

Character Development Scale™



Curriculum Guide

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INTRODUCTION

Developing character traits is vital in today's society. People with character are committed to becoming responsible, self-disciplined citizens even under challenging circumstances. This is especially important in today's job market, as employers value workers with positive character traits. The *Character Development Scale (CDS)* is designed to meet the need for a brief assessment instrument to identify the strength of key character traits among individuals.

While it can be used with a wide variety of populations, the *CDS* is ideally suited for middle and high school classroom use, especially as part of a defined character education curriculum. The information that follows is intended to help educators include the *CDS* as part of their character education program, whether as a pre or post test, as an introduction to an entire character education unit, as a support piece, or as a way to generate classroom discussion.

When administering the *CDS* in groups or in classroom presentations, you should develop a format that will allow the students to easily complete, score, interpret, and derive meaning from their assessment results. This curriculum guide will provide you with suggestions for administering the *CDS* in a classroom or group discussion setting. Individuals interested in giving a presentation on the *CDS* to a group of fellow educators or administrators as part of a teacher in-service or as an orientation are encouraged to download the free PowerPoint presentation also available from www.jist.com.

BEFORE ADMINISTERING THE CDS

The following suggestions are intended to get individuals thinking about their own character and character education in general before they even take the assessment.

1. Define character for your group.

First, you should take steps to make sure that your students understand character. One approach is to simply ask the group what they think character is. Feel free to write their answers on the board or overhead. Then consider providing them some more formal definitions from the character education literature or from your own curriculum (see Appendix A for examples).

2. Ask people what they think the main components of good character are.

Ask students to brainstorm what they think the major pillars of character are. Invariably you will get more answers than the six major scales covered by the *CDS*. Feel free to write them all down on the board or overhead, then ask students if they feel some of these characteristics are more important or more valued than others and why. Are some of them overrated? Which are the most difficult to live up to? Feel free to use the “Who Do You Remember?” handout included with this guide as a starting point (see Appendix B).

3. Ask students how good character is developed.

Ask students whether they believe that character is something we are born with or something we are taught. How does it evolve? When does it begin? Do all people develop character traits at the same rate? If it's not something we inherit, where does it come from? Have students debate all possibilities, then provide them with some answers from the literature or your own curriculum (see Appendix A).

4. Discuss several theories of how character develops.

Feel free to introduce your students to the two most influential people to develop theories of character development: Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg (see Appendix A). Do not spend a great deal of time reviewing these theories. Merely provide enough information so that students understand that they have influence over their character as they interact with the world.

ADMINISTERING THE *CDS*

Now you should begin your administration of the *CDS*. Pass out *CDS* assessment instruments and something to write with. Tell students that you will take the assessment as a group, so they are not to hurry or work ahead.

Complete the Demographic Information

You should first have students complete the demographic information on the front cover of the *CDS*. Remind students that this is their booklet to keep and that nobody else will see their responses.

Administer the CDS

Ask students to read the section titled “About the CDS.” Remind them that developing character traits is vital in today’s society and that the *Character Development Scale (CDS)* is designed to help them identify, explore, understand, and act upon basic ethical values.

Tell students that the CDS is arranged in a series of steps. Remind them that it is not a test. Since there are no right or wrong answers, they should not spend too much time on each item. Remind them that this assessment is designed to help them and that they should respond honestly to every statement.

STEP 1 Completing the CDS

Tell students to complete the 48 items by reading each statement and deciding how well it describes their personality and value system. In each of the choices listed, they should circle the number of their response on the line to the right of each statement.

- Is it Very True of you? Circle that number
- Is it Somewhat True of you? Circle that number
- Is it Not At All True of you? Circle that number

STEP 2 Adding Your Scores

Tell students that for each of the six scales, or sections, they should add the scores they circled. Then, they should put those totals to the right of each section in the **Totals** box for that section. Lastly, they should determine whether their scores for each of the six sections are in the low, average, or high range.

STEP 3 Interpreting CDS Scores

Scores from **8 to 13** on any of the above scales are **LOW** and suggest that the responder needs to further develop these character traits to flourish in his or her personal, social, and academic life, and career.

Scores from **14 to 18** on any of the above scales are **AVERAGE** and indicate that the responder has mastered *some* of the character traits to flourish in his or her personal, social, and academic life, and career.

Scores from **19 to 24** on any of the above scale are **HIGH** and indicate that the responder has developed the character traits needed to flourish in his or her personal, social, and academic life, and career.

Strategies for Character Development

Students must be committed to living and behaving in line with these values. Use the strategies included in **Step 3** to help students reflect on their lives, develop better character traits, and take ownership of the core values that are the basis for good character. You can assign the activities as homework or have students complete the activities in class and then discuss them as a group.

