

Process for Strengthening the Effectiveness of Y Staff Members and Volunteers as Character Builders

Important Information for the Workshop Facilitator, Program Supervisor

Objectives for the workshop:

- To review and apply the six actions that staff members and volunteers can take daily to become more effective character-builders.
- To share a process for creating character development activities and strategies that can help strengthen the character of Y members of all ages as well as of Y staff members and volunteers.

Target audience:

Since this workshop can be adjusted for the program and the ages of its participants, it can be used by any staff member or volunteer. It can even be used by supervisors and team leaders with those who report directly to them. You may discover that some staff members, particularly those who work in child care and school-aged programs, have already incorporated some of these concepts. Before the workshop, you may want to ask participants how they integrate character development into their programs.

How this workshop could be used:

This workshop will help staff members understand their role in enhancing and developing the character of the people they serve and involve. It can help them create character development activities and strategies for specific age groups, programs, or management functions. This process is different from the one presented in the training, *The Role of YMCA Front-Line Staff in Character Development*, in that it offers some newer and more effective approaches to identifying desirable behaviors and some new examples of how Ys have used the six character-building actions.

This workshop gives participants an opportunity to *test* a process. Additional time would be required for participants to actually apply the process in developing a series of activities for a program.

Who can facilitate this training?

Anyone with facilitating skills and a basic knowledge of character development can easily facilitate the process.

Time required:

This workshop requires about 90 minutes to present and experience the process. Additional time is required to apply the process in developing a series of activities and strategies for a program.

Notes for the program supervisor or leader:

- This workshop will be more effective if the participants have already participated in the workshop “*Journey to Strengthen My Character.*” In the Journey workshop, participants have the opportunity to strengthen their own influence as leaders and role models for the Y’s core values. Aside from teaching and promoting values, which is the process taught in this workshop, staff members and volunteers must model the values, which is the process used in the Journey workshop, so that they do not send mixed messages to participants.
- This design was developed for Y staff members who have had little exposure to the Y’s renewed commitment to character development. It would be a good idea to read through the design to determine if the entire training is appropriate as the next step for the participants you have in mind.
- If you discover that some segments of the design (e.g., the piece on the background of character development efforts in the YMCA) would be redundant for the participants, you, the facilitator, should skip the segments or simply summarize them for emphasis.
- Before the training, you should have in mind a plan for how the concepts and tools presented in the training will be incorporated into your team’s chart of work.
- The last part of the training should include a presentation and/or discussion for involving participants in creating age- or program-specific character development activities for their areas of responsibility.

Planning Information and Tips for the Facilitator

Participants:

- If the participants do not know each other, add introductions. The Character Development Bingo (early in the training) will serve as an ice breaker.
- This process asks the participants to draw on their creativity. People are most creative when they are in an environment that is open, relaxed, unhurried, and fun.

Format for the training design:

The training design describes how to present certain materials but does not have to be read word for word.

Facilities:

- Participants will need a surface for writing. Round tables encourage more group participation.
- The facilitator will need a chart pad, markers, and either an easel or masking tape and a wall surface.

Handouts:

- “Important Concepts about the Y Movement’s Commitment to Character Development” (one per participant)
- “Character Development Bingo” (one per participant)
- “Identifying Behaviors” (one per participant plus some extra copies)
- “Six Character-Building Actions” (two per participant)

Charts to be prepared in advance:

- Training objectives (listed in training design)
- The questions from the handout “Important Concepts about the Y Movement’s Commitment to Character Development”
- “What the core values should LOOK LIKE in people’s behavior:
 - specific
 - measurable
 - age-appropriate
 - appropriate to the program or situation”
- Snack Station
- How Character Development Fits into Fitness
- Six Character-Building Actions

Process for Strengthening the Effectiveness of Y Staff Members and Volunteers as Character-Builders

OPENING (3–4 minutes)

(Welcome the participants and introduce yourself. Take care of any housekeeping details that should be covered, e.g., location of restrooms.)

