

Growing Everyday Leaders

Leadership is not a title. It's a way of being. It begins the moment a child takes responsibility for their own choices, their own voice, and their own way of showing up in the world.

From a young age, we can nurture this sense of *inner leadership* - the ability to notice what needs to be done, take initiative, act ethically, communicate clearly, and inspire others by example. Leadership is not about power or control; it's about purpose, courage, and connection. When educators cultivate leadership in children, they plant the seeds of **confidence**, **compassion**, and **capability** that last a lifetime.

The New Understanding of Leadership

In modern education, leadership is no longer confined to badges, captains, or head roles. The world's challenges call for young people who can think for themselves, collaborate with others, and act with integrity - regardless of their position or title.

You don't need a name tag to lead.

Leadership is about seeing what needs doing and doing it. It's about courageously taking small, consistent steps toward what is right, helpful, and meaningful.

Leadership begins with the self.

Before we can guide others, we must learn to guide ourselves - our emotions, thoughts, time, and energy. When we model self-leadership in classrooms, homes, and communities, we help children realise that their choices shape their world. This sense of *sovereignty* - of being in right relationship with self, others, and the environment - empowers them to become confident participants in life, not just observers.

The BE • DO • WANT Framework

A simple way to teach leadership at any age is through three interconnected principles:

BE — *Who am I becoming?*

Leadership begins with self-awareness, reflection, and authenticity. Being one's "best self" means acting with integrity, kindness, and calm confidence.

DO — *What action can I take?*

Leadership grows through initiative and courage. It's about stepping forward when something needs doing - without waiting for permission - and being adaptable, communicative, and team-minded along the way.

WANT — *What is the purpose or outcome I seek?*

True leadership is intentional. It holds a vision of a better outcome - whether it's a tidier classroom, a kinder friendship group, or a healthier planet - and aligns thought and action toward that goal.

Why Leadership Matters

Research across education and youth development highlights several powerful outcomes of fostering leadership from an early age:

- **Increased confidence and self-efficacy:** Students who experience success in leading small initiatives build belief in their own capacity.
- **Improved communication and empathy:** Leadership experiences develop the ability to listen, collaborate, and express ideas clearly.
- **Resilience and adaptability:** Taking initiative - even when things don't go perfectly - helps students learn persistence and flexible problem-solving.
- **Stronger ethical foundations:** Discussing fairness, honesty, and accountability helps children make values-based decisions.
- **Enhanced academic and life engagement:** Students who feel trusted to lead are more likely to take ownership of their learning and contribute to their communities.

Ultimately, leadership education is not about creating a few exceptional leaders. It's about awakening the leader within every learner.

Listen to the 8st November 2025 podcast on [All Learning Reimagined](#).
See below for resources and ideas to enhance leadership skills.

Leadership in Practice

Below are practical, heart-centered activities educators can use immediately - adaptable across cultures, countries, and learning contexts. Each encourages children and young people to **lead themselves first**, take initiative, and collaborate with others.

EARLY CHILDHOOD (Ages 3–7)

1. Classroom Helpers Circle

Focus: Responsibility and initiative

What to do: Invite children to volunteer for daily helper roles such as watering plants, tidying, or handing out materials. Rotate roles often so everyone experiences responsibility.

Reflection: “How did it feel to help others today?”

2. Kindness Captains

Focus: Empathy and positive action

What to do: Create a “Kindness Basket.” When a child sees a kind act, they place a pebble or leaf inside. Celebrate the collective kindness each week.

Reflection: “What happens when we choose kindness first?”

3. Listening Leaders

Focus: Communication and awareness

What to do: One child makes a gentle sound (chime, clap, drumbeat) while others follow. Discuss how listening helps everyone stay connected.

Reflection: “What helps you listen carefully?”

4. Garden Guardians

Focus: Stewardship and care for the Earth

What to do: Children care for a small plant or garden bed, noticing changes and taking turns with tasks.

Reflection: “How can we care for living things together?”

PRIMARY SCHOOL (Ages 7–12)

1. Leadership Through Action

Focus: Initiative and teamwork

What to do: Groups identify a simple school or community improvement (e.g., recycling, class comfort, playtime inclusion). They plan and implement their idea together.

Reflection: “What made your team strong?”

2. Values in Action

Focus: Ethics and integrity

What to do: Introduce a leadership value each week (honesty, respect, perseverance) and ask students to notice examples of that value in action.

Reflection: “Which value guided your choices this week?”

3. Vision Board – ‘What I Want to Create’

Focus: Purpose and goal-setting

What to do: Students create visual boards that express their hopes for themselves, their class, or the planet.

Reflection: “What small action brings your vision closer?”

4. Peer Mentors and Buddies

Focus: Building team capacity

What to do: Pair older and younger students for shared reading, games, or gardening. Encourage the older students to guide with patience and curiosity.

Reflection: “What did you learn by helping someone else?”

5. Circle of Solutions

Focus: Problem-solving and adaptability

What to do: Offer classroom dilemmas (e.g., shared resources, teamwork issues) and invite groups to brainstorm fair solutions.

Reflection: “How can we think together instead of blaming?”



SECONDARY SCHOOL (Ages 12–18)



1. Lead Yourself First Challenge

Focus: Self-awareness and personal discipline

What to do: Students set a one-week goal to lead themselves e.g., exercise routine, gratitude journaling, consistent study time.

Reflection: “How does leading yourself affect how you lead others?”



2. Community Action Project

Focus: Purpose and social impact

What to do: Students identify an issue in their school or community, research it, and take positive action (e.g., awareness campaign, environmental initiative).

Reflection: “What difference did you make, and what did you learn?”



3. Silent Leadership

Focus: Presence and nonverbal communication

What to do: In small groups, complete a creative challenge in silence. Observe who takes initiative, supports others, and keeps calm focus.

Reflection: “Can we lead through presence, not words?”



4. Ethical Dilemmas in Leadership

Focus: Integrity and moral reasoning

What to do: Present real-world scenarios where a leader must choose between what’s right and what’s easy. Discuss choices and outcomes.

Reflection: “What does ethical leadership mean to you?”



5. “We, Not I” Campaign

Focus: Collaboration and community

What to do: Students create posters, podcasts, or short videos promoting teamwork and collective success.

Reflection: “How does leadership grow when everyone has a voice?”



6. Strategic Thinking Workshop

Focus: Vision, planning, and adaptability

What to do: Task groups with designing an event, running a fundraiser, or producing a creative project. Emphasize planning tools and flexibility.

Reflection: “What strategies helped your plan succeed?”

Whole-School Ideas

- **Leadership Journals:** Students record weekly reflections on leadership moments... big or small.
- **Student Voice Circles:** Mixed-age forums for students to propose and implement school improvements.
- **Celebration Walls:** Public spaces for acknowledging acts of leadership not just achievements, but attitudes, effort, and care.

The Educator's Role in Leadership

As educators, we model the leadership we wish to see. Every time we listen deeply, act with integrity, or empower students to make choices, we're showing that leadership is *lived*, not assigned. Leadership education is less about teaching lessons and more about *creating cultures*: cultures where every learner feels capable, valued, and trusted to contribute.

When young people realise that leadership is not about command but about contribution (not about power but about purpose) they step forward naturally, with confidence and care. Across all lands, languages, and learning spaces, this truth remains constant:

Leadership begins within.

When we nurture the leader in every child, we nurture the future of humanity itself.