

# TEACHING GUIDE

for use with  
Program 1

## TRUSTWORTHINESS

In the Video Series

# IN SEARCH OF CHARACTER™

Produced by Elkind+Sweet Communications, Inc.  
in association with Character Counts!

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## INTRODUCTION

In his landmark book, “Educating for Character,” Dr. Thomas Lickona asserts that:

*“Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good. . . . When we think about the kind of character we want for our children, it’s clear that we want them to be able to judge what is right, care deeply about what is right, and then do what they believe to be right—even in the face of pressure from without and temptation from within.”*

The purpose of this video series is to support educators, parents, and others who work with young people in their efforts to achieve this vision.

“**In Search of Character**” focuses on ten virtues commonly named by parents, educators, and community groups concerned with character education:

<b>Trustworthiness</b>	<b>Citizenship</b>
<b>Respect</b>	<b>Honesty</b>
<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Courage</b>
<b>Fairness</b>	<b>Diligence</b>
<b>Caring</b>	<b>Integrity</b>

While each of these words evokes its own meaning, what counts most, like colors on a canvas, is the way they interact to paint a complete picture. “In Search of Character” is not about teaching individual virtues, it’s about helping young people **construct a vision of themselves as good people** and then live up to that vision. It’s about showing them that, in a world where poor character is so commonplace, **they can choose to be better than that.**

***In Search of Character* has important historical roots.** In 1992 the Josephson Institute of Ethics convened a diverse group of 29 educators and youth organization leaders in Aspen, Colorado, to hammer out a framework for character education that would be agreeable across political, religious, and social divisions. As part of their task, the conference participants attempted to identify a concise, yet comprehensive, list of core ethical values they could all embrace. What they came up with is now known as **the six pillars of character**. They are: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

We found these six pillars to be a very useful foundation on which to build our new video series. Additionally, as we looked more closely at these pillars, we found they contained several important virtues which we felt deserved to be singled out for individual attention. And so, from the **trustworthiness** pillar we extracted *honesty*, *courage*, and *integrity*, and from the **responsibility** pillar we took *diligence*. Hence, the ten titles on the previous page.

*In Search of Character* was created and produced by David Elkind and Freddy Sweet, Ph.D., producers of such well known youth guidance videos as *The Power of Choice* and *Big Changes, Big Choices*. Elkind & Sweet are the authors of many journal articles on conducting classroom discussions for character education. They are members of the Character Education Partnership, the Josephson Institute of Ethics, and Educators for Social Responsibility.

## HOW TO USE THIS VIDEO

**Use in classrooms, libraries, youth groups,  
or view it at home.**

This video, along with the guide and website, is designed to help teachers engage students in classroom discussion and other activities leading to deep, meaningful reflection about the kinds of people they are and want to be.

### **Have a great discussion!**

Thoughtful, reflective discussions are essential to getting the most out of these videos. You will find some very fruitful facilitation techniques, including **Socratic Method**, at our special character education website at <[www.goodcharacter.com](http://www.goodcharacter.com)>. The questions in this teaching guide begin on page 10.

*www.goodcharacter.com* provides a wealth of helpful material including questions, assignments, and activities for special topics such as **sports, workplace readiness**, and others. Please utilize this very valuable resource.

## PRINCIPLES

**The following principles are emphasized throughout this video series:**

- ◆ Your character is defined by what you do, not by what you say or believe.
- ◆ Every choice you make helps define the kind of person you are choosing to be.
- ◆ Good character requires doing the right thing even when it's costly or risky.
- ◆ You don't have to adopt the worst behavior of others as a standard for yourself. You can choose to be better than that.
- ◆ What you do matters, and one person can make a big difference.
- ◆ The payoff for having good character is that it makes you a better person and it makes the world a better place.



## WHAT IS TRUSTWORTHINESS?

**In this program trustworthiness means:**

- 🍏 Keeping promises—being a person of your word.
- 🍏 Reliability—following through on commitments.
- 🍏 Honesty.
- 🍏 Keeping a secret. Not betraying a trust.
- 🍏 Integrity—not caving in to temptation.
- 🍏 Loyalty—when appropriate.

