

1. Shaping Character

At a Glance...



Parents will identify the positive strategies and tools for shaping children's character.

Time



45 minutes

Core Concepts



- Children are very impressionable; everything children hear and see affects their character.
- Parents are the primary protectors of their children's impressionable mind.

Objectives



Participants will:

- Identify forces that will influence values.
- Select ways for their children to interact with a positive message.

Materials



- ☐ Paper and pencils
- ☐ Flip chart with markers or chalkboard with chalk
- ☐ Small party-favor-sized portions of clay or dough (two portions per participant)
- ☐ Assorted shapes and colors of confetti (e.g., shaped like notes, people, books, animals, as well as like dots.)
- ☐ Wax paper sheet, one per participant
- ☐ Tape or CD assortment, including tapes with a "parent advisory" warning
- ☐ CD or cassette player
- ☐ Assortment of children's reading material (comics, magazines, workbooks)
- ☐ "What is Character and How Is It Formed?" handout (E-1-a)
- ☐ "Shaping Character" handout (E-1-b)

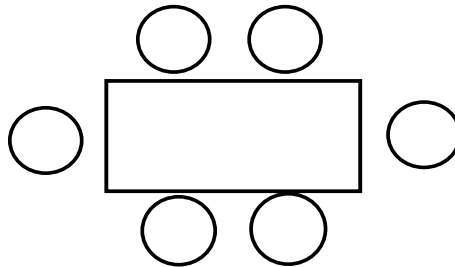
Ice Breaker



Board of Directors

Draw a rectangle on a sheet of paper. Put six circles around the rectangle. Pretend that the rectangle is the conference table in the "Board Room of Your Life." The circles are the chairs around the table.

Here's what the "table and chairs" should look like:



Label each chair with the name of a person (living or dead) who has had the greatest influence on your character.

Give participants a few minutes to complete their drawings.

When you've finished, share the names of those "board members" with a partner. Tell what each person did that had such a major (good or bad) impact on your character -- or the kind of person you are.

Give participants a few minutes to share their "board rooms."

Whether we know it or not, **we** are board members of our children's lives. Everything we do helps shape their character. Today we'll learn how to do our best in this important role.

Facilitator's Script



As participants arrive, seat them at a table where you have placed the sheet of wax paper, two portions of clay or dough, and a sprinkling of assorted confetti.

While we work on the first part of this lesson, I'd like you to play around with one piece of clay, shaping it into a heart. You may knead confetti into the clay, if you would like.

We often refer to someone's "character," but what exactly does that term mean?

Write the word "Character" on the flip chart or chalkboard. Ask each participant to share a thought. After each has spoken, write the following list on the flip chart or chalkboard.

- Character is who we are.
 - Character is what we do when no one is looking.
- Character is how we treat people who we think can help us or hurt.

Everyone has character, but we want to have good character, honorable character, or strong character.

Character is formed in several ways.

Write the following words on the flip chart or chalkboard:

Thoughts [Values [Words [Actions] Habits [Character
] Destiny

Our thoughts influence our values, which affect our words and actions. Our actions become habits. Our habits are our character. And our character becomes our destiny.

We all want good results for our children. Helping them develop good character will help them have good results, trusting relationships, and responsible, productive lives.

What influences our thoughts and values?

Ask each participant in turn to suggest something. Write their responses on the flip chart or chalkboard.

Distribute the handout "What is Character and How Is It Formed?" (E-1-a). Point out any items that haven't been listed on the board.

Now let's take a look at the clay hearts you have shaped.

Ask each participant to show her or his heart to the group. Notice or comment on whether confetti was blended into their creations.

Sometimes we use the word "heart" to refer to what a person really is. For those of you who blended confetti into your hearts, did you do this on purpose, or was it an accident?

Listen to responses.

Imagine that the confetti pieces are things that influence our thoughts and values, such as friends, conversations, places we've been, life experiences, books we've read, movies we've watched, music we've listened to, people we've admired, people we've spent time with, our goals, our limits, expectations placed on us, and so forth.

