

Character Trait of the Month for February, 2014 – Justice

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The Character Trait for the month of February, 2014 is the trait of Justice – or, put another way, it's the trait of taking personal responsibility to uphold what is pure, right, and true.

Justice is a foundational element of our democracy. It takes into account the inalienable and inborn rights of all individuals to have equal protection before the law on their civil rights, without discrimination. It's why our Bill of Rights – the collective name for the first ten amendments to the Constitution of the United States – came into effect as Constitutional Amendments on December 15, 1791, through the process of ratification by three-fourths of the States. They were put into place to guarantee the rights and freedoms of America's citizens and to ensure justice for everyone.

One of the “icons” of justice is the “Scales of Justice”. This important symbol represents the notion that everyone is treated equally; all citizens get the same rights and equal treatment in the eyes of the law. It's a good representation because it serves as a reminder for everyone that we should treat others without prejudice. “Lady Justice” (another important ICON of our inalienable freedom) has her eyes covered for a reason: she doesn't judge by a person's gender, their race or their looks. She judges solely on the rules of law. She is objective and fair, which is why her scales are always even.

It is never too early to start teaching our children about building the character trait of “justice” into their lives. It is a strong character trait which can be learned – and practiced – by people of all ages! As Thomas Jefferson once stated, “It is reasonable that everyone who asks Justice should do Justice.” To paraphrase him in a way that younger children might more readily understand it, “If you want to be treated fairly, you must treat others fairly!”

Unfortunately, too many folks let their emotions get the better of them when dealing with others; and they tend to treat others based on how they are feeling “in the heat of the moment”, instead of remembering the Golden Rule to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you!”

So how do we emphasize justice in our character building process of life? Here are a few topics of discussion we can begin having with those we love:

Conversation topics to discuss:

- Look up the Bill of Rights and talk with your family about what it means and how it is important to everyone; and discuss the “inalienable rights” the Bill of Rights defines.
- Discuss which Bill of Rights issues have come up in the topic of discussion in recent months and how that is important to the political arguments of the day. Or, take a story item in the news and discuss where there is justice and/or injustice in the situation presented, and why.

- Find a picture of “Lady Justice” and the Statue of Liberty. Discuss the symbolism each iconic figure represents.
- Describe why rules are necessary when doing things like playing games, and what it takes to be a good “referee” in those games?
- Describe what fairness means to you and how you use it in your daily life.
- Talk about how being “just” and being “fair” is hard sometimes; and follow up with ways you can use to help you remain just and fair even when your emotions are intensely involved.

Justice is such a critical element of our democratic society; but it is not simply a set of rules and laws written down in legal documents. It is an integrated mindset – a choice of the Will – of those who understand the very meaning behind what Martin Luther King, Jr. meant when he stated it this way: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” The cost, if we aren’t careful to protect the element of justice in our society and the character building training of our children, is the loss of what is most important to us all: our FREEDOM.

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