## PROGRAM CONTENT

We are looking in on the “Dr. Mike Show,” a talk radio show for teenagers. Lee calls in with a personal problem that has him wanting to lie to his parents. This sets in motion an in-depth exploration of what it means to be a trustworthy person. Through conversation with Dr. Mike and his co-host, Anika; through flashbacks to discussions Dr. Mike has had with high school students around the country; and through a documentary profile of a high school peer counselor who exemplifies the benefits of being trustworthy; Lee resolves his problem and learns that trustworthiness is a pillar of good character.

### 00:38 **START OF RADIO SHOW:**

“What’s up, we’re back, and this is the Dr. Mike Show, talk radio for the under twenty crowd. I’m Anika Noni Rose, and heeeeere’s Dr. Mike.”

Dr. Mike reads a personals ad from the newspaper that ends, “Above all, must be trustworthy.” He notes that the writer considered trustworthiness more important than looks. He comments how basic trustworthiness is to a functioning society.

Lee, 15 years old, calls in and asks, “How can I get my parents to trust me?” He’s been invited to the senior prom by his older girlfriend, who wants to party all night after the prom, but his parents won’t allow it. He doesn’t want to look like a “wimp” to his girlfriend, so he’s considering lying to his parents about where he’s going to be that night. Dr. Mike asks him how lying to his parents is going to build trust. Dr. Mike recalls a recent conversation he had with some high school kids about a similar issue. . .

### 03:14 **TEEN DISCUSSION BEGINS:**

*(we see this in flashback)*

**Dr. Mike poses a hypothetical:** Your parents have gone out of town for the weekend and left you home alone. They instructed you not to have anyone over. Meanwhile, a boy or girl in your drama class, whom you are very attracted to, has suggested rehearsing a scene at your house. Your parents won’t know. What will you do?

One boy says he'd take the chance, invite her over, and deal with any possible problems later.

Dr. Mike takes the role of the parents and role plays with him. The boy says he would lie to his parents and tell them nobody was in the house. This leads into a discussion about the importance of trust in the child-parent relationship, and the unthinking way so many kids risk that trust for short-term satisfaction.

Another student adds that at age 17 his parents should be able to trust him to make his own decisions.

**Dr. Mike asks:** Is my trust in you based on the choices I make, or the choices you demonstrate?

The student responds with the challenge that, since you raised him, his choices reflect you as a parent.

Dr. Mike replies that as you get older you have to take responsibility for the choices you make. And when parents see you making good choices, that's when you get their trust.

#### **09:52 BACK TO THE RADIO STATION:**

Lee relates a story about having to cover up lies with lies until he contradicted himself and got caught. Anika quotes Mark Twain saying, "If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything else." Lee says his mom would catch him anyway because she's "a walking lie detector." Dr. Mike asks if Lee would want to lie to his parents even if he could get away with it. "Would you be worthy of their trust if it's based on a lie?" Anika questions how that would reflect on his character in general. "What kind of person are you," asks Dr. Mike. Lee considers himself trustworthy, so he concludes that he can't lie to his parents. Dr. Mike asks him what else trustworthiness means. Lee has to think about it. Dr. Mike recalls another conversation he had with a group of teens. . .

#### **11:11 BEGIN TEEN DISCUSSION:**

**Dr. Mike asks:** You know someone is trustworthy when. . . ?

**The teens give the following responses:**

-I can tell them all my secrets and they're always there for me.

-When they are dependable.

-When you can tell them something personal and not be worried about them telling others.

-When I've known them for a long time and they've demonstrated that they keep confidences and are reliable. It takes a long time.

-An important factor of trust is to be able to trust yourself to be responsible and have a good work ethic. Then you'll be a better person and a good member of society. You and your friends will have mutual trust.

-I wasn't always a trustworthy person but experiences have taught me about the negative consequences and it caused me to change.

-The most important thing for me is be a John Wayne type character: Shoot straight, tell the truth. To be a man, you've got to tell the truth and everything will be good. When you're honest, people will respect that, even if they don't like what you say.

-There's a name for that - strong character. It's important to be able to withstand peer pressure and believe in yourself and what you stand for.

**Dr. Mike asks:** Are you trustworthy?

-Yes, because I believe you shouldn't betray another's trust. It might come back to hurt you.

-I worked all summer at the commodities ex-change where I was entrusted with large sums of cash. I could easily have taken some, but didn't.

**Dr. Mike comments** that many adults feel they can't trust kids, but this group is saying that sometimes they are even more trustworthy than adults—that they're independent, responsible and have a good work ethic. Is that true?

-You build up trust with parents over time. But doing one thing wrong can ruin everything.