Have students look specifically at those scales that they scored in the average or low ranges. These are the area(s) in which they need the most assistance. You should encourage them to complete each of the exercises designed to help them develop good character. Use the strategies listed as a curriculum guide or as a means of generating discussion topics or writing assignments (many of them are ideally suited to journal topics). Each week, work on one of the six sections. Have students work individually and in groups on completing all of the exercises.

ADDITIONAL GROUP ACTIVITIES

The *Character Development Scale* is designed to assist in character education for leadership, career development, community involvement, and personal growth. In addition to the exercises included on the assessment itself, the following activities and discussion prompts can help your students explore the role their character has in each of these four areas.

Activities for Leadership Development:

- Have class members discuss what the characteristics of a good leader are. Have them write their characteristics down and place them into five categories. Then have each student rank order these five categories from “most critical to leadership” to “least critical for leadership.” Debate their choices.
- Have groups discuss why characteristics such as Kindness, Integrity, Citizenship, Determination, Responsibility, and Respect should be shown by effective leaders. Guide them to come up with specific examples.
- Have students journal about supervisors, coaches, or teachers they have had in the past. Ask them to describe these leaders in terms of the six character qualities.
- Generate a list of famous historical leaders and then have students choose one to research for a paper or class presentation. Make the emphasis of their research an analysis of that leader’s character. Possible figures include George Washington, Martin Luther King Jr., Joan of Arc, Elizabeth I, Mahatma Gandhi, Lao Tzu, and Alexander the Great.

Activities for Career Development:

- Have students discuss ways in which character-based activities can have a positive influence on their career development. Start by having them list the qualities of a good employee. Discuss ways that students can better develop these critical qualities.
- Break the class into smaller groups. Have each smaller group take one of the six character qualities measured on the *CDS*. Have each group develop a list of why their character quality is of value to an employer. Have the groups get back together and debate which of the six character qualities is the *most* important for employment success.
- Have students discuss how character can be demonstrated in the various phases of a job search campaign including: developing employment leads, writing resumes and cover letters, completing job applications, researching organizations, interviewing for a job, and keeping a job.

Activities for Community Involvement

- Have students research charitable and other community-based organizations that they can volunteer at. These could include nursing homes, soup kitchens or other food delivery service, Habitat for Humanity, libraries, hospitals, and kennels.
- Have students start an environmental club at school. Have them organize one project each month to contribute to a healthy environment, such as having a recycling drive, cleaning up a neighborhood park, or planning a tree planting party.
- Plan a fundraiser. Have students pick out a cause they would like to support and then organize a means for generating donations. It could be anything from selling candy bars to planning a mini marathon.
- Discuss with students the meaning of community involvement. Ask them to identify other words to describe community involvement (service learning, volunteering, etc.). Then, have them describe some of the positive feelings that they have experienced after being involved with their communities.

Activities for Personal Growth

- Have students keep “Character Logs” throughout the entire semester. Each week they should record specific examples of them exhibiting positive character traits through their words and actions. At the end of the semester have students go back through their logs and document the ten activities or actions they are most proud of.

- Pick one of the six character traits each week and make that the focus of the class's character education curriculum for that week. Plan classroom activities around that trait including writing assignments, readings, games, and, if possible, field trips. At the end of the week be sure to have a discussion about what the students learned about that particular character trait.
- Write on the board or overhead the words *Kindness, Integrity, Citizenship, Determination, Responsibility, and Respect*. Ask group members to identify and describe popular television, movie, and book characters that exhibit each of the traits listed.
- Explain to the group members that character traits can be enhanced through experience. Have group members set long-term goals (goals that can be achieved within one year) and short-term goals (goals that can be achieved within one month) for how they will enhance each of the six character traits identified on the *CDS*.

TYING CHARACTER TRAITS TOGETHER *

The following discussion questions and exercises address four ways that people can continue to develop positive character. Each suggestion encompasses two or more of the character traits addressed in the *Character Development Scale*. Feel free to answer the questions as a class, in small groups, or as part of a writing assignment. Feel free to modify these activities to suit your needs.

Dealing with Adversity

There is no better judge of character than how you deal with adversity. Anybody can be a great person when things are going well. But when you are faced with adversity—failing a test, losing a big game, breaking up with a boyfriend/girlfriend—this is the true test of character. How we perform when faced with such challenges says a lot about our **integrity** (do we stand up for what we believe in), our **determination** (do we quit when times get tough), and our **responsibility** (can we be counted on to finish the job).

