

Books to Build Character & Teach Your Child Important Values

In today's world, children and teens are bombarded with conflicting, ever-shifting standards of ethics and morality. At the same time, you are trying to teach and instill good values at home. Fortunately, a really great book has the power to counterbalance these outside influences and teach children important lessons as they grow.

It might be a book on kindness after your child experienced or witnessed cruelty. It might be a book on expressing emotions after your child saw or heard scary news coverage, or maybe a book on understanding differences after your child saw someone who looked differently than they do.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and Reach Out and Read have compiled the following list of books—organized by age and topic—to help you raise children who are aware of the world around them, curious, brave, kind, and thoughtful. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to review these titles in advance of sharing them with their children.

Then read together! Books are great conversation starters that can give you an opportunity to talk to your children about these issues and help them learn and understand your family's values.

Books to teach kindness

Teaching kindness to children is an important skill to build and reinforce at all ages. Young children can learn how small acts of kindness help and please others, but teens can learn broader, larger concepts grounded in morals and ethics.

Preschoolers & early grades

- *Stand in My Shoes: Kids Learning About Empathy*, by Bob Sornson; illustrated by Shelley Johannes
- *Those Shoes*, by Maribeth Boelts, illustrated by Noah Z. Jones
- *Kindness is Cooler, Mrs Ruler*, by Margery Cuyler, illustrated by Sachiko Yoshikawa
- *What Does It Mean To Be Kind?*, by Rana DiOrio, illustrated by Stéphane Joris
- *Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed*, by Emily Pearson, illustrated by Fumi Kosaka
- *Each Kindness*, by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by E.B. Lewis
- *The Invisible Boy*, by Trudy Ludwig, illustrated by Patrice Barton
- *Heartprints*, by P.K. Hallinan

Middle grades

- *Charlotte's Web*, by E.B. White, illustrated by Garth Williams
- *Wonder*, by R.J. Palacio
- *Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents*, by Sarah Conover and Valerie Wahl

Teens

- *Freak the Mighty*, by Rodman Philbrick
- *Rules*, by Cynthia Lord

Books about expressing emotions

Children may see anger, sadness, and loss in parents and other adults in their lives and be uncertain how to respond. Younger children may have difficulty naming their emotions, but find it easier to identify with a character in a book. Older children may have difficulty sorting through complex feelings and worry about burdening adults who are struggling themselves. Books can help children process, clarify, and put a name to their feelings.

Preschoolers & early grades

- *Moody Cow Meditates*, by Kerry Lee MacLean
- *That's How I Feel (Asi Me Siento)*, by Rourke Publishing
- *Have you Filled a Bucket Today?*, by Carol McCloud, illustrated by David Messing
- *What if Everybody Did That?*, by Ellen Javernick, illustrated by Colleen M. Madden
- *I Was So Mad*, by Mercer Mayer
- *Do Unto Otters: A Book About Manners*, by Laurie Keller
- *My Many Colored Days*, by Dr Seuss

Middle grades

- *Michael Rosen's Sad Book*, by Michael Rosen, illustrated by Quentin Blake
- *Queenie Peavy*, by Robert Burch

Teens

- *Don't Let Your Emotions Run Your Life for Teens*, by Sheri Van Dijk
- *A Still Quiet Place: A Mindfulness Program for Teaching Children and Adolescents to Ease Stress and Difficult Emotions*, by Amy Saltzman MD
- *Learning to Breathe: A Mindfulness Curriculum for Adolescents to Cultivate Emotion Regulation, Attention, and Performance*, by Patricia Broderick PhD

Books about bullying & harassment

Bullying and harassment are difficult topics for everyone, and they are an increasing issue in schools across the country. It's common for younger children to repeat language they've heard without understanding the implications of what they're saying. Those who are harassed (or are worried about being harassed) may have strong fear and anxiety. Children who are bystanders may not know how to respond, particularly if they fear being bullied themselves.

