

VIDEO DISCUSSION GUIDE

for use with
Program 3

RESPONSIBILITY

In the Video Series

IN SEARCH OF CHARACTER™

Produced by Elkind+Sweet Communications, Inc.
in association with Character Counts!

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INTRODUCTION

In his landmark book, “Educating for Character,” Dr. Thomas Lickona asserts that:

“Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good. . . When we think about the kind of character we want for our children, it’s clear that we want them to be able to judge what is right, care deeply about what is right, and then do what they believe to be right—even in the face of pressure from without and temptation from within.”

The purpose of this video series is to support educators, parents, and others who work with young people in their efforts to achieve this vision.

“**In Search of Character**” focuses on ten virtues commonly named by parents, educators, and community groups concerned with character education:

Trustworthiness	Citizenship
Respect	Honesty
Responsibility	Courage
Fairness	Diligence
Caring	Integrity

While each of these words evokes its own meaning, what counts most, like colors on a canvas, is the way they interact to paint a complete picture. “In Search of Character” is not about teaching individual virtues, it’s about helping young people **construct a vision of themselves as good people** and then live up to that vision. It’s about showing them that, in a world where poor character is so commonplace, **they can choose to be better than that.**

***In Search of Character* has important historical roots.** In 1992 the Josephson Institute of Ethics convened a diverse group of 29 educators and youth organization leaders in Aspen, Colorado, to hammer out a framework for character education that would be agreeable across political, religious, and social divisions. As part of their task, the conference participants attempted to identify a concise, yet comprehensive, list of core ethical values they could all embrace. What they came up with is now known as **the six pillars of character**. They are: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

We found these six pillars to be a very useful foundation on which to build our new video series. Additionally, as we looked more closely at these pillars, we found they contained several important virtues which we felt deserved to be singled out for individual attention. And so, from the **trustworthiness** pillar we extracted *honesty*, *courage*, and *integrity*, and from the **responsibility** pillar we took *diligence*. Hence, the ten titles on the previous page.

In Search of Character was created and produced by David Elkind and Freddy Sweet, Ph.D., producers of such well known youth guidance videos as *The Power of Choice* and *Big Changes, Big Choices*. Elkind & Sweet are the authors of many journal articles on conducting classroom discussions for character education. They are members of the Character Education Partnership, the Josephson Institute of Ethics, and Educators for Social Responsibility.

HOW TO USE THIS VIDEO

**Use in classrooms, libraries, youth groups,
or view it at home.**

This video, along with the guide and website, is designed to help teachers engage students in classroom discussion and other activities leading to deep, meaningful reflection about the kinds of people they are and want to be.

Have a great discussion!

Thoughtful, reflective discussions are essential to getting the most out of these videos. You will find some very fruitful facilitation techniques, including **Socratic Method**, at our special character education website at <www.goodcharacter.com>. The questions in this discussion guide begin on page 10.

www.goodcharacter.com provides a wealth of helpful material including questions, assignments, and activities for special topics such as **sports, workplace readiness**, and others. Please utilize this very valuable resource.

PRINCIPLES

The following principles are emphasized throughout this video series:

- ◆ Your character is defined by what you do, not by what you say or believe.
- ◆ Every choice you make helps define the kind of person you are choosing to be.
- ◆ Good character requires doing the right thing even when it's costly or risky.
- ◆ You don't have to adopt the worst behavior of others as a standard for yourself. You can choose to be better than that.
- ◆ What you do matters, and one person can make a big difference.
- ◆ The payoff for having good character is that it makes you a better person and it makes the world a better place.



WHAT IS RESPONSIBILITY?

In this program responsibility means:

- 🍏 Doing what needs to be done.
- 🍏 Being reliable and dependable.
- 🍏 Being accountable for your actions; not making excuses or blaming others.
- 🍏 Fulfilling your moral obligations.
- 🍏 Using good judgment; thinking through the consequences of your actions.
- 🍏 Exercising self-control.