Present a devotional thought:

(Facilitator could use the following devotional thought or provide another that is appropriate to the topic.)

There is a quote from the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament of the Bible that provides a challenge for anyone who cares about children:

“Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)

With the YMCA movement’s renewed emphasis on character development, YMCA staff members and volunteers have committed to strengthen the character not only of children, but also of teens and adults—in other words, everyone whom the Y serves and involves.

Today’s workshop focuses on ways to encourage all the people we serve and involve to want to do what is right.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE WORKSHOP (1 minute)

- To review and apply the six actions staff members and volunteers can take daily to become more effective character-builders.
- To share a process for creating character development activities and strategies that can help strengthen the character of Y members of all ages as well as of Y staff members and volunteers.

**Chart:
Objectives**

SUGGEST GROUND RULES (1 minute)

During the time we are together in this workshop, everyone should do his or her best to choose attitudes and behaviors that reflect the Y's core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility, as well as to be supportive of one another.

Facilitator note:

The purpose of the next section is to ensure that all participants share some common knowledge of the background of the YMCA movement and its commitment to character development.

If your participants have already completed the workshop, *Personal Journey with Character Development*, this section can be skipped. If you (and the participants' supervisor) determine that all the participants have a good understanding of this background, you may choose to spend less time on this section.

The background information helps participants understand the big picture of where the Y movement wants to go with character development. This understanding can help participants see more clearly their role in promoting the Y movement's core values and help liberate their creativity as character-builders.

BACKGROUND FOR THE YMCA'S COMMITMENT TO CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT (15 minutes)

Before we explore the process for personal growth in character development, it is important that we all understand the background of the YMCA's commitment to character development.

Give these group activity instructions:

1. Form pairs and sit next to your partner.
2. (Point to chart) With your partner, develop the best answers you can to each of these questions. You do not need to write your responses, but you may if you want to.

You have 5 minutes.

Chart: The questions from the handout, "*Important Concepts about the Y Movement's Commitment to Character Development*"

**Distribute handout:
“Important
Concepts about the
Y Movement’s
Commitment to
Character
Development”**

3. (After 5 minutes, distribute the handout “*Important Concepts about the Y Movement’s Commitment to Character Development*” and allow participants to review the answers provided by YMCA of the USA.)

4. **Ask these questions:**

- Did anyone learn anything new from the handout? If so, what?
- The YMCA movement has been involved in character development for a long time. It is part of why we exist. Would someone volunteer to explain in his or her own words the mission of the YMCA?
- Would someone volunteer to share with the group his or her understanding of the relationship between character development and the Christian principles mentioned in the national YMCA mission statement?
- A person of strong character is one who strives to do what is right even when no one is looking because the person *believes* it is the right thing to do. Would one of you explain your understanding of how the YMCA develops the character of the people it serves and involves?
- Are there any questions or other reactions to the background information about the YMCA and character development?

Offer these comments about our goal with character development:

Our goal with character development is to help the people we serve and involve to strengthen their belief in our core values (caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility) so they will *want* to behave according to the values—want to do what is right.

Many Y character-builders have been disappointed with the results of simply asking Y members (children, teens, and adults) to “go out there and be caring, honest, respectful, and responsible.”

Even though the Y members may have *thought* they were behaving according to the values, the Y character-builders often saw a variety of behaviors that were not consistent with the values.

**Handout:
“Character
Development
Bingo”**

Before we can encourage someone to want to do what is right, we must come to some agreement on what “right” looks like in one’s behavior.

BINGO GAME GROUP ACTIVITY (10 minutes)

Give these instructions:

(Distribute to each participant a copy of the “Character Development Bingo.”)

