



## Give Your Children the Gift of Character

Bullying, disrespectful behavior, cheating, tardiness, vandalism, profanity, and drug abuse hinder child development, student achievement, school safety, and public confidence. They can be traced to problems in the development of good character, and character development starts early, in the home. What is character? Character (good or bad) is what we do when no one is looking.

*Character First!* has definitions and information, used with permission from the Character Training Institute at [www.characterfirst.com](http://www.characterfirst.com) to help parents and early care and education providers promote positive behaviors in young children and create a culture that values good character. As you praise and nurture the good character traits observed in your children, you give them gifts that last forever. These gifts are the fundamental qualities of good character. In 2013 the character traits of orderliness, forgiveness, sincerity, virtue, attentiveness, faith, justice, gentleness, responsibility, patience, initiative, and self-control will be featured in the newsletter published by MECC, found on our website at [www.monteloresecc.org](http://www.monteloresecc.org).

Because we think of giving gifts in December, the character trait for this month is GENEROSITY. This month, give your children a gift that you don't have to buy, that doesn't require batteries, that won't wear out – in fact, it will last forever. For the month of December, teach your children to be GENEROUS. The dictionary defines *generosity* as 1: nobility of spirit 2: willingness to give or share 3: magnanimity 4: the quality or fact of being generous. The word generosity is related to the Latin word *genus*, which means "a family or race." Through the family tree, generations are linked by inherited physical and personal tendencies. In a similar way, *generosity* links people together.

Teaching young children to be generous begins first with your own actions. Be a person of good character *yourself* by being GENEROUS (cheerfully managing resources so you can freely give to those in need), as opposed to being stingy. Model generous behavior by giving of your time, love, kindness, and attention. Being generous does not mean only giving material things or money.

This season is a wonderful time to do activities with your children that will help them learn to be generous. Depending on their ages, help them make and decorate Generosity Coupons for gifts they can give to others. These can be as simple (and important) as a hug; a batch of homemade cookies; an offer to help clean up a sibling's room, set the table, or do the dishes; and many other small acts. A wonderful family activity is to volunteer together in ways that will be meaningful to your young children –

maybe simply cleaning up a play area at the park, or visiting a nursing home to sing songs, reminding your children how good it feels to be generous and kind.

Something parents already do, hopefully every day, with their children can encourage generosity: reading books together. Author Carol McCloud has written several books to encourage young children to find happiness through acts of generosity, sharing, and love using terms that very young children can understand, the idea of filling a bucket. One of these is *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?* Nicola Moon's book, *My Most Favorite Thing*, uses simple words and pictures to help very young children see that giving not only makes the recipient of the gift feel good, but the giver feel good, too. And many homes already have a well-worn copy of Marcus Pfister's *Rainbow Fish* that tells the story of the real value of personal beauty and friendship.

So at this time of year, enjoy the intangible gifts of the season with your children and families, especially the gift of generosity.

Written for MECC by Dennis Story