-When your parents ask where you're going they really care for you. But it gets annoying. Why can't they just trust you?

**Dr. Mike tells the kids** that their trustworthiness will be questioned frequently during their teen years, but their choices will never lie.

**17:15 BACK TO THE RADIO STATION:**

Dr. Mike asks Lee if he's trustworthy. Lee answers yes because he keeps promises, makes responsible choices, people can rely on him, and now he's decided he won't lie. Dr. Mike asks how he is at keeping secrets. Lee wistfully comments about how much the kids talked about confiding in each other. He can't remember anyone ever confiding in him or vice versa. Anika asks if that doesn't limit the depth of his friendships, and Lee admits that he gets jealous of people who have such intimate friendships. "How do they do that," he wonders.

**18:25 DOCUMENTARY:  
ROSA GONZALEZ**

We see an inspiring documentary about a teenage girl for whom trustworthiness is a major theme in life. We see how her effectiveness as a peer counselor depends on both trusting and being trusted, and we get an insight into the way trust leads to better long term relationships.

**25:00 RETURN TO THE RADIO SHOW:**

Lee says he never saw his unwillingness to trust others as a barrier to friendship. He's going to think about being more trusting. When Anika asks what he's decided about the prom, Lee concedes that he'll skip the parties if he can't change his parents' minds. And even if his girlfriend thinks he's a wimp, at least she'll know she can trust him. Anika concludes that trust is at the core of all relationships, and that without it we have nothing. Dr. Mike agrees. He points out that, in a world where trustworthiness is so often sacrificed for temporary gains, these kids have proved that we can be better than that.

Anika delivers a public service announcement about the benefits of being responsible.

**END AT 26:49**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### *Questions to ask before the video.*

1. How do you know when you can trust someone?

### *Questions to ask after the video.*

2. Some adults say that your generation cannot be trusted, that you've lost the values from past generations. Do you agree, or disagree?

3. Is it a good idea to risk losing your parents' trust for temporary pleasure? In the video Clarence said "So what if you're in trouble for a little while?" Do you agree or disagree with Clarence's position.

4. How important is trust in your relationships with friends and family? How would these relationships be affected if you found out someone was lying to you?

5. Once trust has been broken, what can you do to get it back? Have you ever lost someone's trust? Has someone lost your trust? Explain.

6. If your friends were here right now, would they say you were trustworthy? What would your parents say? Are you more trustworthy with your friends or with your parents? Do you think your parents should trust you automatically? Why or why not?

7. The kids in the video identified several aspects of trustworthiness. What were they? Do you agree with them? Can you add any? What does trustworthiness mean to you?

8. If you want someone to trust you, who has most of the responsibility — you or the other person? Why?

9. Dr. Mike said that your trustworthiness may be questioned but your choices will never lie. What does that mean? Do you agree?

10. As a general policy, should we start off trusting people and only stop trusting if they prove that they're not worthy? Or should we be cautious and not trust them until they prove themselves worthy? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each position?

11. How did Rosa's story (*the peer counselor*) make you feel? What did you learn from it?

12. Rosa said, "Trust is the basis for every relationship." Do you think that's true? Explain.

13. Rosa said that your willingness to trust another person is important if you want that person to trust you. Do you agree? Explain.

13. Why did the Peer Resource Program at Rosa's school use a ropes course to train peer counselors?

14. What does being trustworthy have to do with the quality of your character?

15. What are the benefits of being a trustworthy person? How do you benefit from the trustworthiness of others?

16. Did the video present any ideas you disagree with?

*For additional questions, or to share your own ideas with others, or for questions relating to special topics such as sports, workplace readiness, etc., visit [www.goodcharacter.com](http://www.goodcharacter.com)*

## WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Are you a trustworthy person? In what ways are you trustworthy? In what ways are you, perhaps, not so trustworthy? What could you do to improve?
2. Write an essay describing what this society might be like if nobody was trustworthy, if suspicion, dishonesty, and betrayal were the norm, if nobody could be counted on to keep commitments.
3. Write about someone you trust. Why do you trust that person? How important is that trust to you? How do you reciprocate?
4. If your school doesn't have a peer counseling program, find out what peer counselors do, and then write an essay or an editorial for your school newspaper advocating that your school start such a program. If your school does have a peer counseling program, write a short article describing the program and its benefits to the school community.
5. Keep a journal for a month that focuses on your relationships with your friends and family in the area of trustworthiness. If there are things that displease you, develop some ideas for improving the situation.
6. Write about a time you lost somebody's trust or somebody lost your trust. Was this trust ever regained? How? What did you learn from the experience?

