helping your child
become a responsible citizen

All parents want their children to grow up to be good people and responsible citizens. Just as children must be taught to tie their shoes, read and write, and solve math problems, so too must they be guided to develop qualities of character that are valued by their families and the communities in which they live.

The benefits of encouraging children's positive character development are enormous. Research has shown that children who grow up with strong, positive values are happier and perform better in school. They also are better able to balance their personal wants and needs against those of others and make positive contributions to society.

The *No Child Left Behind Act*, the national effort to improve education, recognizes that building character and learning values are important components of a child's complete education. This brochure is based on the larger *Helping Your Child* series of publications for parents and families, which is designed to provide parents with the latest research and practical information to help them support their children and ensure their children's success in school and in life.

The qualities of character discussed in this brochure are recognized universally by people of many religions and cultures. Information presented here can be used by parents from various backgrounds and with different beliefs.

Research indicates that children take values seriously only when they see that the adults they respect act in accordance with those values. Although parents must be the ones to determine which values they want their children to develop, they need the help of the community, particularly the schools, in reinforcing those values.

activity

Keep trying
Being a person of good character often requires having patience and sticking to something.

What to do:
- Let your child see you practice patience when doing a new or difficult task or when facing life's everyday frustrations, such as heavy traffic.
- Use a timer as you and your child work at a difficult task. For young children, start with a small increment of time and build from there. This activity will build perseverance.
- Help your children learn how to set priorities. For example, your child can be taught to complete homework before watching television, or to finish chores before playing with friends.
- Make a game out of doing hard tasks. How many pieces of spilled popcorn can you and your child pick up? Who can break the record for washing the most windows (and washing them well, of course)?

working with teachers and schools

Below are some suggestions for ways that you can work with your child's teachers and other school officials to make sure that everyone understands the basic values that you want your child to learn and put into practice:

- **Visit with your child's teachers early in the school year.** Discuss what kind of person you want your child to become and what values are important to you.
- **If the school has a character education program, ask for a description of the curriculum and talk with teachers about how you can help emphasize the lessons at home.** If the school does not offer a character education program, work with the school and local community to begin one.
- **Be alert for and communicate with teachers when the school is giving your child conflicting messages about values.** For example, some teachers might expect students to come to class with all the materials they need for the day's work, while others might let them borrow from each other or sit in class without materials.
- **Work with other parents to help your child's school establish high standards for behavior both during school and at events such as ball games and concerts.** Help create a list of volunteers for supervising school activities or chaperoning field trips.

resources

This brochure was drawn from the larger booklet in the *Helping Your Child* series, "Helping Your Child Become a Responsible Citizen," which includes activities for elementary, middle, and high school-aged children. For more information, tips, and resources about how you can help your child build character and learn responsibility—along with a wide range of other subjects—visit the *Helping Your Child* series Web site at www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/hyc.html.

For more information on how you can help your child become a responsible citizen, take a look at the following resources from the U.S. Department of Education and other organizations:

U.S. Department of Education: www.ed.gov or 1-800-USA-LEARN

Character Education, Editor's Picks: www.ed.gov/teachers/how/character/edpicks.jhtml?src=ln

The Parents Portal: www.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml

Federal Resources for Educational Excellence (FREE): www.ed.gov/free/index.html

Parental Information and Resource Centers: www.ed.gov/programs/pirc/index.html