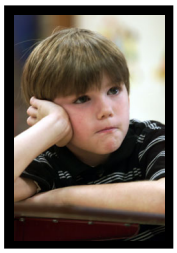
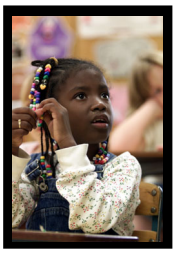
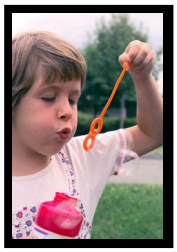
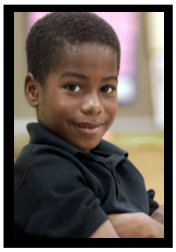
Character education is life changing for kids and their parents . . .









In the past a child's character education came from the home. They spent time with their parents, modeled their parents' behavior and learned valuable life lessons. Children today are facing more adverse situations than the children of 50 years ago. Many parents are living with addiction to drugs and alcohol, unemployment, moving from welfare to work or even being incarcerated. Thus, children now spend more time with the television or peers than with their family.

One indicator of the affect of today's changing society on youth is the fact that a 14-year-old's vocabulary has declined from 23,000 words to 10,000 words since 1950. School counselors have found that children do not understand words such as respect and responsibility.

Teaching children character words

In this new society, we must find a way to teach children the meaning of words related to character.

- Responsibility
- Trustworthiness
- Respect
- Caring
- Fairness
- Citizenship

These are the six pillars of the character education program as developed by the Josephson Institute of Ethics. The OSU Cooperative Extension Service equips parents and teachers with the Character Critters stories. Critters such as Tommy the Turtle and Carrie the Cat go through life experiences that young children relate to. These stories give children a way to understand the six concepts of character. It also helps Oklahoma's preschool children easily remember these principles.

"After Madeline went through the program I would refer to some of the "critters" in various situations and I would notice that Madeline would stop and seem to think back to a certain story," said a parent from Murray County. "It really seemed to alter her negative behavior."

The program includes the animal stories, classroom interest center activities, parent events, a parent newsletter (W.A.R.M. - We Are Role Models), and take home activities.

Results of character education

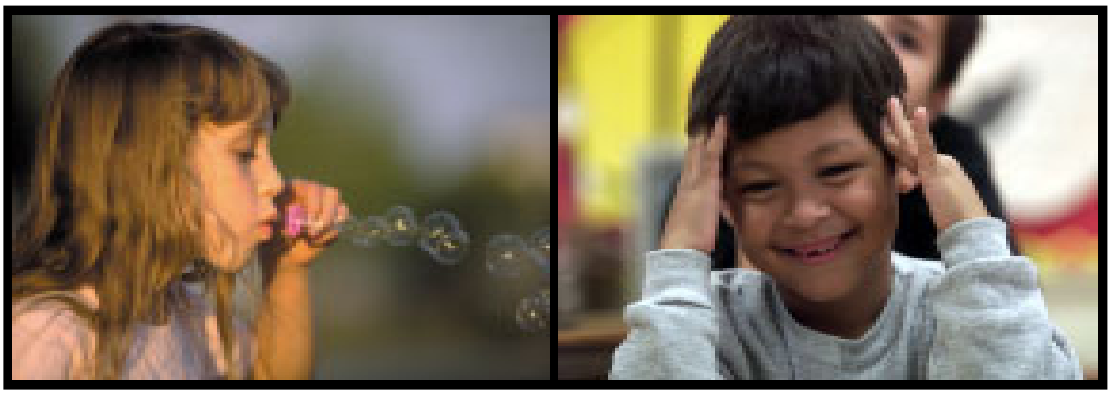
In FY02, approximately 1,000 teachers and 7,000 children participated in the Character Critters program. Nearly 100 percent of teachers noticed an improvement in the children's behavior, and 80 percent reported that the children were using the common language of the six pillar words.

The demand for this program has more than doubled. To meet the demand and increase the impact, Extension's goal for FY 02 was to partner with Head Start, Child Care, and public schools by training teachers to present the lessons. OSU provides a current research base, up to date instructional materials, and parent education. We also monitor any behavior changes.

How you can support this program

To continue and expand this program, the support of government officials, school administrators, sports and youth programs, and churches is crucial. Specifically, our county offices need volunteers or paraprofessionals and assistants to reach new children, schools, and families throughout the county.

In today's fast paced society the amount of time parents and their children get to spend together is dwindling. With both parents working the needs of children often get put on hold.



It's never too early, or too late, to be sure your child has the skills they need to live a life of character.

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