Think of one of the biggest challenges you have faced. In what ways did it test your character? What did you do to overcome that challenge? What did the experience teach you about yourself? Keep in mind, it doesn't necessarily matter what the final outcome was, as long as you stood up for your beliefs and gave your best effort.

Be the Bigger Person

The hard thing about treating others the way you would *like* to be treated is that *that* isn't always how *you* are treated. We have all heard the phrase, "don't stoop to their level," but it can be difficult to take the higher ground. Yet that's what people of character are expected to do—to show their **kindness**, **integrity**, and **respect** for others, even if those others don't do the same.

Think of a time when you felt someone disrespected or was unkind to you. How did you deal with that situation? Did you retaliate in kind? Or did you take the higher ground and act upon your principles? Why is it difficult to be the bigger person sometimes?

Be Honest and Reliable

Gaining the trust of parents, friends, teachers, teammates, and co-workers takes a long time, but that same trust only takes a moment to lose. Being honest and reliable doesn't mean you can't make mistakes, only that you own up to them and do your best to correct them. It means not making excuses and following through on your promises. It means acting with **integrity** and **responsibility**.

Think of someone you used to trust but no longer do. What would that person have to do to regain your trust? Now think of a mistake you have made that you tried to hide or escape from. Why does it seem easier to run away from our mistakes? What is the value of owning up to them?

Take an Interest in the World around You

Humans by their very nature are self-centered creatures. It is often difficult to deal with your own problems with honesty and integrity, let alone the problems of others that you had nothing to do with. Yet persons of character take it upon themselves to help those around them, often at the expense of their own time and resources, and without even being asked. Altruism—the unselfish regard for the well being of others—is what prompts us to help those in need without any hope of reward. Persons of character are motivated by their **kindness** and sense of **citizenship** to make a positive difference in the world. They take an interest in the problems of others and do what they can to help.

Think of a time you helped another person with a problem without any thought of reward. How did it make you feel? Now think of a time when you could have helped someone but didn't. Why didn't you? Thinking back on it, do you think you should have?

* Adapted in part from *Becoming the Best Me* by Robert Orndorff, JIST Publishing, 2004

References

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Appendix A: Definitions and Theories of Character Development

DEFINITIONS OF CHARACTER

- Berkowitz (2002) says character is made up of those personal characteristics that lead a person to do the right thing in a given situation as opposed to not doing the right thing.
- Ryan and Bohlin (1999) define good character as knowing the good, loving the good, and doing the good.
- Wiley (1998) suggests that character is a reliable inner disposition to act in a morally good way, having qualities such as honesty and integrity.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHARACTER

- Character has many components
- The components of character tend to have their own developmental trajectories
- People all develop their character at different rates
- The order in which character traits develop is different in different people
- The components of character develop gradually or in stages over an extended period of time.

PIAGET'S THEORY OF CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Jean Piaget (1965) was the first psychologist to suggest a theory of moral development. According to Piaget, development emerges from action, and people construct and reconstruct their knowledge of the world as a result of interactions with the environment.

Piaget believed people pass through three qualitatively different stages of moral reasoning.

STAGE 1: Moral Realism – In this stage children tend to have a clear sense of right and wrong, although they believe that there is typically only one right answer to every situation. They tend to trust adults at this stage and do not question an adult's moral judgments. At this stage, children tend to believe in moral absolutes and tend to only see a situation from their limited perspective.

STAGE 2: Morality of Reciprocity – In this stage, children begin to understand that rules and regulations are formed through negotiation. Children learn that rules can be changed and they see the world through the eyes of other people. They are able to comprehend that there may be more than one right answer. They believe that punishment should act as restitution for immoral acts. They begin to use logic and hypotheses at this stage.

STAGE 3: Mature Adult Thinking – In this stage, many different moral issues are addressed through practical decision making. For people at this stage, the ethics of cooperation and the complexity of moral issues are better understood.

KOHLBERG’S THEORY OF CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Lawrence Kohlberg (1989) also developed a theory about the stages people pass through in developing moral thinking. Kohlberg believed that people could only progress through the stages one at a time and they could not skip a stage. He believed that there were six identifiable stages that could be classified into three levels.

LEVEL I: Pre-Conventional Level

- In the first stage people behave according to socially acceptable norms because they are told to do so by some authority figure. Therefore, obedience is attained by the threat or application of punishment.
- The second stage is characterized by a view that moral behavior is acting in one’s own best interest. In this stage, people conform to society’s rules in order to receive rewards.

LEVEL II: Conventional Level

- The third stage is characterized by people wanting to do what will gain the approval of others.
- The fourth stage is characterized by abiding with the law and responding to one’s duty as a citizen. When this happens, people avoid censure and guilt.