Many things can affect our character. No two people's character will be exactly the same. Imagine that each color of confetti represents a different message. For example:

List colors and messages on the flip chart or chalkboard. Make sure that the confetti you use contains all of these colors. If you don't have the colors listed below, change the list as needed.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ● White = violent messages | ● Yellow = respect |
| ● Silver = disrespect/sarcasm | ● Green = responsibility |
| ● Gold = dishonesty | ● Orange = fairness |
| ● Blue = honesty/loyalty | ● Red = citizenship |

Now, let's take another look at your clay hearts. Which influences did you blend into your heart?

If your piece of clay were your child's character, what behavior would you expect from your child? In what other ways does this activity resemble real life?

Ask for comments from participants. Note that this clay is very pliable, flexible, and easy to shape. Even our fingerprints make an impression. It will even pick up ink from the newspaper. It is more like "children's character." Potters' clay, on the other hand, is more like "adult character." It takes strength and skill to shape it.

Start over with a fresh piece of clay, and form a heart that represents the character you hope your child will show.

Give participants time to create a new clay "heart," avoiding the negative confetti colors. Ask participants to share how much of each character quality they included and why.

This activity isn't really different from the way character is shaped in our children. What similarities to real life do you see?

Ask for ideas from participants.

The main difference in real life is that we don't get to start over with a clean piece of clay. We can, however, start over with a fresh plan -- from this day on -- to put as much "good" into our children's hearts as we possibly can. Let's also try to keep out as many "bad" things as we possibly can from our children's lives. This can give them a chance to practice making decisions so that they can handle the choices they must make.

Think back on what you just did with your second piece of clay. What are you going to do with the fresh start you have today with your children? How will you do an even better job of shaping your children's character than you have done before?

Work in groups of three to list ways you will help shape your child into a person with character more like the second heart than the first.

Give each team member a copy of the "Shaping Character" worksheet (E-1-b) to complete. Give each team 15 minutes to list strategies they will use at home to maximize influences on strong character and to minimize influences that weaken good character.

Have teams share their lists with the entire group for 5 minutes.

Final Thoughts

To end this lesson, I would like you to select one strategy that you will start using today, circle it on your worksheet, and take your day hearts home as reminders to use that strategy daily. Plan to report on your success at our next session.

What is Character and How is It Formed?

Character is who we really are. It's what we do when no one is looking. All of our thoughts help shape our values, words and actions. Our actions can become habits that shape our character. And our character eventually determines our destiny.

To help shape our children's character, we need to focus on six core values: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.

Families can have the greatest impact on children's character. In fact, building character is one of the major responsibilities that families have. Trying to build good character by ourselves can feel overwhelming at times. But we don't need to do it alone. Instead, we should work with our communities (neighbors, friends, churches, schools and so on) to send a common message to our children of what we mean by "good character."

Our character is influenced by our thoughts and values. Our values are shaped by:

- Our families
- Friends
- Life experiences
- Stories we hear
- Books we read
- Words we hear
- Movies we watch
- Programs (even cartoons!) we see
- Music we hear
- People we admire
- People who spend time with us
- Reactions we observe
- Our goals
- The expectations placed on us
- And even the games we play

As parents, our role is to help our children -- no matter their age -- learn trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship and to practice these values as much as possible.

Shaping Character:

A Personal Plan for Shaping Your Child's Character

What are you going to do to increase the influences that help your child develop Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship? What are you going to do to reduce the influences that might cause your children to lie, steal, fight, be rude, not do their part, fail to go by the rules, or be a poor citizen? Use this chart to make a list of ways you'll take charge.

Factors that will influence my child's character	What I'll do to reduce or eliminate bad influences	Ways I'll increase the TRRFCC influences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● My child's friends ● My own friends ● People who spend time with my child ● Music my child hears ● Movies my child watches ● Conversations my child hears ● Places we go ● Things my child gets to do ● Books ● My child's heroes ● My child's goals ● Things I expect of my child ● Ways I let my child know what I expect 		