

The Aspen Declaration on Character Education

In July 1992, the Josephson Institute of Ethics hosted a summit conference in Aspen, Colorado. A diverse group of ethicists, educators and youth-service professionals convened to find ways to work together and boost their character-education efforts. The declaration that concluded this meeting would form the intellectual foundation for the CHARACTER COUNTS! movement, started by the Institute the following year.

1. The next generation will be the stewards of our communities, nation and planet in extraordinarily critical times.
2. In such times, the well-being of our society requires an involved, caring citizenry with good moral character.
3. People do not automatically develop good moral character; therefore, conscientious efforts must be made to help young people develop the values and abilities necessary for moral decision making and conduct.
4. Effective character education is based on core ethical values rooted in democratic society, in particular, respect, responsibility, trust-worthiness, justice and fairness, caring, and civic virtue and citizenship.
5. These core ethical values transcend cultural, religious and socio-economic differences.
6. Character education is, first and foremost, an obligation of families and faith communities, but schools and youth-service organizations also have a responsibility to help develop the character of young people.
7. These responsibilities are best achieved when these groups work in concert.
8. The character and conduct of our youth reflect the character and conduct of society; therefore, every adult has the responsibility to teach and model the core ethical values and every social institution has the responsibility to promote the development of good character.