

CHARACTER DEFINITIONS

CHARACTER

Character is the mental and ethical qualities that define a person. These mental and ethical qualities determine the kind of life a person leads, the type of relationships they sustain, the kind of citizen and worker they become, and their future success.

Good character is a pattern of behavior, thoughts, and feelings based on virtues such as integrity, self-control, respect, empathy, perseverance, positive attitude, humility, wisdom, and citizenship. It is evidenced by virtuous actions in both the moral and performance areas of one's life. Experts have divided character education into two parts – “performance character” (maximizing one's performance in every area of his or her life) and “moral character” (always choosing to do the right, honest and ethical thing).

PRINCIPLES

- Universally accepted standards of conduct
- Universally accepted rules of doing right and avoiding wrong
- **EXAMPLES:**
 - “Treat others as you would want them treat you” The Golden Rule
 - “All men are created equal” The Declaration of Independence
 - “Thou shalt not lie, cheat, or steal” The Ten Commandments
 - “Do no harm” Hippocratic Oath
 - “In all things, charity” Richard Baxter



MORALITY

- Morality (morals) comes from the Latin word "mos," meaning "custom."
- A means for evaluating human conduct.
- A person's decision to choose right and avoid wrong.
- **EXAMPLE:** "I choose not to cheat on the exam."

ETHICS

- Ethics comes from the Greek word "ethos," meaning "character."
- The study of a person's moral choices of right and wrong.
- **Note:** The ethics of a group may sometimes conflict with an individual's moral choice.
- **EXAMPLE:** John is a lawyer who is ethically required to defend his client (legal ethics are group choices among lawyers) even though he knows his client is guilty (individual moral dilemma).

MORALITY VS ETHICS

- Very similar, yet morals usually refer to individuals, while ethics usually refer to a group.
- Morals involve an individual's decisions, whereas ethics is a study of right and wrong.

INTEGRITY

- Adhering to a moral code of honesty, courage, strength, responsibility and uprightness in everything you do.
- Being true to your word.
- **EXAMPLE:** "A person lives a life of integrity by having the courage to be honest, truthful, and to keep his promises."



Although closely related:

- Principles = standards of conduct
- Morality = conforming to those standards of conduct
- Integrity = the quality of always living those standards

VIRTUES AND VALUES

VIRTUES

- The admirable trait or quality of doing good and avoiding wrong that has become a habit
- Qualities of moral and performance excellence considered to be good

VALUES

- A quality or standard deemed desirable by an individual, group, or a society
- Values, unlike virtues, are not habits or always acts of moral good
- Virtues are values but many values are not virtues
- *EXAMPLE:* "John Doe values having many material possessions, having many girlfriends, and being the toughest man on his block."

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

- The development of fundamental skills for life, including how to relate with oneself, others and relationships, and work effectively.
- An approach to learning that helps a student become a socially and emotionally skilled person.
- Comprehensive character development programs include SEL.