

# TEACHING GUIDE

for use with  
Program 7

## HONESTY

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 discussion 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 HONESTY?

**In this program honesty means:**

- 🍏 Be truthful, sincere, and straightforward.
- 🍏 Don't lie, cheat or steal.
- 🍏 Don't intentionally mislead others.

## PROGRAM CONTENT

We are looking in on the “Dr. Mike Show,” a talk radio show for teenagers. Toshiko calls in with a personal problem that has to do with cheating. This sets in motion an in-depth exploration of the entire subject of honesty. Through conversation with Dr. Mike and his co-host, through flashbacks to discussions Dr. Mike has had with high school students around the country, and through a documentary profile of two teenage boys who exemplify honesty, Toshiko resolves her problem and learns how essential honesty is to 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 S.E. Townsend, and heeeeere’s Dr. Mike.”

Dr. Mike begins by saying that he was just in Cincinnati talking at some high schools and he met a couple of guys who had an amazing experience he wants to tell us about.

### 01:00 **DOCUMENTARY: MATT & CHRIS**

We see a short documentary about two teenage boys who found \$10,000 in a shopping mall. The national media made heroes out of them for turning it in, but many of the kids at their school ridiculed them for not keeping it.

### 05:55 **BACK TO THE RADIO STATION**

S.E. suggests that the controversy over the boys’ decision makes her wonder if we don’t have an honesty problem in this society. Dr. Mike agrees and decides to devote the program to the subject of honesty.

The first caller is Toshiko, who has a friend who has asked Toshiko to help her cheat on an exam. Toshiko feels very uncomfortable about it, but her friend needs the help and Toshiko doesn’t want to let her down. Dr. Mike says this reminds him of a discussion he recently had with a group of teenagers. One girl in particular had a similar problem, and he wants to tell Toshiko about it. (We, the viewers of the video, see this discussion in flashback.)

### 07:50 **TEEN DISCUSSION: A tough choice**

Allison shares a dilemma about a lost beeper she found in a parking lot. Although it is clearly marked

with a phone number and reward, her parents are urging her to keep it. They want to activate it for her. Allison has been struggling with the decision. She has already scraped off the bar code and reward notice. She feels badly for the person who lost it and feels guilty every time it beeps. She readily admits that returning the beeper would be the right thing to do. Still, she thinks she's going to keep it.

When prodded by Dr. Mike, she explains her behavior with rationalizations like: "it was meant for me," "I'm 18 and confused," and "the owner doesn't expect to ever see it again." Ultimately, she admits that there is no excuse.

#### 11:54 **RETURN TO RADIO STATION**

Dr. Mike asks Toshiko if she got anything from hearing that discussion. Toshiko thinks Allison's problem is a no-brainer—it's very clear that the only right thing to do is return the beeper to its owner. She doesn't understand why Allison is waffling. Dr. Mike asks Toshiko how her problem is any different. Toshiko responds that the difference is that she has a friend who needs her help. Dr. Mike asks if helping her friend is important enough for her to become a cheater. Toshiko says she wouldn't be cheating, she'd just be making it easy for her friend to cheat.

#### 13:04 **TEEN DISCUSSION: Rationalizing**

**Dr. Mike poses a hypothetical:** A friend gives you a very expensive birthday present, and then tells you he stole it. What would you do?

Several kids say it would be okay to keep it because they weren't the ones who stole it.

One boy replies that it's just as bad as stealing if you accept something you know was stolen.

They go on to make distinctions between stealing from a person, a small store, or a big chain of stores.

A girl brings it all to a conclusion by saying that these rationalizations are nothing but excuses for dishonest behavior and it's all wrong.

**Dr. Mike poses another hypothetical:** A clerk in a store gives you way too much change. What do you do?

This provokes a lively argument. Some of the teens would keep the change because it's the clerk's fault for not paying attention and doing his/her job. Others empathize with the clerk, arguing that anyone can make a mistake and if you keep the

money the clerk will have to make up for the shortfall.

Dr. Mike asks the students if this is the kind of world they want to live in.

One boy replies that it's wrong, but . . .

Dr. Mike seizes the moment to point out that "but" is usually nothing more than an excuse for not doing the right thing.

In a wonderful moment of insight, the teens acknowledge the truth of this lesson.

#### 19:45 **RETURN TO RADIO SHOW**

Toshiko admits that it's not okay to help her friend cheat—she was just looking for excuses to do something she knows is wrong. But, when asked what she's going to tell her friend, she says she'll make something up in order to get out of it. Dr. Mike says, "You mean you're going to lie to her?" Toshiko replies, "That way she won't get mad at me."

#### 20:53 **TEEN DISCUSSION: Lying**

Even though most of the teens say being honest is important to them, they agree that almost everybody lies. One boy says he never lies to his friends, but he regularly lies to his parents because they expect so much of him. Another boy tells how he lies to his parents in order to keep them happy, but that has backfired badly and broken the trust his parents had in him.

A girl says she'll lie to spare someone's feelings.