PROGRAM CONTENT

We are looking in on the “Dr. Mike Show,” a talk radio show for teenagers. Carlos calls in with a personal problem that requires making a tough choice. This sets in motion an in-depth exploration of what it means to be a responsible person. Through conversation with Dr. Mike and his co-host, through flashbacks to discussions Dr. Mike has had with high school students around the country, and through a documentary profile of a young woman who exemplifies the power that comes from taking responsibility, Carlos resolves his problem and learns that responsibility is a pillar of good character.

00:38 **START OF RADIO SHOW:**

“What’s up, we’re back, and this is the Dr. Mike Show, talk radio for the under twenty crowd. I’m Anika Noni Rose, and heeeeere’s Dr. Mike.”

Dr. Mike reads an email he received from a teacher regarding a class project about what it means to be a “grown up.” The class found maturity was analogous to taking responsibility.

The first caller is Carlos, who has a dilemma. He has a commitment with his youth group to take some disadvantaged children sailing. But a girl he’s interested in has invited him to a party for the same day. What should he do?

Dr. Mike is reminded of a recent discussion he had with a group of teens about a similar problem. (We see this discussion in flashback.)

03:50 **TEEN DISCUSSION BEGINS:**

Dr. Mike asks: What would you do if a good friend invited you to an all expense paid trip to Florida the same weekend you had an important obligation to rehearse with your musical group?

The teens give the following responses:

-I would stick with the group. I would ask my friend to postpone the trip for a week or two.

-I might be tempted to go, but it would be important to stay for the group.

-It’s your responsibility to be part of the group. I’m a dancer and when one person can’t make it to

a competition it causes a lot of inconvenience for everyone. You need to be there for the group.

-It's a matter of priorities. You can always see your other friend, but you can't regain this chance to perform at the competition.

-You've made a commitment. Your friend should understand. I'd feel horrible if I let down the band.

Dr. Mike asks: what would you do if the trip was to France, instead?

-It depends on priorities. You could always go to Paris, but you can't always play with your band.

-Not everybody could always go to Paris. Maybe you could postpone the date when your band is supposed to be competing because I'd really, really love to go to Paris. (laughter)

-It's irresponsible. If they were part of my band I wouldn't let them back in. I wouldn't even want to be your friend because you let us down.

07:28 BACK TO THE RADIO STATION:

This has made Carlos see things differently. He sees that the real issue is responsibility. Maybe the real question is not what to do, but what kind of person he wants to be. Since he wants to be responsible he'll take the kids sailing. Dr. Mike asks what else there is to responsibility besides fulfilling obligations. Carlos isn't sure.

08:35 BEGIN TEEN DISCUSSION:

Dr. Mike asks: what would you do if you hit a parked car and nobody else saw it happen?

The teens respond:

-If there was damage, I would feel responsible. I would end up paying for it.

-I'd be really mad if someone damaged my car and didn't admit it. It's my responsibility.

-It's easy to say that right now when we're not faced with it because we know it's the right thing to do.

Dr. Mike asks: how do you know it's the right thing to do?

-If everybody made decisions based on the way they would like to be treated, then people would make better decisions.

Dr. Mike asks: would anybody take off?

-I'd probably get caught driving away. (laughter)

-A girl tells her story about hitting a parked car. She owned up to what she did. That's part of being an adult.

-I work as a cashier and sometimes people give me too much money by mistake. I could pocket it, but I don't. When you take responsibility, especially as a kid, people really appreciate it.

12:25 RETURN TO RADIO STATION:

Carlos now understands that there are at least two aspects of responsibility—fulfilling our obligations, and being accountable for our actions. But he points out that both of these are responsibilities to others. Doesn't he have some kind of responsibility to himself, as well?

13:10 TEEN DISCUSSION:

Dr. Mike asks: what does responsibility mean to you?

-Taking care of what you have to do and finishing what you start.

-Learning how to do things on your own. You won't always have your parents to make choices for you. You need to know right from wrong.

-Responsibility is a lot of stress. I have both school and internships after school.

This turns into a discussion about their responsibility to go to school and do well. One boy suggests that if he is unprepared for a test he has a responsibility to cheat. Others disagree, asserting that it's irresponsible to act in a way you know is wrong.

