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Ever since I was a little girl, my mom always told me, "You can only control your own actions and behaviors, not anyone else's." When she would say this, I would think to myself, "I may not be able to control them, but I sure can try to influence them by being a good person." Every day, I think about how I affect others. I always try my best to make sure I help others feel better about themselves, not worse.

I am an only child. So every day, when I go to school, I am so excited to see my classmates and teachers. Even if it's Monday morning and I'm tired and cranky, I push those feelings away and put a smile on my face. I am lucky that I have a good home and a great life-I never really know what each of my classmates have going on at home. So, I try my best on a daily basis to make everyone's day brighter, even if it's just with a smile. Just this year, a classmate said to me, "Dang, Maddie. How are you always in such a good mood?" This classmate made me realize that others notice my positive attitude. Because I can get along with just about anyone, there is not one person in my class that I wouldn't call a friend. My classmates and myself are reaching the age where using curse words is thought of as being cool. I don't find curse words to be cool, therefore I don't use them. I don't find them necessary to use, if you are intelligent enough, you should be able to get your point across in many other ways. By not using curse words, I feel like I am being a positive role model to my classmates.

I have been playing team sports since I was 3 years old. I love to play on team sports for a couple different reasons. They have allowed me to meet new people and they have taught me to work with others. As I have said before, I am an only child, so I treat my teammates like family. I am on a travelling team and we spend a lot of time together. I have become a leader on our team. When we are struggling during a game, it is part of my job to be positive, and pep the team up so that we can play better. I work hard to encourage my teammates to play their best so that we can become successful and be the best that we can be. Team sports have taught me many things that I use in daily life. They taught me that I will not be the best at everything I do. This helps me recognize other people's talents and give me an opportunity to help them become even better.

My extended family has always been close. I have many aunts, uncles, and cousins whom I love to be around. As we get older though, I notice that some of my teenage cousins are pulling away from my grandparents. They are too busy or too cool to hang around with them. I see how hurt my MomMom and Poppy get when my cousins won't hug or kiss them. I don't know how long they will be around, I'm hoping forever. Because of this, I put forth an effort to make them realize that I love and appreciate them. My MomMom and Poppy have Christmas every year. I know that it takes a lot of work to clean the house, buy and wrap presents, and prepare dinner for all 20 of us. So, I go and help clean their house. I know my MomMom appreciates it, because she tries to pay me, but I don't take the money. My grandparents live close to us, and everyday, when I walk home from school I pass by their house. Every now and then (usually once a week), I stop by for a visit and hang out. They love to hear stories about what I am doing at school or my many sporting activities. My MomMom tries her best to be close to her granddaughters. Every year, she has a "Granddaughters Night", where she takes all of her

granddaughters (there are 6 of us) to dinner and then back to her house to play games, watch movies and spend the night. But this year, only my 7 year old cousin and myself went. My other cousins made it clear that they were not interested and had better things to do. This really hurt my MomMoms feelings. Believe me, I had other things I could have done that night, one of my friends had a sleepover, but I wanted to spend this special night with my Grandma. My other Grandma, on my Dad's side has Parkinson's Disease. My Grandpa died over three years ago and she doesn't get out much and other than my Mom and Dad and my Aunt, she doesn't get many visitors. I try to go over and spend time with my Grandma as much as possible. It's a little harder with her because she doesn't live in walking distance from my house. I know how lonely she must be, so when I am there I try my hardest to make her laugh and feel loved. On weeks that I can't make it to her house, I make sure that I call her. We talk about what has been going on in our lives and what she has been doing. We always end our conversation discussing how funny the last episode of Ellen was. My Grandma loves that show.

About 10 years ago, when I was 4 years old, my aunt decided to become a foster parent. The first 3 kids that she fostered were in-and-out of our lives so fast, that we never became emotionally attached to them. But, the fourth, Riley, we had for two years. I became so close to Riley, I thought of him as a little brother. We went everywhere together. We went swimming in the summer, we spent holidays together, we even took him to Disneyworld. I loved him so much. He was considered part of our family, but his real Dad took classes to become a better Dad and Riley had to go back home. I was heartbroken. My Aunt took in some other foster kids, but I kept my distance, afraid of being hurt again. But, when I was 9 years old, my Aunt got a call that the state had a newborn baby that needed a home. The baby's name was Ian. I kept my distance from Ian for the first few weeks we had him. I was so afraid of losing him. But, after a while, my heart melted for this baby. I couldn't understand how his real mom didn't want him. My mom helped me realize that this baby needed a family to love him and we were that family. So, I loved him, fed him, and played with him. And one year after Ian came, his real mom gave birth to twins, and my Aunt took them too. Soon, my Aunt was able to adopt Ian, but it didn't matter, all three of them were already part of our family. I learned that blood doesn't matter and we are the ones who are lucky to have these babies in our lives. Since Ian's adoption, my Aunt has adopted his two brothers and his little sister. So yes, my single aunt has four kids 4 and under. Needless to say, she needs lots of help. My mom and I do everything we can to help. We visit, we take turns with the kids taking one of them a week out to do something special, I babysit them for free so that my Aunt can go to the grocery store or run errands. And at family gatherings, I laugh and have fun with my four little cousins. I would like to say that these kids are so blessed to be adopted into such a loving family, but really, we are the ones who are lucky. These babies bring smiles to our faces everyday.

So, I would be the first to say that I am not a perfect person. Just ask my mom. My room is always a mess, I leave my dirty clothes on the floor in the bathroom, and I can never seem to hang up my wet towels. But, I made the decision a long time ago what type of girl I wanted to be. I wanted to be a sweet, responsible, outgoing person who cares about others. I have been lucky enough to have a great family with lots of positive role models and a strong Catholic background that has helped me to become who I am today. And now, not only do I strive to be a positive

role model for my friends, teammates, and family, but everyone I come in contact with.