

Back to School

By Marvin W Berkowitz, PhD

It is that time of year when kids start heading back to school looking like pack mules as they struggle under the weight of overloaded backpacks. But there is one thing that can't be found in your kid's backpack: You. Kids go to school and can't rely upon their moms and dads to protect them from making bad decisions.

Predictably, we parents worry about what our kids are doing at school and what others are doing with—and to—them. We fear that some unsavory kid will prey on our children, leading them to lives of second grade debauchery (like blowing spit bubbles, reciting dirty limericks, and so on). As our kids grow older, the ante is raised. Then, we find ourselves concerned about delinquency, alcohol, drugs, and sex.

There's no room left in those backpacks for moms and dads to hide out, so what can we parents give our kids to help protect them from harmful influences at school?

The answer lies in a single word: character.

Good character has no weight and it doesn't take up space, so kids can easily carry it with them all day every day wherever they go. The only challenge is that character development isn't like a peanut butter and jelly sandwich that can be slapped together in a few minutes. Developing a child's character takes time and requires consistent attention, nurturing and reinforcement.

One can certainly consider character development to be a long-term project. In a sense it's built brick by brick throughout a child's life. But it's certainly worth the effort! Character offers the best possible protection available against negative influences and bad choices.

A case in point: [The Developmental Studies Center of Oakland California](#),* was recently recognized by the U.S. government for its Child Development Project's drug prevention effects. What's interesting is the fact that the CDP isn't a drug prevention program at all; it's a character education program. Rather than talking about drugs the leaders work on students' character development. That's because they've learned that a high quality, comprehensive character education program is the best tool available for preventing drug use and other negative behaviors.

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The same premise applies to parenting. If you raise a child of character you can rest assured that he or she will be better prepared to resist inappropriate pressures and to make better choices. And best of all, experience shows that his work at school will likely improve significantly. Your child wins all the way around.

It takes character to succeed both in school and in life. And parents are the primary source of kids' character. So make sure you start packing character into your kid's life now!

** NOTE: The Developmental Studies Center of Oakland California is now the Collaborative Classroom.*