-Part of our responsibility as a student is to study hard to prepare for the future. When you're an adult you need to make sure your children's needs are met. It's meeting your own needs and well as others' needs.

17:15 Dr. Mike asks: who do people usually blame for their problems?

-Anyone but themselves because people don't like to put the blame on themselves.

Dr. Mike shows them that when they point at someone else they have three fingers pointing back at themselves. You have the power, the control and the choices and you own the problem. He explains

the relationship between being responsible and gaining freedom.

19:38 RETURN TO RADIO STATION:

Carlos is distressed about how much pressure responsibility is. “Don’t you ever get a break?” Dr. Mike says he’s looking at it all wrong. Responsibility is an opportunity. Responsibility is power.

20:15 DOCUMENTARY: LATEEFAH SIMON

An inspiring documentary about a young African American woman who tapped into the power of personal responsibility to overcome poverty and the negative influences of the ghetto. She is now the Executive Director of a social services agency and a pre-med college student.

26:40 RETURN TO RADIO STATION:

Carlos now sees how taking responsibility is a source of power. Dr. Mike leads him to the realization that the only thing in life he can completely control is himself, and responsibility is the key to seizing that control. Anika tells Dr. Mike her grandmother’s theory that you can’t control what life puts at your doorstep, but you can control how you respond to it. She says that when you take responsibility, you have the power to make good things happen. Dr. Mike agrees and points out that while many people in this world want to avoid responsibility, these kids have shown that they can be better than that.

Anika delivers a public service announcement about the benefits of being responsible.

END AT 28:45

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Questions to ask before the video.

1. Do you consider yourself to be a responsible person? Why? In what ways?

Questions to ask after the video.

2. The people in the video identified several aspects of responsibility. What were they? Do you agree with them? What does responsibility mean to you?

3. Do you consider it important for your friends and family members to be responsible? Why?

4. Carlos said, "Maybe the real question is not 'what am I going to do,' maybe it's 'what kind of person do I want to be?'" What did he mean by that?

5. Think about somebody you know who is very responsible. How does that person demonstrate responsibility? Does that make you respect him/her more?

6. The girl who hit the parked car felt she had to report it. Why take responsibility for something nobody saw you do?

7. What does the golden rule have to do with responsibility?

8. What is the relationship between blaming and responsibility? How did Dr. Mike change blaming others into a tool for teaching responsibility? Think about what some of your biggest problems are in school. Do you blame anyone for those problems?

9. Dr. Mike told Carlos responsibility is power. What did he mean? Do you agree?

10. How did Lateefah's story make you feel? What did you learn from it?

11. Lateefah said, "My future is up to me." Do you agree with that idea? Explain. What would Lateefah's life be like, if she did not take personal responsibility for changing it?

12. How does Lateefah's story demonstrate the power of taking responsibility? How did the story of Brian Harris and his pen-pal service make you feel? What did you learn from it?

13. It's been said that "There are no rights without responsibility, and there is no responsibility without rights." What does that mean? Do you agree? What is the relationship between rights and responsibilities?

14. Dr. Mike said we need to separate problems into three categories: ones we have no control over, ones we have some influence over, and ones we have total control over. How would it help resolve our problems to look at them in this way?

15. Anika's quotes her grandmother as having said, "You can't control what life puts at your door-step, but you have complete control over how you respond to it." What does that mean? How can you apply this principle to your daily life?

16. What does being responsible have to do with the quality of your character?

17. What are the benefits of being a responsible person? How do you benefit from the responsibility of others?

18. Did the video present any ideas you disagree with?

For additional questions, or to share your own ideas with others, or for questions relating to special topics such as sports, workplace readiness, etc., visit www.goodcharacter.com

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. What responsibilities do you believe you personally have for: 1) yourself, 2) your family, 3) your community, 4) the world?
2. Think of an instance when you were impressed by the way a teenager took responsibility for something. Write a news story (or letter to the editor) about this person.
3. Write a letter to someone in the news who did something that you think was irresponsible. Be specific about why you don't think it was right and why you think this action sets a bad example. Mail the letter.
4. Write an essay about the relationship between your age and level of responsibility. How do responsibilities differ for people your age and for older adults? How has your sense of responsibility changed as you have gotten older? At what age should we become totally responsible and accountable for our actions?
5. Write at least five things you could say to yourself when you are tempted to act irresponsibly. Explain the meaning and significance of each.
6. Describe something you've done that was really irresponsible. How did you feel afterward? What did you learn from it?
7. Describe what this society might be like if nobody was accountable for their actions, if nobody kept their commitments.