Here are the rules:

- Your challenge is to find people in this room who have chosen one or more of the behaviors on the bingo card.
- Where a person can say that the statement in the square applies to his or her own life, he or she may sign in those squares on other people’s cards. Try to get as many people’s signatures as possible.
- You may sign your own bingo card only once.
- Remember that you win in bingo by filling four squares vertically, horizontally, or diagonally.
- Each time you get bingo, I want you to yell out “Bingo!” and then try to get bingo once again until you have a “blackout” (all squares filled).

(Depending on the size of your group, determine how much time you want to allow for the game to be played and give a countdown to end it. Then recognize those participants who hustled to get lots of signatures.)

Offer these comments:

This bingo game offers us the secret to successful character development.

For each of the Y’s core values, the game identifies some behaviors that demonstrate that value.

The words caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility are general but the behaviors are more specific.

<p>Chart: “What should the core values LOOK LIKE in people’s behavior: - specific - measurable - age-appropriate - appropriate to the program or situation”</p>	<p>A child can gain a better understanding of the meaning of the value of “caring” by thinking of hugging a parent or sharing a toy.</p> <p>Many youth and adults need help grasping what these values look like in behavior in various situations in their lives.</p> <p>(Point to chart.) Veteran Y character development champions tell us that the secret to success in character development is focusing on <i>specific and desirable behaviors</i>.</p> <p>For the various Y members we serve and involve, both young and old, we need to ask the question: “What should the Y’s core values look like in their behavior?”</p> <p>We want to make sure the behaviors we target are age-appropriate and appropriate to the situation or program.</p> <p>Once we target specific behaviors, we can determine how to encourage people to <i>want</i> to choose those behaviors.</p> <p>EXAMPLES OF DESIRED BEHAVIORS (10-12 minutes)</p> <p>AFTER-SCHOOL CHILD CARE EXAMPLE</p> <p>Present the after-school program example by offering these comments: YMCA after-school child care staff members have shown us the secret to becoming effective character-builders.</p> <p>Here are some desirable behaviors appropriate to a local YMCA after-school program.</p> <p>The staff wanted to involve the school-age children in the process of determining how the Y’s core values would be demonstrated by the children’s behavior in various settings.</p> <p>This after-school room had eight activity stations such as a homework station, arts and crafts station, music station, snack station, etc.</p> <p>The staff members gathered groups of children around each station and asked the question: “What should <i>honesty</i> look like at the snack station?” “What should <i>responsibility</i> look like at the snack station?” and so on.</p>
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Chart: Snack Station

Of course, the staff members helped the children when they needed help and prompting.

(Point out the Snack Station chart.)

This sign describing the desirable behaviors was placed near the snack station as were the other signs for the various stations.

(Read the behavior for each value for the snack station.)

Ask these questions:

- Are these behaviors desirable for children in an after-school program?
- Could the behaviors be understood by second-grade students?
- Would the parents of the students be pleased about the Y's encouraging these behaviors?
- Are the behaviors teachable?
- Can we measure ongoing progress with adherence to these behaviors?
- Are the behaviors specific enough to make it easy to know when to praise and when to encourage more effort toward adherence?

FITNESS CENTER EXAMPLE

Present the adult fitness program example by offering these comments:

Now let's see how a YMCA used the same process with adults in a fitness center.

The Y staff members measured the adult behavior in the fitness center and concluded that a focus on the core values was needed.

The staff conducted a focus group with staff members and fitness center members, including some who had complained about behavior in the fitness room.

The group was asked "What should the values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility look like in the behavior of Y members who use the fitness center?"

**Chart:
How Character
Development Fits
into Fitness**

(Point to chart.) After some polishing, the behaviors that the focus group identified were printed on a professional full-color framed poster that was placed so it could be read easily from anywhere in the center.

Y staff members added a section to their new member orientation that explained the Y's commitment to character development and detailed how those values might look in the fitness center.

Also, when members chose attitudes or actions that were not consistent with the ones on the poster, fitness center staff members intervened in a respectful manner.

