It is hard to look into the face of those sweet little angels we consider our babies and imagine that they could grow up to be anything other than wonderful children. So how do children develop their morals and character strength?

Moral development refers to the progressive stages we undergo to develop new skills to decide what is right and wrong and process justice and fairness. Some researchers believe that a person’s interactions with others, their environment, and their gender also influence moral development. For example, skills in resolving conflicts acquired during sibling interactions are thought to contribute to moral maturity. And studies have shown that some children may make decisions based on justice and others based on care.

In general, social scientists agree that moral development goes hand in hand with cognitive development.

For example, children aged two through five avoid punishment for their own benefit. A preschooler understands they have to go in time-out if they hit a sibling and may choose to avoid time-out. In the early elementary years, moral reciprocity develops. “I’ll be nice to Cassandra because she is nice to me.”

Children in middle and upper elementary grades do the right thing to get approval. For example, the safety patroller helps others knowing it will make his parents and teachers proud.
And speaking of parents, contemporary researchers find that parents are the first and primary influence in the moral development of a child. Remember, it’s not what you say; it’s what you do that matters!

Listening, learning and living together, it is the science of life. “Family Album” is a co-production of UF/IFAS Extension, the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences and of WUFT-FM. If you would like to learn more, please visit our website at http://familyalbumradio.org or find Family Album Radio on Facebook.

References