LEVEL III: Post Conventional Level

- The fifth stage is an understanding of social welfare and a genuine interest in other people.
- The sixth stage is based on respect for a universal principle and requires people to be guided by their own individual conscience.

Appendix B: Handouts and Exercises to Supplement the Character Development Curriculum

Feel free to adapt the following handouts and transparencies to use alongside the *Character Development Scale*.

- The “Create Your Character Profile” worksheet can be filled out alongside the *CDS* and serve as a springboard for incorporating positive character traits into an actual resume, portfolio, or other job search materials.
- The “Who Do You Remember?” quiz can be used as an introduction to the discussion of character in general or to supplement a discussion of leadership or success.
- The “Character Calendar” provides an opportunity for students to explore daily opportunities for strengthening their character and improving the world around them.
- The “Expanding Your Character” exercise gives students the chance to reflect on character traits not covered explicitly by the *CDS*.
- Use the overhead transparencies with the six character traits and their definitions on them for discussion purposes.

In addition, a PowerPoint presentation designed to familiarize users with the *CDS* and provide instruction on how to administer it is available for free download from www.jist.com. This PowerPoint is especially helpful for a teacher training or in-service session, though it is not intended for classroom use.

Create Your Character Profile

Now that you've taken the *Character Development Scale* and have a better sense of what your strengths are, use the worksheet below to create your Character Profile. Think of it as a kind of *life resume* that lists your positive character traits rather than your past work experience. Be sure to include as many examples as you can as evidence of good character, and remember that having and exhibiting good character is something to be proud of.

Name: _____

Grade: _____

My best character trait: _____

Instances and examples where I have shown this trait include:

My second best character trait: _____

Instances and examples where I have shown this trait include:

My third best character trait: _____

Instances and examples where I have shown this trait include:

Who Do You Remember? *

Answer the following questions to the best of your ability:

1. Name the five wealthiest people in the world:
2. Name the last five Heisman trophy winners:
3. Name the last five winners of the Miss America contest:
4. Name ten people who have won the Nobel Prize:
5. Name the last half dozen Academy Award winners for best actor and actress:
6. Name the last decade's worth of World Series winners:

How did you do?

These are no second-rate achievers. They are the best in their fields. The point is none of us remember the headliners of yesterday. The applause dies. Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten. Accolades and certificates are buried with their owners.

Now answer the following questions to the best of your ability:

1. List a few teachers who have aided your journey through school.
2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.
4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.
5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.
6. Name half a dozen heroes whose stories have inspired you.

Which was the easier quiz?

The people who make a difference in your life are not often the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. The difference makers are the ones that care and have the most influence on our own character.

** Adapted from an Internet mailing. Original source unknown*

Expanding Your Character

The *Character Development Scale* covers six of the most important character traits shared by human beings across the world: Kindness, Integrity, Responsibility, Citizenship, Determination, and Respect. But these don't cover every aspect of character. For example, having good character could also mean having a good sense of humor, and being kind isn't necessarily the same thing as being selfless.

In the spaces below, try to think of as many positive character traits as you can in addition to those covered on the *Character Development Scale*. Then pick one out of the list that you feel is one of your strengths or that is most important to you and write a definition of it and suggestions for how people can strengthen this trait.

Other Character Traits:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

My Most Important Trait: _____

Definition: _____

Ways People Can Show/Improve This Trait: _____

Kindness

Kind people are courteous, considerate, helpful, and understanding of other people. They show compassion and generosity towards others. They treat others as they would like to be treated. They are sensitive to the feelings of others, and they give of their time and money to help people in need.

Integrity

People with integrity are trustworthy and truthful in all that they do. They behave honorably and justly in that they keep your promises. They always try to do what is right, even under difficult circumstances. They are honest and do not lie, cheat, or steal.

Citizenship

Good citizens are law abiding and try to make the world a better place. They are involved in service to their school, their community, and their country. They are a good friend and neighbor. They are responsible for what happens around them and do their part for the common good of society. They follow the rules and take an interest in the world around them.

Determination

Determined people continue to pursue worthy goals regardless of difficulties they might encounter. They follow their dreams, even in the face of opposition or discouragement from other people. They have the patience and strength to try again when confronted with failure or mistakes. They are very self-disciplined, and they always try to do their best.

Responsibility

Responsible people are dependable and fulfill tasks with reliability and commitment. They are consistent in their words and actions. They think before they act and always imagine the consequences of their actions. They are responsible for their mistakes and rarely make excuses or blame other people.

Respect

Respectful people have a high regard for authority, other people, themselves, and society in general. They understand that all people have value. They respect differences in other people and do not judge people prematurely. They treat people with dignity and courtesy and do not embarrass, insult, or hurt others.