Preschoolers & early grades

- *Chrysanthemum*, by Kevin Henkes
- *The Hundred Dresses*, by Eleanor Estes, Illustrated by Louis Slobodkin
- *Edwardo: the Horriblest Boy in the Whole Wide World*, by John Burningham
- *Say Something*, by Peggy Moss, Illustrated by Lea Lyon
- *Babymouse: Queen of the World*, by Jennifer Holm and Matthew Holm
- *Bully B.E.A.N.S.*, by Julia Cook, Illustrated by Anita DuFalla
- *Confessions of a Former Bully*, by Trudy Ludwig, Illustrated by Beth Adams

Middle grades

- *Stitches*, by Glen Huser
- *To This Day: For the Bullied and the Beautiful*, by Shane Koyczan
- *Understanding Buddy*, by Marc Kornblatt
- *Loser*, by Jerry Spinelli
- *Veronica Ganz*, by Marilyn Sachs
- *Blubber*, by Judy Blume

Teens

- *Dear Bully: Seventy Authors Tell Their Stories*, by Megan Kelley Hall and Carrie Jones
- *Speak*, by Laurie Halse Anderson
- *Freak Show*, by James St James
- *Stargirl*, by Jerry Spinelli
- *7 Days at the Hot Corner*, by Terry Trueman

Books on listening to others' views

Learning how to listen well and respect different views are important life skills. While younger children find it difficult to take the perspective of others, they gain that ability over time. Older children may become great debaters—especially with their parents. Books can offer models for engaging with others who have different views in a respectful and productive manner.

Preschoolers & early grades

- *When Sophie's Feelings Are Really, Really Hurt*, by Molly Bang
- *I'm the Best*, by Lucy Cousins
- *Chocolate Milk, Por Favor*, by Maria Dismundy, illustrated by Donna Farrell
- *The Sandwich Swap*, by Queen Rania of Jordan & Kelly DiPucchio, illustrated by Tricia Tusa
- *Junkyard Wonders*, by Patricia Polacco
- *The Conquerers*, by David McKee

Middle Grades

- *Zero Tolerance*, by Claudia Mills
- *The Cat at the Wall*, by Deborah Ellis
- *The Three Questions*, by Jon Muth

Adolescents

- *This Side of Home*, by Renee Watson

Books about respecting differences

Children are naturally curious about others (particularly other children) who fall into groups other than their own. Think of your child's curiosity as an opportunity to teach him or her about respecting these differences. Remember, in order to raise kids to embrace diversity, you'll need to give them access to a variety of different cultures and traditions—books are a great way to do that!

Preschoolers & early grades

- *I Like Myself!*, by Karen Beaumont, Illustrated by David Catrow
- *Red: A Crayon's Story*, by Michael Hall
- *Giraffes Can't Dance*, by Giles Andreae, Illustrated by Guy Parker-Rees
- *Strictly No Elephants*, by Lisa Mantchev, Illustrated by Taeun Yoo
- *Two Speckled Eggs*, by Jennifer K. Mann
- *Willow*, by Denise Brennan-Nelson and Rosemarie Brennan, Illustrated by Cyd Moore

Middle grades

- *Out of My Mind*, by Sharon M. Draper
- *Inside Out and Back Again*, by Thanhha Lai
- *The Ordinary Princess*, by M. M. Kaye

Books on social change & civic engagement

Many children are drawn to helping others—even at young ages. Maybe it is raising money for a cause or having a passion for issue impacting their community. Books can help them understand the broader concepts of social justice and civic engagement. Younger children tend to thinking of things as "good vs. bad," but as they get older they develop very sophisticated and nuanced moral reasoning.

Preschoolers & early grades

- *Grace for President*, by Kelly DiPucchio, Illustrated by LeUyen Pham
- *A Chair for My Mother*, by Vera B. Williams
- *Mama's Nightingale: A Story of Immigration and Separation*, by Edwidge Danticat, Illustrated by Leslie Staub
- *House Mouse, Senate Mouse*, by Peter W. Barnes and Cheryl Shaw Barnes
- *Being Me*, by Rosemary McCarney, Illustrated by Yvonne Cathcart

Middle grades

- *Zero Tolerance*, by Claudia Mills
- *Paper Things*, by Jennifer Richard Jacobson
- *The Kid's Guide to Social Action*, by Barbara A. Lewis
- *Hoot*, by Carl Hiaasen
- *The Chocolate War*, by Robert Cormier

Teens

- *The Great Greene Heist*, by Varian Johnson
- *The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck
- *The Plain Janes*, by Cecil Castellucci and Jim Rugg
- *Samir and Yonatan*, by Daniella Carmi
- *The Lions of Little Rock*, by Kristin Levine
- *March: Book One*, by John Lewis and Andrew Aydin

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