

# Trustworthiness Character Connection

“I trust you.” Doesn’t it feel great when you know people trust you? Have you ever thought about how you get someone’s trust? You can’t just tell them you are trustworthy. Trust is earned one trustworthy deed at a time, but it can be lost very quickly.

Trustworthiness means:

- Being reliable; do what you say you’ll do
- Having the courage to do the right thing
- Being loyal; stand by your friends
- Being honest
- Not deceiving, cheating or stealing

## ***Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers***

Teaching your child to be trustworthy doesn’t happen overnight. Instead, it is something you should model every day. How do you do that? Consistent interaction. Infants have the capacity to learn from others. The first years of life are trust-building years. Every time you respond quickly and appropriately to your infant’s cries, coos and smiles you are building trust. Children who learn to trust others will build trustworthy characteristics in themselves.

Toddlers need to learn simple rules (don’t touch, etc); they are very interested in property rights (mine!); and they need to see you being consistent. Patience and persistence will help your toddler develop trustworthiness.

Your preschooler can learn about telling the truth, respecting property of others and following through. When you pay attention to and model these behaviors every day, your child will develop into a trustworthy individual.

## ***School-age, Middle School and Teens***

Trust is an especially big deal to a teenager. Teen relationships are vulnerable to real and perceived betrayals of trust. Help your teen understand that trust has two sides. One is to trust, to have faith and confidence in the intentions and actions of others – to believe that he will do the right thing. The other is to be trustworthy – to demonstrate by words and acts that people can trust him



Your child should understand that trustworthiness is a complicated idea but it is essential to meaningful relationships, long-lasting friendships, and successful associations in school and in the workplace. Talk to your child about the four major qualities of trustworthiness and discuss situations that you both face that challenge each of these qualities.

- **Integrity** – being true to yourself and living up to your highest and best personal values
- **Honesty** – telling the truth and doing what is right even if no one else is doing it
- **Promise-keeping** – keeping your word and being dependable
- **Loyalty** – standing by, sticking up for and protecting family, friends and country; being a good friend and looking out for those who care about you

### ***Tower of Trust Activity***

“Towers of trust are built stone by stone; yet no tower is so tall or so strong that it can stand when lies and deceptions undermine the stones at its base.” Talk about this quote with your child. Each of you think about individual actions that build trust and those actions that erode trust. For example, trust builders might be: meeting curfew, coming to watch your teen play ball; going to work on time. Trust eroders might be: saying homework is completed when it really isn’t, promising to help with a school project and then not helping or leaving the car windows open when you were asked to close them.

### ***Practicing Trustworthiness 1***

People with good character are people we can trust. Trust is not automatic. Earning trust takes time, losing trust can happen quickly. Honesty, promise keeping, loyalty and integrity are four elements that are key to building trustworthiness. Use these guidelines for earning and maintaining trust.

- Tell the truth.
- Be sincere. Say what you mean and mean what you say. If you find something that doesn’t belong to you, return it.
- Keep your word.
- Be reliable.
- Return things you borrow.
- Keep private information private.
- Don’t gossip.
- Don’t ask a friend to do something wrong to keep your friendship.
- Stand up for and act on what you believe.
- Do the right thing no matter what you lose in the process.



Are you worthy of trust? Spend some time thinking about how trust is earned and why it is so important. Consider one of the following:

- Your teacher has miscalculated your test score giving you a higher grade than you deserve. What do you do?
- The teacher is in the hall and you need a pencil. There are pencils in the teacher's desk drawer. What do you do?
- You did some work on your 4-H project but when the fair got closer and closer your mom finished the project for you. You go to conference judging and the judge asks you if you completed your project all by yourself? What do you say?

### ***Practicing Trustworthiness 2***

"I trust you." Doesn't it feel great when you know people trust you? Have you ever thought about how you get people to trust you? You can't just tell them you are trustworthy. Trust must be earned by demonstrating honesty, integrity, promise keeping and loyalty. Trust is earned, one trustworthy deed at a time. Think about it like a tower.

- Every time you do something to show you are untrustworthy (miss curfew or not study for a test) a block is removed from near the bottom of the tower that may cause the tower to tumble. You must then start building trust all over again.
- Every time you do something to show you are trustworthy (do your chores, help a friend with homework) a block is added to the top of your tower.

### **Exercise**

You have just made the cover of Honest Confessions magazine. Draw yourself on that cover and list "articles" that indicate in words or pictures some of the stories included in that issue. Here are some suggestions: "When My Parents Trust Me Most," "When I Trust My Parents Most," "I Destroy/Earn My Parents' Trust in Me When I..." and "I Think Trust Is Really Important Because..."

