an instant because of one bad choice. And it can take a long time to rebuild that tower of trust.
- Remind them that honesty, keeping promises, being loyal and having integrity – which all add up to being trustworthy – are always the best policy as they build their character.

Activity 2 – Can you keep a lie going?

- Give each student a balloon; ask them to blow it up and tie it off. If the group is small, try to give each person a different color balloon. If the group is larger, have them carefully write their initials or some identifying mark on the balloon so they know it is theirs.
- Have everyone hold their balloon and stand in a circle in an open area in the room (or outside if the weather is nice).
- Tell them that their balloon represents a LIE that they have told. On the count of three, have them throw their balloon into the air toward the center of the circle and then follow it and try to keep it afloat.
- If their balloon touches the ground, their lie has been discovered and they are “out.”
- Once everyone's balloon has touched the ground, discuss the following questions:
 - While the “lies” were out there in the air, was there a lot of chaos? Was it hard to keep up with the lie and keep it going?
 - Did you help other people keep their lies in the air? In real life do you sometimes get asked to help keep someone's lie or secret? Is that a good idea?
 - Wouldn't things be easier if we just told the truth all of the time?
 - When you tell a lie, what does it do to your character?

Respect

Activity 1 - What does your R stand for?

- Print a copy of a large R on an 8x11 sheet of paper (See Appendix page 1 for example). Take to the meeting to display.
- Show everyone the giant R and explain that just like Superman has an S on his chest, we each have an imaginary R on ours. The question is does your R stand for Respect or Rudeness?
- Then explain that the answer is based on our actions toward others. The R for Respect shines through when we say thank you to someone; hold the door open for someone or when we listen without interrupting. Ask for other examples that show respect.
- Then say: Let's see what happens to the R when Rude actions take place.
- Give each participant a sticky note and ask them to write an example of being rude –either when they were rude or someone was rude to them.
- Ask volunteers to share their example. Once they do, have 4 or 5 volunteers come up and put their sticky note on top of the giant R.
- Explain that the R for Respect is starting to get covered up by the Rude actions – and Respect is no longer shining through.
- Conclude by reminding them to think of the imaginary R on their chest each day and make sure their actions allow Respect to shine through.

Activity 2 – Admire each other's differences.

- Draw a squiggly line on an 8x11 sheet of paper. (See Appendix page 2 for example). Make enough copies of this paper with the line on it for everyone attending the meeting.
- Tell the group you have a fun activity for them – you will be handing out a sheet of paper to everyone with a unique line drawn on it. As you hand out the sheets of paper, tell participants they are NOT to let anyone else see their sheet of paper (*you do not want them to know they all got the exact same line to work from.*)
- Their assignment is to turn the line on their paper into an object or a picture. The only rule is that they SHOULD NOT look at anyone else's paper. Give about 1 to 2 minutes for them to sketch a picture with a pen or pencil. (You want them to do it quickly.)
- Have each participant then find a partner and discuss what they drew.
- If time allows have participants quickly share their creations with the entire group.
- To wrap up, say: By now you've probably noticed we all started with a squiggly line that was exactly the same. But, because we are each different people, we were able to turn that line into its own unique object/picture.
- Also say: This is a great reminder in realizing that we each have similarities, but we also have differences, and it is important to respect those differences because they are what make people and the world unique and special.

Responsibility

Activity 1 - Everyone plays an important part.

- Open by having a student play a scale – up and down – on a musical instrument (such as a trumpet, clarinet, or piano.)
- Say: Didn't that sound beautiful! But what would happen if a few notes were missing in the scale? Let's listen...
- Have the student play the scale up and down again, but skip 3 or 4 notes.
- Ask: Did that sound as nice? I think we all agree it didn't. Some of the important notes were missing.
- Now, let's think of those notes on the scale as people – each note or person has an important responsibility to do their job or assignment. When they don't complete their responsibility, things often don't turn out as nice AND it affects the outcome for others.
- Conclude by saying: Remember, that like the music notes in a scale – or a song – everyone plays an important part.

Activity 2 – The more the merrier – and easier!

