

UNIT 1: Sociology

We All Need a Role Model

1. Who do you turn to when you have a problem or don't know how to do something? If you have someone to help you, you are lucky. If you have someone who takes a personal interest in helping you, you are luckier still. You have a role model.

2. Just what is a role model? First, let's recognize what it is not. It is not necessarily the smartest, strongest, or most successful person you know—although it could be. A role model is a person who has the characteristics you want for yourself and who can help you develop those traits. In other words, a role model both embodies positive qualities and teaches others, directly or through example.

3. For most of us, our parents are our first role models. From when we are young children, they help us learn how to interact with other people—how to share, how to ask for what we need, and how to disagree without hurting someone. They are inherently interested in us and want us to do well. Furthermore, our parents teach us how to be adults in our society. A mother demonstrates to her daughters how to be a daughter, a woman, a wife, and a mother. Lessons learned from our parents will stay with us throughout our lives.

4. Other family members also serve as role models. Grandparents, uncles, and aunts, cousins, and even siblings can show us how to manage our daily lives. Other obvious candidates include teachers and community leaders.

5. Sometimes we find role models in unexpected places. A family story might inspire us to have the same generosity as our grandfather had. We might see a young child fall, pick herself up, fall again, and pick herself up again. Her resolve might inspire us to continue in our own struggles, just as she learns to stand, keep her balance, and take a step. We might even find a model within ourselves, remembering back to a time when we were brave, or imagining a different version of ourselves who has the quality we desire.

6. Besides showing us how to do different things, a good role model also inspires us to pursue our dreams and achievements. A wise lawyer may inspire one person to study law, while a competent, compassionate physician may lead another person to the medical profession. Role models should empower others to become good parents, leaders, and members of society, and to internalize the qualities that they value. Therefore, role models must do the right thing, even when no one is watching, even when they won't be acknowledged for what they have done.

7. It is easy to be a role model when everything is going well, but it is perhaps more important to be a role model when things go wrong. A role model can show us how to handle adversity. For instance, we all make mistakes, but what do we do when we realize that we have made one? Do we try to hide it or pretend that it never happened? Are we inclined to look for someone to blame? Do we get angry?

8. A role model can show us how to deal with mistakes. A parent or teacher can help us repair any damage that was done or soothe any feelings that were hurt. He or she can listen to us, advise us on alternative courses of action, and support us as we make amends. The example of a community leader might serve to guide us toward appropriate action, encouraging us to imagine what he would do in our circumstances.

9. Other situations that we might find ourselves in include dealing with stress, illness, or other misfortunes. Confronting these predicaments and overcoming them is made easier by the knowledge that people we admire and respect have faced similar conditions. Asking ourselves what they would do might help us be brave for a little while longer or figure out how to deal with life when we feel constrained by difficulties.

10. We need role models throughout our lives, and we only need to look around us to find someone who has experienced what we are going through, who has faced difficult decisions, or who has accomplished something we aspire to do. Sometimes we only have to look as far as the mirror to see a role model for our children, our neighbors, or even ourselves. Who is your role model? Maybe it is time to say thank you.