Ask these questions:

- Are these behaviors desirable for a fitness center?
- Are the behaviors easily understood?
- Are they teachable?
- Could we measure progress with adherence to these behaviors?
- Are the behaviors specific enough to make it easy to know when to praise and when to encourage more effort toward adherence?

Ask this question for exploration:

We have just reviewed two good practices that local YMCAs used to encourage people to want to do what is right.

Both practices involved participants in identifying how the Y's core values would be demonstrated in particular situations.

After six months of introducing and reinforcing these "desirable" behaviors, what *changes* in behavior do you think the after-school and fitness staff observed?

We will share the results a bit later in the workshop.

**Handout:
“Identifying
Behaviors”**

GROUP ACTIVITY TO GENERATE TARGET BEHAVIORS

(10–15 minutes)

Give these group activity instructions:

1. Pair up with someone for this activity.
2. Select a target age group in the Y for which you will develop a list of desirable behaviors. If you work with staff members or volunteers, the age group can be adults.
3. Now select a YMCA program in which the age group you selected is involved. If your targeted age group is YMCA staff members, select the management area for this group of staff. An example might be 10-year-old boys in day camp or 18- to 65-year-old Y staff members at the Member Service desk.
4. (Distribute worksheet, “Identifying Behaviors.”)
5. Here is a worksheet that will help you identify some desirable behaviors for your targeted age group.
6. At the top, insert in the appropriate spaces the age group and program or management area you have targeted.
7. Under each core value are some empty boxes to be used for the behaviors you identify. For each value, think of some age-appropriate behaviors that demonstrate the value. In order to keep the behavior from being too general, do not use the name of the value (i.e., caring, honesty, respect, responsibility) in your description. Make sure the behavior:
 - is specific
 - is measurable
 - is age-appropriate
 - can be effectively taught in the targeted program or situation.

(Allow participants enough time to generate some behaviors. Check their work to see whether it reflects the four characteristics in the above paragraph.)

8. From your worksheet, select one behavior that you want to develop more. Once you have selected this behavior, circle it.

9. (Ask each pair to share the selected behavior with the rest of the group, and make sure each behavior is specific and measurable.)

10. Now we have a list of desirable behaviors that are appropriate for a specific age and program or situation. The next challenge is to figure out what we could do to encourage the targeted group to *want to* choose these behaviors.

GROUP ACTIVITY TO APPLY THE SIX CHARACTER-BUILDING ACTIONS (10 minutes)

Review of the six actions

Offer these comments:

With the help of some experts on behavior, YMCA of the USA has developed a list of six actions that, if taken consistently, should strengthen one's capacity as a character-builder.

If the six actions are taken consistently over time, the character-builder can help the people he or she serves and involves to want to do what is right: to choose the targeted behaviors.

Of course, different approaches to the six actions will be necessary depending on the age group and program or situation.

You may already use some of these character-building actions. If that's the case, your goal might be to become more intentional and systematic in using the actions on a daily basis.

Let's examine these character-building actions to see if they make sense to us as staff members. If you're experienced in raising children, you can also use that experience to evaluate these actions.

Facilitator note:

The YMCA Program Store has a resource titled *The Role of YMCA Front-Line Staff in Character Development* (\$19.95). It contains a short video that depicts the six character-building actions in YMCA settings. The “Strengthening the Effectiveness” workshop supplements the older *Front-Line* training with newer and more effective approaches.

The video, which is part of an older version of a character development orientation, presents the six actions in actual YMCA settings. The video could help less experienced participants and visual learners grasp the six character-building actions more readily.

The recommendation is to play the 11-minute video in its entirety, and then continue with the training design below.

- Chart:**
Six Character-Building Actions:
- **Teach**
 - **Model**
 - **Celebrate & Uplift**
 - **Practice**
 - **Praise & Reinforce**
 - **Confront**

Action #1

We can **TEACH** the people we serve and involve the desired behavior or attitude. For those who have difficulty knowing the difference between right and wrong behavior, this is a critical action.

