

Wyoming 4-H: Character – That’s What We’re Made Of

Good character is not hereditary or automatic. It’s developed by example and practice. One way or another, young people pick up the values that form their character – it might be through watching T.V., it might be through examples they see at home, it might be a result of watching YOU! Everyone who interacts with youth plays an important role in how youth grow into individuals with good character. Being a role model is not a volunteer position. If you work with young people, you are a role model and only you can decide what kind of role model you will be.

CHARACTER COUNTS! Is a framework built around 6 pillars of character that teaches young people to make sound moral judgments. The 6 pillars are: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship. **CHARACTER COUNTS!** also encourages all adults to become more involved in helping youth develop positive character traits. Use the **TEAM** (Teach, Enforce, Advocate and Model) approach to guide the young people in your life to become a person of good character. Here are some examples of what YOU can do:

- ✓ **Teach** children that character counts – that their success and happiness will depend on who they are inside, and not what they have or how they look. Tell them that people of character know the difference between right and wrong because they guide their thoughts and actions by some basic rules of living.
- ✓ **Enforce** the importance of rules and policies - Praise good behavior and discourage bad behavior by imposing fair, consistent consequences that prove you are serious about character. Show courage and firmness by enforcing the core values when it is difficult or costly to do so.
- ✓ **Advocate** for character - Don’t be neutral about the importance of character or casual about improper conduct.
- ✓ **Model** good character - Hold yourself to the highest standards but recognize everyone makes mistakes. The important part is how you behave when you slip – be accountable, apologize sincerely and resolve to do better.

The 4-H program has a wonderful history of helping youth develop characteristics that are described in the 6 pillars of **CHARACTER COUNTS!** We hope that this intentional focus on developing character will enhance the experience youth and adults have in our 4-H program.

I pledge my head to clearer thinking

- ✓ Be open minded
- ✓ Do what is right even if no one else is doing it
- ✓ Pursue excellence in everything
- ✓ Take responsibility for my own actions

My heart to greater loyalty

- ✓ Be a person of high integrity
- ✓ Tell the truth at all times and in all places
- ✓ Be the kind of friend I would like to have

My hands to larger service

- ✓ Volunteer in the community
- ✓ Protect my neighbor, the environment and our natural resources
- ✓ Promote good citizenship

My health to better living

- ✓ Show concern to others
- ✓ Be kind, considerate and compassionate
- ✓ Treat people fairly
- ✓ Respect myself and those in authority

For my club, my community, my country and my world**

- ✓ I will use my abilities to “Make the Best Better” for everyone

We talked about what you can do as an individual to nurture the development of positive character. Here are some examples of ways to use CHARACTER COUNTS! in YOUR 4-H CLUB:

- ✓ Use the pillar of the month as roll call
- ✓ Use pillars to come up with rules for the club
- ✓ Talk about pillars when an issue relating to one comes up
- ✓ Do character building activities that can be used in the fair (ex: citizenship workbooks)
- ✓ Help members, parents and leaders recognize how the activities they already do in 4-H develops positive character traits (ex: voicing your opinion in club meetings or supporting your club officers demonstrates citizenship)

As we begin to infuse CHARACTER COUNTS! into our 4-H program we hope that what we learn and how we behave will spill over into our schools, other youth organizations, into the broader communities in which we live. Over the next several months we will develop items that will help you reinforce the importance of living a life of good character.

- Monthly news letter articles – two months will be dedicated to each pillar. The news letter articles will provide background information on each pillar as well as ideas on how to introduce that pillar into your club activities.
 - December – introduction to CHARACTER COUNTS! and the six pillars
 - January – Respect
 - February and March – Responsibility
 - April and May – Fairness
 - June and July – Caring
 - August and September - Citizenship
- A page on the state 4-H web site will be developed as a place for you to find additional information and activities around CHARACTER COUNTS!
- A recognition model will be developed to emphasize each pillar and provide you an opportunity to recognize young people and adults who demonstrated their good character.

Have fun with CHARACTER COUNTS! and be proud of the character traits we are helping 4-H members develop. Imagine what our society could be like if decisions were made with the 6 pillars of character in mind.

**4-H Pledge with CHARACTER COUNTS! was prepared by Carol A Gehrs, Show Me Character for the Club, University of Missouri, 4-H Center for Youth Development

CHARACTER COUNTS! is a service mark used by the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics.