

Fairness Character Connection

“That’s not fair!!” Sound familiar? It’s commonly heard from people of all ages. We often think of situations that put us at a disadvantage as “unfair.” Although some decisions are clearly unfair, the fact is that there is usually more than one fair choice.

Being fair means you:

- Play by the rules
- Take turns and share
- Keep an open-mind and listen to others
- Avoid taking advantage of others.

Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers

How can I teach my very young child about fairness? Remember, young children are very impressionable. They watch everything you do. If they see you following the rules, sharing with and listening to others and not placing blame, they will likely follow your example. It is important that you model the behavior you want to see in your child.

One important way to build a foundation for teaching fairness is by listening. When your baby babbles, copy her sounds. Not only are you encouraging language development but also character development. Infants who are listened to will learn they are important and valuable and they will be likely to listen to others when they are older.

Fairness is not easy for toddlers to understand. There are a number of things you can do to help them:

1. **Listen** - Get down on their level so they know you are listening.
2. **Share** - Toddlers love to hand toys and other objects to adults which is an early form of sharing.
3. **Rules** - Some of the first rules toddlers learn revolve around safety (don’t touch the stove). This helps set boundaries and helps them begin to understand fairness.

The number of rules may increase as your toddler becomes a preschooler. It is also a good idea to involve them in setting some of the rules.



Fairness Relay Activity

Help your child understand the importance of taking turns by having a relay. Explain that it is important that everyone gets a turn and that we encourage others when they are doing something. Here are some relay suggestions:

- Blow a balloon or feather across the room.
- Carry a ping-pong ball in a large spoon across the room.
- Balance a feather on your head and walk across the room.

School-age, Middle School and Teens

As your child gets older, issues of fairness will be a part of daily life. Help your child to understand that decisions should be made carefully, honestly and objectively. Make sure she understands that you want fairness from her just as she wants fairness from you and others.

Again, modeling fairness is one of the best ways to teach fairness to your child – no matter their age. Since applying the rules of fairness is not always easy or clear, it is important that your child see you making the effort to be open, honest and objective in making decisions.

Walk a Mile Activity

Select an issue or topic you and your child are both interested in – it might be something you have heard on the news or read in the paper. For example, a talented high school basketball player moves into your school during mid-season and promptly replaces one of the original starting five. Discuss the issues from all points of view and consider closely the issues of fairness.

Practicing Fairness 1

Fairness is one of the most difficult Pillars of Character to define clearly. People often see decisions that help them as being “fair” and those that do not as being “unfair.” Fairness is often a matter of perception. Although some decisions are clearly unfair, the fact is there is usually more than one fair choice. Being fair means you:

- Listen to others and try to understand what they are feeling and saying.
- Consider all the facts, including opposing views.
- Use the same standards for everyone in the same situation.



Are you being fair? Make a list of some of your family rules and the consequences of not following them. Ask your children what their rules would be if they were in charge of making them. List these next to the actual rules. Discuss the rules one by one. Ask, "Is this one fair? Why or why not? What would happen if we adopted this rule?" Compare these to the first list in terms of fairness. Decide what will happen if the rules are broken. Consider revising some of the current rules if youth can show how their suggestions are fairer.

Practicing Fairness 2

How many times a day do you proclaim, "That's not fair!"? It seems to be a common statement made by people of all ages. We often see situations that put us at a disadvantage as "unfair." At the very least, fairness means going by the rules, treating everyone the same, and using the same rules for everyone, so no one has an unfair advantage.

Exercises

Invite a group of your friends over and suggest you play a game. Make sure that some of your friends know before hand that the group will be playing the game using different rules than usual. Play the game and watch the reaction of those who don't know the new rules. Be sure to tell them afterward that this was an experiment and not a plan you devised to make them mad. Talk about how it felt to not understand what was going on.

What would you do? One of your 4-H projects is sheep or beef. A requirement for showing market animals at the State Fair is to have a nose print of the animal made several months before the show. While at the Fair you overhear someone saying they switched their animal after the spring nose print was made with a prize-winning animal recently purchased from another state. What would you do? Who is affected by the decision you make? Who is affected by the decision made by the other exhibitor? Why do you think someone would make this kind of switch?