- We can use “teachable moments” (something that happens and that captures people’s attention) to highlight the importance of doing what is right. (Facilitator might want to give examples of teachable moments and how they might be used to teach about the Y’s values—such as how the 9/11 tragedy provided a teachable moment to have discussions around respect and caring.)
- We can use stories, songs, skits, discussions, games, and projects.
- Some Ys have assigned a values coach to every youth sports team. This coach concentrates on the Y’s core values and takes advantage of all opportunities to teach the players about the core values.
- In our example of the after-school “snack station,” the Y staff members taught the children each desired behavior so that they could be sure the children understood them.

Action #2

As staff members and volunteers, we can consistently **MODEL** behaviors that reflect the Y's core values so people can see what values look like in action.

- Leading by example is one of the most effective ways to encourage others to want to do what is right.
- We must remember that young people, especially children, don't miss anything and watch closely the actions of adults. This is why it is so important for staff members and volunteers to choose only those behaviors and actions that reflect the Y's values.
- Each time staff members and volunteers unintentionally choose behaviors and actions that contradict the Y's values, we confuse the children with a mixed message. We may want to examine all of our behaviors to make sure that they are not sending any mixed and confusing messages to the people we serve and involve.

(Facilitator may wish to give—or have participants give—some examples of staff behaviors that would send a mixed and confusing message.)

- In both our after-school and fitness center examples, the Y staff members closely examined their own behaviors to make sure they did not send any mixed messages.

Action #3

We can **CELEBRATE and UPLIFT** the behaviors—holding them up as the right things to do.

- We can rework the behavioral expectations of the people involved in our program (or Y management function) around the core values (as was done in the after-school and fitness center examples).
- For children, we could find stories, songs, and folklore that celebrate having the courage to do the right things.
- We could create visuals (e.g., banners, bulletin boards, posters, arts and crafts) that celebrate and showcase the desired behaviors as the right way to behave.

- We could organize celebrations for our accomplishments with the behaviors.
- In both of our examples, the Y staff members created attractive signs to serve as reminders of the behaviors that reflect the Y's values.

Action #4

We could provide opportunities for the people we serve and involve to **PRACTICE** the desired behaviors.

- We know that practice makes perfect, and providing opportunities for people to practice the desired behaviors will pay off.
- We also know that repetition helps children to learn and to develop new habits.
- In both the after-school and fitness center examples, the participants had opportunities to practice the behaviors listed on the posters.

Action #5

We can increase our efforts to “catch” people as they choose appropriate attitudes and behaviors, and we can **PRAISE and REINFORCE** those choices.

- We know that behavior that is genuinely praised and reinforced is repeated.
- We know that everyone, especially children, loves to be praised for choosing to do the right thing.
- We can find creative ways to remind ourselves of the importance of making the extra effort to notice and praise good choices.
- To encourage participants to choose to do what is right, some YMCAs have created incentive programs that award tokens such as beads.
- In both of our examples, staff members invested extra effort in positive reinforcement by praising those who chose to do the right thing.

<p>Handout: “Six Character-Building Actions”</p>	<p>Action #6 When others make choices that are not appropriate, we can CONFRONT them in a respectful and caring way, and let them know the choice is unacceptable. We can make the incident a teachable moment.</p> <p>We must keep in mind the following about children and teens:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and teens do best with clear boundaries that are consistently and respectfully enforced. Clear boundaries and consistent enforcement teach young people to become more responsible for their own actions. • If inappropriate choices are not consistently dealt with in the proper manner, we risk sending the message that the choice is acceptable and that poor choices can be made without negative consequences. • Children and teens <i>want</i> feedback on their choices, and we must make the extra effort to provide that feedback. • In both the after-school and fitness center examples, Y staff members made extra efforts to intervene and give feedback to participants who chose behaviors or actions that were not consistent with the desired behaviors. <p>Ask these questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think of these six character-building actions? Do they make sense to you? • If we are already taking these actions, is it possible that we could be more consistent in making them part of how we work? <p>ACTIVITY TO APPLY THE SIX ACTIONS TO THE DESIRED BEHAVIOR (20–25 minutes)</p> <p>Give these instructions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Let’s see if these actions can help us develop some activities and strategies for the one target behavior each pair selected earlier. 2. (Distribute the handout “Six Character-Building Actions.”)
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3. On the handout “Six Character-Building Actions,” in the first open space at the top, jot down the one behavior you and your partner selected. Make sure the behavior is stated in specific and *measurable* terms and that it is age-appropriate and appropriate for the program or situation.