*For additional assignments, or to share your own ideas with others, or for assignments relating to special topics such as sports, workplace readiness, etc., visit [www.goodcharacter.com](http://www.goodcharacter.com)*

## GROUP ACTIVITIES

1. Many people complain that political leaders cannot be trusted. Develop a check-list for evaluating the trustworthiness of political leaders. Test out your checklist by listening to a politician speaking on TV. You can see entire speeches on C-SPAN.
2. Divide the class into small groups. Have each group develop a list of do's and don'ts for being a trustworthy person. (*See our definition on page 5.*) Have them make oral reports to the class addressing the following questions: What happens when people live in accordance with these guidelines. What happens when they don't. In what ways does trustworthy and untrustworthy behavior affect our community and society? In what ways can/do young people demonstrate trustworthiness?
3. Have the students watch a movie, TV drama or sitcom, paying particular attention to the behavior of the main characters with regard to trustworthiness. How much trust-worthy behavior did they find? How much untrustworthy behavior? Have a class discussion about these issues. (*A great many TV plots are based on a deceit.*)
4. Most people consider loyalty to be an important part of trustworthiness. What, exactly, is loyalty? Who should be loyal to whom or what, and under what circumstances? When is loyalty appropriate, and when might it be a bad thing? Give some specific examples. Break the class into small groups to ponder these issues and have each group give an oral report to the class.

*For additional activities, or to share your own ideas with others, or for activities relating to special topics such as sports, workplace readiness, etc., please visit [www.goodcharacter.com](http://www.goodcharacter.com)*

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**www.goodcharacter.com**  
***A Cyber Supplement for***  
**“In Search of Character”**

*Please visit this website to find:*

- \* **Facilitation techniques** for conducting meaningful, productive classroom discussions, including **Socratic Method**.
- \* **Additional discussion questions, writing assignments, and learning activities** contributed by teachers and youth group leaders who are using “In Search of Character.”
- \* **Opportunities for your students** to become involved in activities and issues relating to the topics in these videos.
- \* **Links** to key character education organizations and resources.
- \* **Articles** and other writings on educating for character.
- \* Special discussion guide supplements for use with **sports programs, workplace readiness programs**, and other areas of special interest.

**This website is updated frequently**, and you are invited to check it often. We welcome your requests for specific items to include, and we will appreciate any contributions you make by sharing your own ideas or experiences as a character educator.

## ABOUT DR. MIKE. . .

Michael Thomson, Ph.D., is a youth counselor, teacher-trainer, lecturer, and author unlike any you have ever seen. Whether doing a school as-seemly, parent evening, or staff in-service, “Dr. Mike” leaves the audience with a lasting and powerful message. His audience-interactive techniques are entertaining, fun, and most of all educational. Through his naturally warm, humorous approach to important issues, Dr. Mike reveals the consequences of good choices and poor choices, and provides people with tools to take control of their lives.

Dr. Mike received his Ph.D. from The Ohio State University. He has been a high school hockey coach, a Supervisor in the Dept. of Psychology and Psychiatry at The Mayo Clinic, and Director of health care centers in Minnesota, Ohio, and Sweden. He is Head Clinician with the Ohio High School Athletic Association, and consultant to The Ohio State University athletic department. He is a Certified Reality Therapist and a certified trainer for Character Counts!<sup>™</sup>.

Dr. Mike is the author of several books for teen-agers, parents, and teachers. He lives in Ohio, with his wife, Carol, and their teenage son and daughter.

***Dr. Mike is available for school assemblies, in-service trainings, and speaking engagements. He may be reached at 1-800-359-5437, or by visiting his website at [www.drmikethomson.com](http://www.drmikethomson.com)***

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This video series was produced in association with  
**CHARACTER COUNTS!**<sup>sm</sup>

The CHARACTER COUNTS! coalition is a consortium of the nation's largest and most influential educational and youth-serving organizations united in one overriding mission: strengthening the character of America's youth.



**CHARACTER COUNTS!**  
(310) 846-4800  
[www.charactercounts.org](http://www.charactercounts.org)

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[publisher@livewiremedia.com](mailto:publisher@livewiremedia.com)**

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