A role model is someone whose behavior is imitated by others. Of course, there are good role models and bad role models. There is even the counterintuitive anti-role model who behaves so badly that s/he serves as a good example of what NOT to do.

We all hope that children have good, strong role models who possess the kind of qualities that make our sons and daughters want to be (and become) better people. While there is some variation in every parent’s definition of what it means to be a good person, the following 7 characteristics of a positive role model remain constant.

Positive role models:
(1) Model positive choice-making: Little eyes are watching and little ears are listening. When it comes to being a role model, you must be aware that the choices you make don’t only impact you but also the children who regard you as their superhe-ro. Someday, they will be in the same predicament and think to themselves, “What did s/he do when s/he was in the same situation?” When you are a role model it’s not enough to tell your charg-ees the best choices to make. You must put them into action yourself.

(2) Think out loud: When you have a tough choice to make, allow the children to see how you work through the problem, weight the pros and cons, and come to a decision. The process of making a good decision is a skill. A good role model will not only show a child which decision is best, but also how they to come to that conclusion. That way, the child will be able to follow that reason-ing when they are in a similar situation.

(3) Apologize and admit mistakes: Nobody’s perfect. When you make a bad choice, let those who are watching and learning from you know that you made a mistake and how you plan to correct it. This will help them to understand that (a) everyone makes mistakes; (b) it’s not the end of the world; (c) you can make it right; and (d) you should take responsibility for it as soon as possible. By apologizing, admit-ting your mistake, and repairing the damage, you will be demonstrating an important yet often over-looked part of being a role model. (This point began some great conver-sation on parents and role models in the comments below and here.)

(4) Follow through: We all want children to stick with their commitments and follow through with their promises. However, as adults, we get busy, distracted, and sometimes, a bit lazy. To be a good role model, we must demonstrate stick-to-itiveness and self disci-pline. That means; (a) be on time; (b) finish what you started; (c) don’t quit; (d) keep your word; and (e) don’t back off when things get challeng-ing. When role models follow through with their goals, it teaches children that it can be done and helps them adopt an “if s/he can do it, so can I” at-titude.

(5) Show respect: You may be driven, successful, and smart but whether you choose to show respect or not speaks volumes about the type of attitude it takes to make it in life. We always tell children to “treat others the way we want to be treat-ed” and yet, may not sub-scribe to that axiom our-selves. Do you step on others to get ahead? Do you take your spouse,
friends, or colleagues for granted? Do you show gratitude or attitude when others help you? In this case, it’s often the little things you do that make the biggest difference in how children perceive how to succeed in business and relationships.

(6) Be well rewarded: While we don’t want to spread ourselves too thin, it’s important to show children that we can be more than just one thing. Great role models aren’t just “parents” or “teachers.” They’re people who share their curiosities and have varied interests. They’re great learners and challenge themselves to get out of their comfort zones. You may be a father who’s also a student of the martial arts, a great chef, a good sportsman, and a treasured friend. You may be a mother who’s a gifted dancer, a solid rock climber, a celebrated singer, and a curious photographer. When children see that their role models can be many things, they will learn that they don’t need to pigeon-hole themselves in order to be successful.

(7) Demonstrate confidence in who you are: Whatever you choose to do with your life, be proud of the person you’ve become and continue to become. It may have been a long road and you may have experienced bumps along the way, but it’s the responsibility of a role model to commemorate the lessons learned, the strength we’ve amassed, and the character they’ve developed. We can always get better, however, in order for children to celebrate those who are their role models need to show that confidence doesn’t start “5 pounds from now,” ”2 more wins on top of this one,” or “1 more possession than I have today.” We must continue to strive while being happy with how far we’ve come at the same time.

While it may seem like a great deal of pressure to be a positive role model; nobody is expecting you to be superhuman. We certainly wouldn’t expect that behavior from the children who are looking to us for answers and guidance—not would we want them to expect that kind of flawless behavior from themselves or others. You can only do your best. And, if you mess up today, you can always refer back to tip #3 and try again tomorrow. Good role models earn multiple chances from the children who believe in them and know they can do anything if they simply put their mind to it.

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us. ~ Albert Schweitzer

All of us at the Friends Program are thankful that we have a chance to work with volunteers like our Foster Grandparents. We know that some days are tough. It can be a true challenge to be a volunteer. It can be incredibly difficult to be in a modern classroom or after-school program. Remember that you are doing important work helping children who need your support. You do it with a smile and you do it with great love.

The child you connect with, when nobody else can, will remember your kindness and support for a lifetime. The boy you spend extra time with this month may be able to understand what his next teacher says because you took extra time to give him a solid foundation this year.

The service that you give makes a difference. Our program and your work are about much more than the Foster Grandparent program. Your work is about truly changing lives. This November, we thank you for serving. We are grateful for the chance to serve you.

Nancy Paul
Director of Senior Programs

November Workshops

SEACOAST
- Wednesday, November 9th at 10am
First Parish Church
176 West High Street, Somersworth
Topic: The Importance of Quality Child Care
Speaker: Kendra Bisson, Wentworth–Douglas Hospital
Early Learning Center

CONCORD
- Wednesday, November 16th at 10am
Friends Conference Room
Topic: TBD

HAMPSTEAD/DERBY
- Wednesday, November 30th at 1:00 pm
Hampstead Library
Topic: Building Successful Relationships with Children
Speaker: Jane Quigley, Education Consultant

MANCHESTER
- Wednesday, November 16th at 9:30 am
Manchester Christian Church
1308 Wellington Rd., Manchester
Topic: Service Link
Speaker: Jeanie Thorn

NASHUA
- Tuesday, November 8th at 10:00 am
St. Philip’s Greek Orthodox Church
500 W. Hollis St., Nashua
Topic: TBD

LAKES REGION
- Tuesday, November 15th at 11:00
Sacred Heart Parish
31 Gilford Ave Laconia (building behind the Church offices on corner of Union and Gilford)
Topic: TBD

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