4. Now put your creative hat on. With your partner, work through the six actions and brainstorm ideas for how you would carry out each action. Let your mind run free in coming up with fun and creative ideas, activities, and strategies. Depending upon the age group with which you are working, all six actions may not be used equally. Use your judgment to determine which actions would make sense.

(Walk around, encourage participants, and assist where needed. Allow sufficient time [15-20 minutes] for participants’ creativity to flow.)

5. **Ask this question:**

Did the worksheet help you generate some possible activities or strategies to encourage your targeted age group to choose your desired behavior?

6. (If time permits, ask participants to volunteer to share *some of their best* ideas.)

7. **Offer these comments:**

Let’s go back and look at the results observed by the two YMCAs that used these methods. You will remember that these YMCAs involved their members along with staff members in a process to generate a list of how the Y’s core values would be demonstrated by behavior. Then staff members applied as many of the six character-building actions as were appropriate to encourage people to choose the behaviors. Here are some of the changes in behavior the staff members observed over an eight-month period:

In the after-school program, the staff members observed a dramatic decrease in the amount of time they had to invest in discipline. Why? The children knew which specific behaviors were acceptable and which ones were not, and they did a better job of choosing appropriate attitudes and behaviors. Many parents reported a positive change in their children’s behavior at home. Staff members also reported that the children seemed to have

<p>Chart: Objectives</p>	<p>more respect for themselves because they knew where the boundaries were and knew that the consequences they enjoyed or suffered were directly related to the choices they made.</p> <p>In the Y fitness center, staff members reported a positive change in members' behavior. Members even began to both praise and intervene with other members who chose appropriate or inappropriate behavior. More members cleaned the equipment after use, returned towels and magazines to the proper places, and did a much better job of respecting the time limits for the equipment. The facility maintenance staff members reported having to invest less time in cleaning the center because of the good choices made by the members.</p> <p>8. Offer these comments: One cannot build character with a sign or a one-time activity. It requires a long-term and ongoing process and lots of repetition. Character development is about staff members creating an environment in which character development can take place. It is about targeting specific and desirable behaviors and then systematically and intentionally applying the six character-building actions, day in and day out.</p> <p>9. Ask this question: Does it sound like the changes in members' behavior at these two YMCAs made the staff members' character development efforts worthwhile?</p> <p>CLOSING (5 minutes)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (Review the two objectives for today's training and ask the participants if they feel that the objectives have been met.) 2. Ask these questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have you learned today that will help you become a more effective character-builder? • Do you think that the process we just tested could be helpful to you in creating activities and strategies that would encourage others to choose behaviors and actions that reflect the Y's core values?
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- How do you think you might use these character development tools?
- How would you adapt the tools to make them more useful to you?

3. Offer these comments:

It is obvious that encouraging people to *want to* do what is right is a **PROCESS** that takes considerable time and effort.

But our mission statement challenges us to do just that, as it speaks of “putting Christian principles into practice....”

Being a character-builder is one of the best ways to help deliver the YMCA mission.

The impact of a true character-builder can be powerful and can make dramatic and positive changes in the lives of youth and adults alike.

Note to Supervisor and Facilitator

Supervisor and facilitator should decide next logical steps after the workshop. This would be the time to share with the participants how these tools will be used to create a package of age- and program-specific character development activities and strategies for their respective areas.

