

# FACTS *for* FAMILIES

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## Children and Role Models

A role model is a person whose serves as an example by influencing others. For many children, the most important role models are their parents and caregivers. Children look up to a variety of role models to help shape how they behave in school, relationships or when making difficult decisions. Children also look up to other relatives, teachers and peers. Children may try to copy the behavior and appearance of celebrities, such as athletes and entertainers, and characters from books, TV, movies and video games. Some parents may want to help their children choose positive role models. Here are some helpful suggestions for discussing role models with your child and for serving as a positive role model for your child:

- Have your child identify what qualities he admires in his role model
- Give examples of people in your community who you feel have positive qualities and are a good influence on others
- Talk about people you look up to for guidance and inspiration

Negative role models, however, may also influence children. Sometimes widely admired public figures can make poor personal choices. Young children may assume that the behaviors of negative role models are typical, safe and acceptable. Parents and caregivers can intervene by emphasizing that role models who embrace inappropriate behavior, violence, sexuality, race and gender stereotypes, and drug and alcohol abuse are not acceptable.

Some suggestions to help you talk to your child about role models who have made mistakes are:

- Remind your child that all people have good and bad qualities and that anyone can make a mistake. Explain that it is important to apologize and to learn from our mistakes
- Ask your child what he thinks of the role model's behavior
- Ask what he would have done differently in the situation
- Give example of more positive and healthy ways to handle the situation

If you have concerns that your child is being negatively influenced by his role model, work with your child to identify more appropriate role models.

- Encourage your child to become involved in activities that reflect your values, such as religious programs, athletics, after school programs, clubs and volunteering.
- Remind your child that he or she does not have to do everything that the role model does. Your child can copy what he or she likes but still be him or herself.
- Give examples of people in your community who you feel have positive qualities and are a good influence on others.

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A qualified mental health professional can help if you are troubled by recent changes in your child’s behavior or attitude due to his or her choice of role model.

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