*For additional assignments, or to share your own ideas with others, or for assignments relating to **special topics such as sports, workplace readiness, etc.**, visit www.goodcharacter.com*

GROUP ACTIVITIES

1. Have your students visit our special web-site <www.goodcharacter.com> where they will find opportunities to become involved in activities and issues relating to personal and social responsibility.
2. Divide the class into small groups. Have each group develop a list of do's and don'ts for being a responsible person. (*See our definition on page 5.*) Have them make oral reports to the class addressing the following questions: What happens when people live in accordance with these guidelines. What happens when they don't. In what ways does irresponsible behavior affect our community and society? In what ways can/do young people demonstrate personal responsibility?
3. Role play: You've made a commitment to spend the weekend working on your part of a class project that's due Monday. Then, some friends invite you to go on a weekend camping trip in the mountains. You can't do both, so you decide to go on the camping trip. Try to explain your decision to the other people working on the class project. After the role play, have the class analyze what each person did to accomplish his/her objective. What general principles or guidelines can be drawn from this incident about responsibility?
4. Have several students search for the word "responsibility" on the Internet. Make a list of resources. Then create a Responsibility Web Page with links to these resources. E-mail this list to several of the websites recommending that they link to these resources.

*For additional activities, or to share your own ideas with others, or for activities relating to **special topics such as sports, workplace readiness, etc.**, please visit www.goodcharacter.com*

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www.goodcharacter.com
A Cyber Supplement for
“In Search of Character”

Please visit this website to find:

- * **Facilitation techniques** for conducting meaningful, productive classroom discussions, including **Socratic Method**.
- * **Additional discussion questions, writing assignments, and learning activities** contributed by teachers and youth group leaders who are using “In Search of Character.”
- * **Opportunities for your students** to become involved in activities and issues relating to the topics in these videos.
- * **Links** to key character education organizations and resources.
- * **Articles** and other writings on educating for character.
- * Special discussion guide supplements for use with **sports programs, workplace readiness programs**, and other areas of special interest.

This website is updated frequently, and you are invited to check it often. We welcome your requests for specific items to include, and we will appreciate any contributions you make by sharing your own ideas or experiences as a character educator.

ABOUT DR. MIKE. . .

Michael Thomson, Ph.D., is a youth counselor, teacher-trainer, lecturer, and author unlike any you have ever seen. Whether doing a school as-seemly, parent evening, or staff in-service, “Dr. Mike” leaves the audience with a lasting and powerful message. His audience-interactive techniques are entertaining, fun, and most of all educational. Through his naturally warm, humorous approach to important issues, Dr. Mike reveals the consequences of good choices and poor choices, and provides people with tools to take control of their lives.

Dr. Mike received his Ph.D. from The Ohio State University. He has been a high school hockey coach, a Supervisor in the Dept. of Psychology and Psychiatry at The Mayo Clinic, and Director of health care centers in Minnesota, Ohio, and Sweden. He is Head Clinician with the Ohio High School Athletic Association, and consultant to The Ohio State University athletic department. He is a Certified Reality Therapist and a certified trainer for Character Counts!™.

Dr. Mike is the author of several books for teen-agers, parents, and teachers. He lives in Ohio, with his wife, Carol, and their teenage son and daughter.

Dr. Mike is available for school assemblies, in-service trainings, and speaking engagements. He may be reached at 1-800-359-5437, or by visiting his website at www.drmikethomson.com

This video series was produced in association with
CHARACTER COUNTS!sm

The CHARACTER COUNTS! coalition is a consortium of the nation's largest and most influential educational and youth-serving organizations united in one overriding mission: strengthening the character of America's youth.



CHARACTER COUNTS!
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