Handouts and charts follow

Important Concepts about the Y Movement's Commitment to Character Development

What is the YMCA's commitment to character development?

In the early 1990s, many YMCAs became concerned that our nation was caught up in a rapid decline in morality. It seemed as though many children were unable to tell right from wrong. YMCA of the USA began to address this concern in the mid-1990s by launching the YMCA character development thrust: a strengthened commitment to build the character of our movement and the people it serves and involves. Through the Y's ongoing commitment to character development, many YMCAs have begun a process to become more intentional and purposeful in their efforts not only to teach the Y's core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility, but also to use these values to guide individual actions and behavior, as well as organizational practices, decisions, and priorities.

Is character development new to the YMCA?

No, character development is not a new subject for the YMCA movement. We've been shaping character and adhering to Christian principles for more than 150 years. However, our methods have changed over the years. Today, as part of the character development thrust, many YMCAs across the country have adopted four specific values—caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility—as their core values. Some YMCAs have adopted the six pillars of the Character Counts! Coalition: caring, respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, citizenship, and fairness. The process of character development is the same regardless of which positive values serve as the core values. These core values reflect major tenets of Christianity, and yet they are also shared by nearly all of the world's religious traditions.

How does character development relate to the YMCA's national mission statement?

Character development will strengthen our ability to deliver what the national mission statement promises. The YMCA national mission statement is "to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind, and body for all." Christian principles, taken together, are like a code of conduct, based upon Biblical teachings.

These principles consist of many positive values that are also accepted by many other religious traditions as "the right things to do." Some YMCAs consider the core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility to be among the most important Christian principles and to be derived from the umbrella concept of faith. (YMCAs welcome as members persons of all religious affiliations who wish to join and cooperate in support of the ideals and values for which we stand. Each member is encouraged to be faithful to the teachings and practices of her or his own faith.)

Character development is one method Ys use to encourage the people they serve and involve to put Christian principles or positive values into practice in their daily lives. YMCA programs are one of the vehicles Ys use to accomplish our character development

goals. But another vehicle is the behavior of staff members and volunteers who are encouraged to model consistently the Y’s values in their actions and behaviors. A mission-driven YMCA will offer programs that will encourage people to act on these principles in a manner that is inclusive of all people (ages, abilities, incomes, genders, backgrounds, and beliefs).

How would one describe a person of strong character?

The dictionary defines character as “the ethical traits marking a person, attributes, held values.” A person of strong character strives to do the right things (to act on positive values) even when no one is looking. He or she chooses to do what is right because he or she honestly believes in the positive values as the way to behave.

Why did YMCA of the USA adopt the four core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility?

The selection of these core values was the result of a process conducted by the stakeholders in 30 YMCAs across the country to identify the values Ys held in common—shared values. After the list of common values was completed, four core values—ones that encompassed most of the values—seemed to emerge.

YMCA of the USA felt it would be more effective at changing behavior by concentrating on only four values because it is important to concentrate on only a few of the most important values, continually emphasizing their importance and how they should be applied in various situations. Here is a partial list of other values that are related to the Y’s core values:

Caring	Honesty	Respect	Responsibility
compassion	integrity	acceptance	commitment
forgiveness	fairness	empathy	courage
generosity	trustworthiness	self-respect	health
kindness		tolerance	service/citizenship

How can YMCA staff members and volunteers develop the character of the people they serve and involve?

We encourage the people we serve and involve in our programs to *believe in* positive values and to *act on* them with their daily choices. Our goal is not to coerce people to do what is right only when someone of authority is watching them. Our goal is for people to choose to do the right thing because they *believe in* the values and *want* to do what is right. Therefore, our challenge is to find ways to encourage those we serve and involve to believe in and to act on positive values and the behaviors associated with them.