**Dr. Mike asks,** "How many lies do you get to tell before you're a liar?"

"One," says a girl. "It's not okay to lie." She tells how a close friend ruined their friendship by lying to her.

The teens make a distinction between little lies & big lies. But one girl says that eventually it will come back to you if tell different things to different people. It's not worth losing the respect of your friends or the trust of your parents just to get out of a troublesome situation.

**Dr. Mike asks,** "How does it make you feel when people lie to you?"

One girl says it's horrible. It's a double standard. It hurts. Another says, "If you call yourself my friend



then why do you have to lie to me? Be a good enough friend to tell me the truth.”

The discussion ends with a girl saying, “We all know people who are completely honest and do the right thing.” They are her favorite people.

**26:45 RETURN TO RADIO STATION**

Toshiko recognizes that the lie she was going to tell her friend is probably more serious than she had thought and that it would could harm their relationship.

Dr. Mike asks her if she knows any phony people, and what is it that makes them phony. Toshiko realizes that what makes people phony is that they aren't honest. Dr. Mike asks her if she wants to be real or phony. Toshiko gets the message and vows to do the right thing.

Dr. Mike's co-host, S.E., points out that being honest makes life easier. She concludes with a public service announcement about honesty.

**END AT 29:30**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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

1. How many lies do you get to tell before you are a liar?
2. Do you consider yourself to be an honest person? Why?
3. What would you do if you found \$10,000 on the shelf beneath an ATM machine and nobody saw you find it?

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

4. In the opening documentary, some kids thought that Matt and Chris were saps for returning the money they found. What do you think of their decision?
5. The girl who found the lost beeper said she felt guilty and that giving it back would be the right thing to do. Why, then, is she keeping it? What advice would you give to her?
6. People often rationalize their own dishonesty by saying, "That's the way the world is, so why should I be different?" What do you think of this reasoning?
7. One of Dr. Mike's guidelines for making good choices is to ask yourself, "How would I feel if this were printed on the front page of the newspaper?" How might that help keep you honest?
8. Is there anything wrong with a "small" lie to parents or friends to keep from upsetting them?
9. One girl in the teen discussion said she doesn't count little lies as lies. How do you feel about that idea?
10. When people are dishonest with you, how does it make you feel?
11. Dr. Mike's co-host, S.E., comments that lying ruins relationships. Do you agree? Has that ever happened to you?
12. What is your definition of an honest person?
13. How important is it to you that your friends be honest?

14. If you discover your classmates are cheating on an important exam, does that make it okay for you to cheat, too?

15. It's been said that cheating is just another form of lying. Do you agree?

16. Dr. Mike makes the point that dishonesty turns us into phonies, but honesty allows us to be real. What does that mean? Do you agree?

17. S.E. observes that simply being honest makes life a lot easier. What does she mean by that? Do you agree? Have you experienced this in your own life?

18. What risks are involved in being honest? What risks are involved in being dishonest? How do you benefit from being an honest person?

19. What does honesty have to do with your character?

*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. Pick any question from the previous two pages and write an essay.
2. Select an advertisement from a magazine or newspaper, or from radio or TV. Analyze it for honesty:
  - Does it explicitly say anything you think is untrue? Is it trying to make you believe something that might not be true? Is it lying by omission, i.e. leaving out important information that would make a difference to you? Is it misleading in any way? Does it present any half-truths?
  - Take any political speech (especially a campaign speech) and analyze it in the same way.
3. What is a phony? How does dishonesty turn people into phonies? What does it mean when you say that a person is “real” or “authentic”? What does being “real” have to do with honesty?
4. What is the relationship between honesty and trustworthiness? Write an essay exploring this relationship.
5. Write an essay about a situation in which you were dishonest (lied, cheated, or stole). Why did it happen? How did you justify it? How did you feel about it at the time? Did it affect any of your relationships? Did it cause any problems for you? How do you feel about it now? What did you learn from it?
6. Write a letter to someone in the news who’s honesty has impressed you.

*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. Have the students keep an "Honesty-Dishonesty" journal for one week. In this journal, document examples of honesty and dishonesty in everyday life. Keep track of all the times you hear or tell "white lies." Pay particular attention to the media. See what role honesty plays in stories covered in the news. Note how often dishonesty is at the core of TV sit-coms and dramas. At the end of a week, write your conclusions and share them with the class. What did you learn about your own behavior from doing this project?
2. As a class, brainstorm all the excuses and rationalizations people give for lying, cheating, and stealing, and then have a discussion about them. How valid are they? What's wrong with each of them?
3. Conduct a survey in your school or community asking questions like the following: Do you think people are honest enough? What are some examples of dishonesty you really dislike? What are some examples of honesty that you especially appreciate? Compile the results into a report.
4. Role-play various situations where one or more students are under pressure to be dishonest. Examples: helping a friend cheat on an assignment or exam, or lying to cover up for someone. Record it on video and share it with other classes.
5. Create an "honesty" web site. Then, contact us (by e-mail through our website) so we can check it out.

*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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