

# TEACHING YOUR KIDS ABOUT INTEGRITY

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Integrity means to be of sound moral character. It means to do the right thing whether anyone is looking or not. In other words, it means being incorruptible. It also means our word is our bond. We are committed to our promise, even if something better does come along. When we demonstrate integrity, we have reached a high level of maturity.

We are not born with integrity. It is a value based on honesty and developed over a lifetime. It requires clear and consistent training from those who also demonstrate integrity. In many situations society challenges our quest for it. Many do not appreciate that integrity works both ways. For example, John discovers he has been overcharged at the grocery store. Of course he will request a refund. However, if John finds that he has not been charged for an item, will he go back and pay for it? A person with integrity would, no matter how small the undercharge was. The store assistant may be very surprised at 'such honesty', but this reaction just shows how society has drifted away from what should be a given.

I heard a story about a builder who was almost ready to retire. Joe had always prided himself on being a good employee and his boss rewarded him for good workmanship. With only two months to go before his last paycheck, Joe's boss asked him to build one more house. Joe was really annoyed and told the boss that building this house would push him beyond his retirement date. The boss insisted, so with a poor attitude, he threw the house together. He took short cuts where they wouldn't be seen and covered them by plasterboard and paint. Oh yes! He would show his boss not to trifle with his plans! When the job was finished, the boss handed him the front door key. "This is my gift to you, Joe. You have worked hard and long and I truly appreciate your integrity. Enjoy your retirement."

Integrity means that our word is our bond, and that we fulfill our obligations to the best of our ability as and when promised. As we deal with people on a daily basis, we find that many will not commit themselves. We might ask them if they would like to come to a gathering in our home. We get replies that range from, "Yes, we will come", to, "I think so", to "We're coming so far." 'So far' means that they are coming so far as nothing better comes along. This leads me to wonder why people are afraid to commit themselves. Will they be disappointed? Will they HAVE to go once they say they will? Have they had some bad experience? Were their parents non-committed? Should they keep their options open just in case? Are they waiting for God to give them the OK?

Lawrence Kohlberg is a well-known behavioral researcher who has extensively studied the moral development of children. He described clear stages of moral development. He says that in the earliest stage children choose not to do wrong because of the fear of punishment by God or their parents. As they develop more into their teens they have more experience and knowledge and start to reason things through. They make more educated decisions because they develop a sense of 'good', 'fair', and 'right'. As they interact with society and have greater responsibilities they understand that rules and laws are created for the greater good. They see themselves being part of a bigger world. The highest level of Kohlberg's moral development is when a person makes decisions based on drawing from his own understanding of what is right, rather than not breaking the law, purely out of fear of the consequences. Age means nothing. It is our level of understanding that creates maturity and, therefore, integrity.

Kids need to understand why we have rules, boundaries and expectations. They need to be trained, and they need to experience consequences when they make inappropriate choices. Praise should be liberally given when wise choices are made. Parents need to display integrity consistently. It is one of our most important personal values. When integrity is compromised, memories are very long.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at [sally@forefrontfamilies.org](mailto:sally@forefrontfamilies.org). We invite you to also check out our website at [www.forefrontfamilies.org](http://www.forefrontfamilies.org) and our blog site at [www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com](http://www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com) for further assistance.