

Character Trait for October, 2014 – Cooperation

Jan H. Gunter, Community Relations Specialist

The Character Trait for the month of October, 2014 is cooperation, which is defined as working together, getting along, and functioning as a team. It is the act of people coming together for a common purpose and, with everyone doing their part, creating the kind of supportive atmosphere where everyone can succeed.

Cooperative people are “team players.” They understand that people coming together for a common cause can accomplish more together than any one of them can do on their own. They build a sense of “community” which not only allows for differences in others, it helps everyone learn our different talents and skills are what makes our community strong and vibrant. As former President Bill Clinton once said, “We all do better when we work together. Our differences *do matter*, but our common humanity matters more.”

So how do we begin to teach our children about cooperation? One fun and easy way to teach young children the positive concept of “cooperation” is to let them watch or help you bake a cake from scratch. As you start putting the different ingredients for the cake out on the counter, explain that it takes several different ingredients coming together to make a cake. Each ingredient is *different* from the others and yet, when added to the other ingredients, something marvelous is created! And then explain that this is what cooperation is. Each person is a “different ingredient” in that we all have different talents and strengths. And that’s a good thing, because when one person’s strength is added to another’s, and those two are then added to another’s – and so on – in perfect measurements, like the ingredients of a cake – great things can happen in the community because everyone worked together for a common goal!

For older kids and teens, parents can have a discussion with them about the successful organizations at school to which they belong – sports teams, academic teams like the debate team or the science and math teams, band or choir or various other organizations. How did those organizations become successful? Everyone practiced hard to develop their own personal skills and abilities; but then they came together and developed successful “interactions” with others in the organization to build a strong sense of unity as they planned and strategized towards a successful outcome of their coming together for a common goal.

The important thing to remember about cooperation is that it is *not* about surrendering “who you are” as an individual; rather, it’s about taking the best of each of our individual talents and putting them together with others and their specific talents, and working together to achieve at atmosphere of success – for the community as well as individuals. When that is achieved, remarkable things begin to happen!

###