- Ask everyone to stand in a circle. A simple game of “hot potato” will be played by gently throwing a ball to someone else in the circle. The object of the game is to keep the ball moving quickly. Remember to treat the ball like a “hot potato.”
- If someone does not catch the ball/drops it; they are out of the game and must step out of the circle. **HOWEVER**, the circle should stay the same size, and the gaps created by those who are out of the game should be left as is.
- The game continues until there is only one person left.
- At the conclusion of the game, ask the players to discuss the following questions:
 - How was the game at the beginning when everyone was in the circle?
 - As fewer people were in the circle to play the game, did it get more challenging – maybe even a little stressful?
- Conclude by noting that when everyone is working together and taking care of their responsibilities all tasks are easier. When just a few people have to do most of the work, tasks become less fun and much harder. So remember to do your part and be responsible.

Fairness

Activity 1 – Being fair makes “cents.”

- Stack ten pennies on top of each other, in another stack place two nickles on top of each other, then place a dime beside the two stacks.
- Ask the group what the value is of each stack? (Each is 10 cents) Discuss that even though each set of coins looks different, they all have the same value.
- Say: This is the same with people. Although we may look different on the outside – some people are short, or tall, or have different skin and hair color – we are all of equal value and deserve to be treated fairly.

Activity 2 – Fairness & Feelings.

- Announce to the group that everyone who is wearing red (or some other color) may come forward and have a piece of candy.
- Most likely, there will be some unhappy people in the group who do not get a piece of candy. Ask them what it feels like when they are not treated fairly? *Before continuing make sure everyone receives a piece of candy, so they've been treated fairly* 😊
- For discussion, ask the group what sporting events would be like if there were not rules to keep things fair?
- Ask what are some other examples where it is important to have fair rules in place? (Examples: Elections, courtrooms, government processes, etc.) Emphasize that rules and laws exist to help protect everyone so that they are treated fairly.
- Discuss when a situation is not fair, what might be some good solutions for solving the lack of fairness? For instance :
 - If there is not enough candy for everyone, what should be done?
 - If someone is cheating on a test or project, what should be done?
 - Ask for other situations where students see a lack of fairness...
- On a dry erase board or poster board, write these quotes and then also discuss what they mean:
 - “It is not fair to ask of others what you are not willing to do yourself.” – Eleanor Roosevelt.
 - A single penny fairly got is worth a thousand that are not.
– German proverb
 - Cheat the earth and the earth will cheat you.
– Chinese proverb
- Conclude by reminding the students to think about the importance of Fairness in their own actions and their actions toward others.

Caring

Activity 1 – Caring chases away the blues.

- Fill a clear glass jar one-fourth full with water. Fill another jar about half or three-fourths full with bleach.
- Ask the audience if they've ever had a "Blue" day – one of those days where you got in a fight with your parents or siblings; you couldn't find your homework; you were late getting to school. As you say each item, put a couple drops of blue food coloring into the jar with water – then stir to tint the water blue. Say, "all those things added up to make you kind of sad and blue."
- Ask: How can you fix that sad and blue feeling? Maybe your mom gives you a hug. You find your homework! Or a friend tells you they care about you.
- Hold up the jar with the bleach and say: This represents all the kind and caring things people do to help us feel better.
- Pour it into the jar with the blue tinted water and stir – let it settle and the water should go back to clear.
- To conclude, say: Caring for ourselves and others can help chase away the blues.
- Have everyone put their arms on their opposite shoulders and give THEMSELVES a bear hug. Remind them that even when no one else is around, they can always give themselves a bear hug to remind them that people care.

Activity 2 – Give the gift of caring.

- Ask: Do you think one simple kind and caring act could change the world?
- Have the group ponder that question as you read one of the following books:
 1. *Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed* by Emily Pearson
 2. *Because Amelia Smiled* By David Ezra Stein

**both books are available via Amazon.com or see if your local library can get them.*

**The story in each book starts with a kind act, then follows how it impacted the next person and the next person and the next person and ultimately came back to the original person who did the kind and caring deed.*
- Discuss the story that was read. Ask if anyone has ever experienced a caring act that really made a difference. Discuss what the world would be like if everyone would find ways to do more caring deeds.
- Conclude by giving each person a notecard and ask them to write a "Card of Caring" to someone –thank a teacher, a grandparent, a 4-H supporter; or encourage a friend or fellow 4-H'er etc. If possible, have students personally deliver their card.

