



## PARENT TOOLKIT

*It's no secret: we all want to raise the type of children that make other parents marvel. You know what we're saying... kids who do their own laundry, get all their homework done before dinner and know exactly how to properly respect their elders, without ever being nagged. Most days, this can feel closer to a dream than a reality. But what if instead of trying to change our children, we rethought our mindset and focused on something better than having perfect kids: raising good people?*

*Lucky for you, we have just the person to help. Parent Toolkit expert **Dr. Maurice Elias** is the Professor of Psychology and Director of the **Social-Emotional and Character Development Lab** at Rutgers University. He lectures nationally and internationally to educators and parents about students' emotional intelligence, school success, and social-emotional and character development. He also works to bring social-emotional learning into the classroom through the **Academy for Social-Emotional Learning in Schools**. Here's what Dr. Elias has to say about raising socially responsible kids, who are just 'good' enough.*



Ask the question, **what might be done about this?** Talking about social issues **consistently** helps our kids internalize a set of **questions** that they start to ask **themselves** as they hear about and try to **understand social dilemmas**.

**MAURICE ELIAS**

Professor of Psychology at Rutgers University

**Establish Helpfulness as Routine in Your Household**

Have you noticed that in preschool, every student has a job, or, as I prefer to call it, a daily responsibility? Some kids put out the mats, some distribute the cups, others pour juice, others clean up after snack and make sure everything is put back in place... everyone contributes. So should it be in your household. Everyone should be involved in meal preparation, cleaning up, organizing, preparing for the next day, to the extent of their capabilities. (Parents, you are not exempt! Your modeling is essential, as we will discuss again.)

One particularly powerful activity is to teach your kids hospitality. How do you prepare for guests, greet them, and make them feel comfortable while in your home? Long before he could write, my then-three-year-old grandson Harry would appear at family events with a pencil and pad and take people's beverage orders. He would go up to each guest and ask what they would like to drink. What he would write on the pad was some combination of Egyptian hieroglyphs and interpretive renderings of the English alphabet. But no one went thirsty, some got introduced to new beverages, and everyone enjoyed. Another key part of hospitality is to walk guest to the door, an action that communicates, we were glad you were here, sorry you are leaving, and we want to be sure you get on your way safely. Even toddlers can accompany parents during this process, and when they are older, they will be family representatives doing the escorting.

### **Perform Acts of Kindness For Others**

The earlier we start modeling kindness for our children, and with our children, the sooner they begin to appreciate their role in making others' lives better and the good feelings that arise from helping. See which of these you may be most comfortable trying as a family activity, beyond what you already might be doing. Each one of these helps your children to feel a sense of social responsibility:

- Make cookies for people confined to their homes or in nursing homes
- Prepare meals for a homeless shelter
- Donate clothes, books, or household items to families or reputable organizations
- Write letters to kids with parents overseas in the military
- Visit pediatric units in the hospital to make friends, read books, or bring toys
- Help stock the shelves of a food pantry
- Write thank-you notes to or make pictures for local firefighters, police officers, and other community workers clean up a broken playground or community garden

### **Help Your Kids Problem Solve More than Complain**

It's impossible to shield our kids from social issues. Voting rights, climate change, homelessness, vaccinations, the use of drones, bullying and cyberbullying, responsible use of social media, privacy—these are matters that can and should matter to our kids. In addition to talking and reading about them, consider having problem-solving discussion about them. Ask the question, *what might be done about this?* Talking about social issues consistently helps our kids internalize a set of questions that they start to ask themselves as they hear about and try to understand social dilemmas. Having a strategy makes it a little easier to take on social responsibility.

One way to do this involves a problem-solving strategy we use that goes by the acronym PLAN:

- **P**roblem: What is the **p**roblem we are talking about? How can we put it into words?
- **L**ist: Brainstorm a list of options to solve the problem
- **A**ction: Develop and **a**ct on a plan to solve the problem. What can be done and what are some things we can do to help make this happen, even if it seems small right now?

- **Notice:** Notice what is happening next. Check in on the issue periodically. Think about what actions you took and what else might be helpful.

Kids in grades five and up are particularly responsive to this kind of conversation. You might consider one night during the week when dinner conversation focuses on an issue, or you might have a spontaneous conversation in the car when an issue gets raised on the radio.

As James Comer has said, values and character are more "caught" than "taught." There is nothing that will help our children understand social responsibility more powerfully than observing *parents'* actions and taking actions *with* parents.

More ideas about being kind and cultivating an attitude of gratitude in your children can be found in *The Joys and Oys of Parenting*.

*Want to hear more from Dr. Elias? Check out some of his articles...*



[The Incredible Benefits of Family Routines Around Mealtime and Bedtime](#)



[No More Mindless Homework](#)



[Reduce Anger in Your Household](#)



[What Can Be Done To Stop Bullying?](#)

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