YMCA of the USA has suggested six actions a character-builder can take that, over time and with consistency, can encourage people to want to do what is right—to choose attitudes and behaviors that reflect positive values. (These actions are presented in the workshop titled, *Process to Strengthen the Effectiveness of Y Staff Members and Volunteers as Character-Builders.*)

Once again, one of the most powerful ways Y staff members and volunteers encourage people to want to do what is right is to provide them with a good example—to demonstrate consistently attitudes and behaviors that reflect the Y’s core values.

How should the character development focus affect how Y staff members and volunteers view themselves and their jobs at the Y?

To be effective, Y staff members and volunteers must accept as part of their jobs the role of teacher of values, the role of character-builder. For the people we serve and involve (including those we supervise), we must look for ways that will encourage them to want to choose to do what is right. We must also lead by example in our own choices of attitudes and behaviors.

How should the character development core values affect how a Y does business?

Ideally, the core values should guide everything we do: how we lead and manage, how we supervise, how we make decisions, how we treat others, etc. Ideally, the stakeholders for each YMCA management function area (including the board) should examine their Y’s policies, practices, and behaviors against the core values and make any adjustments that are needed.

Character Development BINGO

Honesty	Caring	Respect	Responsibility
Tries hard to “walk the talk”	In the past week, has hugged someone	Tries hard to obey laws and rules	Understands that Y staff members should be role models for the core values
Does not or would not cheat on a test	Writes letters or e-mails to friends	Does not litter	Practices the core values outside the YMCA
Within the past 3 months (and apart from this game), admitted to having done something wrong	Helped a neighbor with a chore	Has thanked someone for helping them recently	Recycles
Does not or would not steal anything	Tells family member(s) she or he loves them	Tries not to gossip about others	Has been a volunteer
Honesty	Caring	Respect	Responsibility

Our character is measured by our behavior.

Identifying Behaviors

Select an Age Group: _____ Select a Program or Staff Group: _____

Under each value, jot down some behaviors for which this targeted group needs some help. Make sure the behavior is: specific, measurable, age-appropriate, and appropriate to the program or situation.

Honesty	Caring	Respect	Responsibility
Honesty	Caring	Respect	Responsibility

Specific
Measurable
Age-appropriate
Appropriate to the program or situation

Six Character-Building Actions

Describe a desired behavior or attitude (specific, measurable, age-appropriate, and appropriate for the program or situation) that we can encourage people to choose.

Describe behaviors or actions that we can take to encourage the people we serve and involve to want to do the right thing—to want to choose this behavior or attitude:

1. What can we do to **TEACH** them this behavior/attitude?
2. What can we do to make sure we consistently **MODEL** the behavior/attitude so others can see the behavior in action? Do we need to make any adjustments in our behavior in order to model this behavior more consistently?
3. What can we do to **CELEBRATE** and **UPLIFT** the behavior/attitude—holding it up as the right thing to do?
4. Because practice makes perfect, how can we provide opportunities for them to **PRACTICE** the behavior/attitude over and over again?
5. What can we do to more consistently **REINFORCE** their choice of this behavior/attitude by **PRAISING** them and their choice?
6. When they choose not to practice the behavior/attitude, how can we do a better job of consistently **CONFRONTING** the inappropriate choice (in a caring and respectful way) so that they understand that there are consequences to unacceptable choices?

Snack Station

CARING: I will help if someone needs help opening a wrapper or pouring milk.

HONESTY: I will not lie to get extra snacks. If I want seconds, I will ask if there are extras.

RESPECT: I will use proper table manners.

RESPONSIBILITY:
I will clean up when I am finished.

How Character Development Fits into Adult Fitness

We demonstrate **CARING** by exercising the spirit, mind, and body and by showing courtesy and kindness to fellow exercisers.

We demonstrate **HONESTY** by following the established policies for equipment use and by monitoring our workouts to stay within safe limits.

We demonstrate **RESPECT** by wiping off equipment after use, avoiding use of abusive language, and being considerate of other members.

We demonstrate **RESPONSIBILITY** by using equipment properly and returning all weights, equipment, towels, and magazines to their proper places when finished with them.