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Being a Good Leadership Role Model: 11 Key Tips for Mentors

The relationship between a Big and a Little can be life-changing. But for the mentors who volunteer with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ozaukee County ([find out how to volunteer here!](#)), taking on a leadership role in a child's life is often intimidating. What does it take to impart leadership skills in children, and is it really possible for an average person to make such a big impact on a child's future?

The answer is yes, and it's easier than you think. Whether you're a Big, a parent, or another mentor in a child's life, this is what you need to know about giving children the leadership skills they need to succeed.

It's All About Modeling

Modeling is the fastest and easiest way to teach children, Parents.com [explains](#). When the adults in a child's life behave with integrity, the children around them are more likely to do the same.

- **Follow the rules.** The best way to raise a child who does the right thing even when no one is looking is to be an adult who does the right thing when no one is looking. Even if breaking a rule seems harmless, the message it sends may not be.
- **Be honest.** Not only do even simple “white” lies tend to backfire, but dishonesty also robs mentors of teaching opportunities. By being honest instead of taking the easy way out, you teach children how to deal with the hard but necessary parts of life.
- **Stay calm.** Children are prone to emotional outbursts, but adults can teach children how to regulate their emotions by staying calm and communicating clearly in stressful situations.

Key Habits to Teach Children

The right habits make a person more effective at whatever they do. However, children aren’t born with the habits they need to succeed in life. Instead, it’s up to adults to instill [good habits](#) in youth.

- **Take care of your health.** Your body is the vessel that lets you achieve your goals, so it’s important to take care of it with daily habits like good hygiene, proper sleep, and a healthy diet.
- **Plan ahead.** Children don’t need a ten-year plan, but teaching basic planning habits like preparing homework and school clothes the night before teaches the value of planning ahead.
- **Challenge yourself.** We don’t grow by standing still. Encourage children to step outside their comfort zone. Even if it doesn’t work out, it’s an opportunity for personal growth.
- **Seek out positive role models.** Having someone to look up to gives kids a model to follow when they encounter a challenging circumstance.

Emotional Intelligence for Kids

It’s not just kids’ self-discipline that influences their leadership potential. [Emotional intelligence](#) is critical to leadership today, as well as to finding success in one’s personal life.

- **Teach children how to identify emotions.** Naming emotions not only helps children process how they’re feeling, it also increases their empathy for others.
- **Encourage different perspectives.** Children who can put themselves in another person’s shoes are more empathetic, less judgmental, and better at conflict resolution.
- **Discuss the importance of boundaries.** Everyone should know how to say “no,” children especially. Children should learn how to enforce personal boundaries assertively but respectfully.
- **Practice gratitude.** Gratitude promotes a positive mindset. Encourage children to focus on things they’re grateful for and why.

The Best Books for Learning More

Do you want to deepen your knowledge of leadership? Not only does reading [leadership books](#) like these model a thirst for lifelong learning, but it's a great way to expand your own view of what leadership looks like.

- **Dare to Lead by Brene Brown.** A must-read for anyone in a mentorship role, *Dare to Lead: Brave Work, Tough Conversations, Whole Hearts* explores themes of vulnerability and connection in leadership.
- **The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey.** A primer on the mindset and habits you need to be a successful leader, there's a reason this book is canon in leadership literature.
- **The Leadership Challenge by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner.** Originally published in 1987, this book's lessons, which include practices like "Model the way" and "Encourage the heart," still hold true today.
- **Off the Clock by Laura Vanderkam.** Do you struggle to manage your volunteer role with the rest of life? *Off the Clock: Feel Less Busy While Getting More Done* talks about how you can keep your commitments and accomplish more without burning out.

Being a role model to young people might not come naturally to you, but the truth is, children are eager to learn. By modeling the behavior you want to see and teaching simple practices that help kids be their best selves, you can make a lasting difference in the life of a young leader.