

# What are the Golden Rules?

**T**he moral values that we learn as children are part of the wider process of socialisation. Our sense of morality is grounded in our growing understanding that we must build bonds with other people to ensure our mutual well-being in a community. A consensus about the values that should underpin and guide our behaviour towards each other is the code of conduct that ensures that we can live in social harmony by taking care of one another.

Morality is linked to consequences. We decide if an action is right or wrong when we see how it affects the people around us. Does it harm or improve their welfare?

By teaching moral standards that are universal, schools and parents are promoting behaviours that are common to all humanity. They should incorporate the moral codes of all the major religions without undercutting the particular practices that make them all different. The Quality Circle Time model considers these universal values to be vitally important and calls them the Golden Rules:

- 1. We are gentle, we don't hurt others.**
- 2. We are kind and helpful, we don't hurt anybody's feelings.**
- 3. We are honest, we don't cover up the truth.**
- 4. We work hard, we don't waste time.**
- 5. We listen, we don't interrupt.**
- 6. We look after property, we don't damage things.**

People often ask why there are negative statements in the Golden Rules. Young children learn through opposites. Hot and cold, smooth and rough: each concept's opposite enhances its 'definition' or knowledge of itself. We can put our emphasis on the positive part of the Golden Rule by scribing it in gold lettering and keeping the negative part in small, grey writing. But the negative is still there as a reverse image.

Everything depends on the language you use. An ideal approach might be as follows: *'Do you know the rule you are breaking now? By hurting Wayne, you are breaking the Golden Rule of being gentle'*. The fact that all the adults share a mutual understanding of the rules is reinforced when the whole learning community, including the parents, use similar applications of the Golden Rules.

## Introducing the Golden Rules

For very young children it is advisable to start with two positive statements:

**We are gentle.**

**We are kind.**

There is a further Golden Rule that is useful for young children:

**We play well, we don't spoil each others' games.**

The other Golden Rules can be introduced gradually from the second term of the reception year onwards.

Young children need visual images to support their learning. It is important that displays of the Golden Rules are surrounded by photographs of children showing gentle and kind behaviours. Firstly, you need to engage the children in discussions of what a gentle act and a kind act would look like. Eventually, they will be able to describe examples of behaviour that they would like to see shown in photographs. Later, you can draw attention to the Golden Rules by pointing to the photographs.

## The benefits of using stories

We cannot be truly moral unless we are able to see things from another person's point of view. It is important that we help children to take the big cognitive leap from self-absorption to a sense of empathy and sharing that is called 'perspective taking'. Many children find this difficult, but practice makes perfect. This essential cognitive shift is accelerated by social interaction and games that draw attention to the skills involved. Another useful strategy is to harness children's imagination by using plays, stories and puppets to stimulate discussion about what is right and what is wrong.

In stories, the predicaments we all face are made concrete and the structure – a beginning, middle and end – means that children can experience the thrill of anticipation safe in the knowledge that all will be sorted out in the end. Stories usually deal with action and its consequences, and so provide excellent starting points for discussions about moral behaviour. The main characters are involved in goal-oriented action and we learn about the strategies



they use to overcome hurdles and setbacks before they reach the satisfying place where stories end.

Interesting moral questions can be teased out from almost any children's story. However, the Golden Rules series makes each Golden Rule the subject of a separate story that has been written specifically with the needs of young children in mind. All you need to do is to read them to your group. A range of open-ended questions can then be asked to encourage them to build on the ideas embedded in the story. For example:

- 'Can you tell me which of the Golden Rules was broken?'
- 'Why did he/she break the rule?'
- 'What happened because he/she broke the rule?'
- 'Why do you think the other characters reacted as they did?'
- 'How do you think the other characters felt when he/she did that?'
- 'What do you think should have happened to the character after he/she did that?'
- 'If you were the character, how do you think you would be feeling at that moment?'
- 'If you could change the story, how would it end?'
- 'Was it fair? Was it right?'

These questions gently introduce children to philosophical dialogue and debate.

## Using finger puppets

Moral values can be difficult to talk about and there are many advantages to using finger puppets to open up discussion. When children are able to speak through a puppet they often find that they can say things that would be impossible to articulate if they were required to use their 'real' voice. In the same way, you will find that puppets are able to close the distance between you, as an adult, and the children with whom you wish to communicate. Once you have a finger puppet you can cross the generation gap and speak 'as a child'. What is more, you can sit with a finger puppet and a script on your lap and nobody will complain – your audience will be so riveted by the puppet's antics that they won't even notice that you are reading!

## Learning to love the Golden Rules

The commitment of staff and children is of paramount importance if the Golden Rules are to be applied with confidence. This commitment requires that they are learned in an atmosphere of respect and that all parties understand why they are so important. To impose the Golden Rules is to show that you expect obedience but to negotiate them is to show that you desire cooperation and that you are ready to discuss all the uncertainties that your children may feel. By discussing the problems that your children encounter, you are also showing that you value their participation in creating an environment that is emotionally safe. This raises the communal sense of responsibility and increases the likelihood that your children will use these rules as life-long codes of conduct. You will be giving them something of inestimable value in helping them to become compassionate adults.



We are gentle...



We don't hurt others

We listen...



We don't interrupt

We are honest...



We don't cover up the truth

We are kind and helpful...



We don't hurt anybody's feelings

We look after property...



We don't damage things

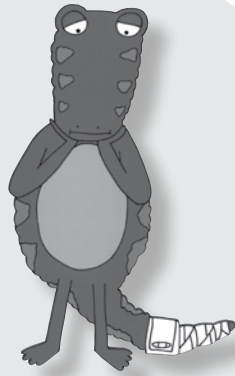
We work hard...



We don't waste time



We are gentle...



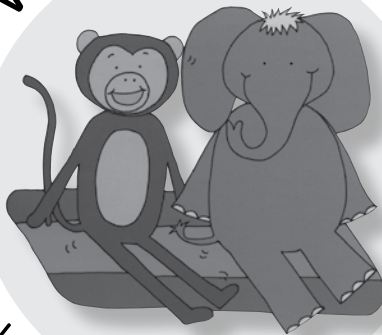
We don't hurt others

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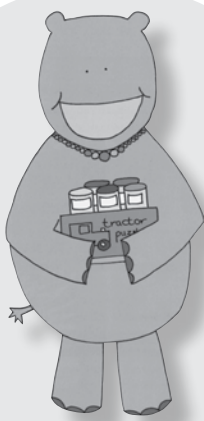
We don't cover up the truth

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We don't damage things

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We don't waste time