Note: even if a book isn't available for this activity, discuss how acts of caring can positively impact the world, and write the "Cards of Caring" to others.

Citizenship

Activity 1 – Links of citizenship.

- Open by asking “What does being a good citizen mean?” Listen to input given by participants. (Examples, vote, obey laws, pick up litter, etc.)
- Also ask for participants to discuss/share thoughts on what their school or community would be like if people were NOT good citizens.
 - Examples, no one would follow rules, crime could increase, driving would be less safe because speed limits aren’t enforced, trash and garbage would pile up, etc.
- Emphasize that citizenship encompasses:
 1. Caring about your community and country.
 2. Being responsible and respectful to people, animals and the environment.
 3. Being informed about the needs in your school, community and country.
 4. Doing your best to make your home, school and community a better place.
- Hand out a strip of paper (approx. 8 inches long and 1 inch wide) to each person in attendance. Ask them to write a good citizen example or action on the paper. Then staple the links together to create a “citizen chain.” Hang it on display in the meeting room.
- Conclude by saying: This chain reminds us that in a community we are all connected and we must all work together as good citizens to make it a great place to live.

Activity 2 – What kind of a “citizen” are you?

- Display a very large potato, a very small potato, two matching potatoes, a potato with several “eye” specks, and a sweet potato on a table at the front of the meeting room.
- Remind those attending the meeting that citizenship is about being involved to make your community better. But unfortunately, sometimes people do not strive to be the best citizen they could be. And these “tators” are going to help show some examples of that.
- Ask: Have you noticed that some citizens are always telling others what to do, instead of pitching in and helping? Hold up the large potato and say: This bossy citizen is acting like a dic-tator .
- Ask: Or, have you noticed a citizen who has a lot of comments about everything, but they also are not willing to be too helpful? Hold up the small potato and say – This citizen is a commen-tator.
- Then, hold up the two identical potatoes and say: Then there are those who only want to do what everyone else is doing. These citizens are imi-tators.
- Then hold up the potato with the eye specks and say: Or maybe you know some citizens who watch everyone else do the work, but they don’t get involved. They are the spec-tators.
- Conclude by holding up the sweet potato and say: Last, but by no means least, is this “Sweet Potato.” It looks a lot like the other potatoes, but on the inside it is a different color and has a sweeter taste. A good citizen is a lot like this – they have a heart of gold that is sweet and caring and gets involved in their community.

Additional Resources

For more Character Education ideas, visit these websites:

SDSU Extension Pillar Activity Quickies

<http://www.sdstate.edu/sdsuextension/4hyd/CC/activities/pillar-activity-quickies.cfm>

CHARACTER COUNTS! Lesson Plan Bank

<http://charactercounts.org/lesson-plans/index.html>

CHARACTER COUNTS for 4-H Clubs (*Includes Roll call suggestions, presentation ideas, community service ideas, meeting activities and recreation ideas*)

<http://www.uwyo.edu/4-h/character-counts/tote-forclubs.pdf>

Dilworth School Character Education Classroom Activities

<http://schools.cms.k12.nc.us/dilworthES/Pages/Character%20Education.aspx>

Character Education Videos to Discuss and Share:

Stu Cabe : “The Big Elephant Story”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBGEon6sMb8>

Will Bowen: “How to Become Complaint Free”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNXR_TL2Fvk

DeWitt Jones: “Celebrate What’s Right With the World”

<http://www.celebratewhatsright.com/film>

Character Education Quotes to Discuss and Share:

SDSU Extension Foundations for Life Essay Contest Maxims (*click on manual pdf*)

<http://www.sdstate.edu/sdsuextension/4hyd/CC/essaycontest/index.cfm>

CHARACTER COUNTS! Quotations Bank

<http://josephsoninstitute.org/quotes/>

***** Special Request*****

If your club uses some of the Character Education activities in this booklet, visits some of the resources listed above, or adds a Character Education Coordinator officer position to your club, please contact Danika so she can track the reach and influence that this booklet has. You can email her at office@gordonresources.com.

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