

NFL Star Anthony Harris Shows Us How to "Pass it Forward"... Not in Football but Through Acts of Kindness

This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before the discussion questions.

Lesson Goals

Help students...

- become more aware of the good things others have done for us and to consider how we can pass forward that goodness to others in our own lives right now and in the future
- consider how acts of kindness can bring people together and establish true solidarity among people from very different walks of life and experiences
- realize the value of living with a sense of determination to help others and ourselves
- consider our own sense of duty in helping others in need

Highlighted Virtues / Character Traits

Caring - to help others; a caring person lives with:

- *empathy* in trying to understand another person's situation, entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person's situation
- *compassion* in feeling of sympathy for the distress of others with the desire to help
- *generosity* in giving freely of our own possessions, time and/or talent

Determination – firmness of purpose; complete commitment to achieving a goal

Duty - something that one is expected or required to do according to one's own standards or values, and the standards and values of groups that we are a part of such as our family, school, religious groups and larger community

Solidarity - unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group

Leader Introduction:

Normally, Anthony Harris (NFL Philadelphia Eagles star safety) has the job of intercepting and stopping the passes of quarterbacks. However, at the end of this season Harris took on a different role in working to assure a successful pass - but not of a football, rather Harris worked to assure that the support and kindness that he received in his life would be passed on to another person in need.

We're going to read about this story from a Washington Post article and then watch a short video clip with some of its highlights.

Lesson Text:

(Teachers can consider reading this article to the class, having students take turns reading the article or reading it on their own.)

[INSPIRED LIFE](#) article by Sydney Page of The Washington Post

Her dad died. So her favorite NFL star took her to the father-daughter dance.

Philadelphia Eagles player Anthony Harris, 30, flew across the country to take Audrey Soape, 11, to her father-daughter dance on Jan. 28 after Soape's mother explained that Audrey's father died last year.

For Audrey Soape, the father-daughter dance is a big social event and always a highlight of her year. This year, though, as it was drawing near, the 11-year-old was filled with dread. Audrey's father died in March. Just five weeks later, she also lost her grandfather, who would have been her stand-in date to the dance. "We had such a horrible year, and she had been through so much," said Audrey's mother, Holly Soape. Still, Audrey wanted to attend the dance at her local church with all her friends.

About a month before the event, Soape started brainstorming date options for her daughter. One man came to mind. It seemed improbable that [an National Football League player would say yes](#), but there was no harm in asking her daughter's favorite sports star. Soape sent an Instagram message a few days before Christmas to Anthony Harris, a [Philadelphia Eagles player](#) who is originally from Richmond. "I knew it was far-fetched and I didn't know what I was expecting," Soape said. "But I figured at least I would try."

"Hey, this is kind of a crazy big ask, and please feel free to say no, but there's this dance at the end of January," Soape wrote to the NFL player, explaining her daughter's predicament. "Is there any way you would consider doing this?" To her shock, he replied right away. Given that the football season was still in motion and there was a chance his team might make it to the playoffs, Harris couldn't immediately commit. "If we don't make it to the playoffs, I would be open to that," he wrote back to Soape.

This wasn't the first time Harris and Soape had corresponded. They started communicating periodically over Instagram in March 2020. Soape and her two children live in Pflugerville, Tex., just north of Austin, but she is originally from Minnesota. The Soape family has long been a fan of the Minnesota Vikings, and their favorite player is Harris — who played for the NFL team for six seasons before signing a contract with the Eagles in March 2021.

Soape spontaneously sent him a message on social media one day to let him know that she and her family are big fans and that they wanted to send their prayers and support amid the pandemic. The last thing she expected was a reply. "But he responded, which was kind of incredible," Soape recalled.

Every few months, she would write Harris to check in and let him know that her family was watching from home and rooting for him. Most often, to her delight, he would respond.

In an interview with The Washington Post, Harris said he was touched by her support. “To continue those efforts really showed that they appreciated not only who I was as a player, but also what I was doing as a person,” said Harris, 30. “This is somebody who never met me in person; this is somebody who has just been following my career and not only paying attention to what I do on the field, but also what I do off the field.” For her part, Soape said she found “all his posts really down to earth” on social media, and “he just felt really personable and relatable to me.” “He seemed so real and so genuine, and it really made me feel like he was more of a person that we could get to know,” Soape continued.

She decided to send him a message the day after her husband died in a tragic accident, hoping he would send back a word of condolence. Harris, who was raised by a single mother, wanted to return the support Soape had given him over the years. “I will absolutely pray for you,” Harris wrote to her. “Please let me know if you need anything.”

Soape said she never expected to take Harris up on his offer, but for her daughter’s sake, she figured it was worth a shot. When it became clear in mid-January that the [football season was over for the Eagles](#), Harris kept his word. He told Soape that he would fly across the country to accompany Audrey to the father-daughter dance at the Fellowship Church in Round Rock, Tex. Harris said he was moved by Soape’s invitation and recognized her as “a mother doing what she can to provide for her family.” He wanted to try to make a sad situation better, in some small way.

When Harris confirmed that he would be there, “I was really blown away,” Soape said. “It was just disbelief.” Harris also insisted on buying Audrey a brand-new dress and shoes to wear that night, and he arranged for her to get her hair and makeup done. “He spared no expense whatsoever, and he just wanted to make sure that she felt special and cared about,” Soape said.

“I wanted to try to make it a very unique experience,” Harris echoed. “I wanted her to feel like a princess.” He also wanted to alleviate some costs, as “deaths could come with some financial burden as well,” he said. “I thought that this would take another load off of what the family was going through.” On Jan. 28, Harris arrived at the Soape’s home to pick up Audrey for the dance. She stepped outside, wearing her new floral dress with tan heels, to meet her date for the first time.

“I couldn’t believe that this was happening,” Audrey said. In equal measure, “I was nervous and excited to meet him.” The feelings were mutual: “I think I might have been a little more nervous than she was,” Harris confessed with a laugh. But he did everything possible to make Audrey feel comfortable around him, by chatting with her and trying to relate to her as best he could. His efforts worked. Before long, “it didn’t feel like I was with someone that was in the NFL,” Audrey said.

“It felt like I was with a normal person that was my friend.” The duo danced and laughed for several hours that night, and they also participated in a scavenger hunt. “We had fun. That was what it was all about,” Harris said. Soape volunteered to chaperone at the event so that she could spend some time with her favorite football player, too. “He had such a sense about him where if he could tell she was feeling nervous or uncomfortable, he would just break the ice,” Soape said. “He really just engaged with her the entire night and made sure she never felt alone.” Plus, she added, “when you see someone show up for your kid to make them feel special, to make them feel unique, it was just so unbelievably touching for me.”

For Harris, ensuring Audrey felt special and supported was his top priority that evening.

“I just wanted to try to help her cope through that experience without her father being there,” he said. “I had people in my life, sometimes complete strangers, that were very supportive of me, so I wanted to do that for her.” Harris hopes his presence at the dance demonstrated to Audrey and others that “you can one day potentially be a support system to someone else,” he said. “You don’t have to know somebody to help them.”

NBC Interview of Anthony Harris and the Soape Family

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p14lUi8i4iM>

Leader Summary:

Harris is an incredible story of a star NFL player being aware of and grateful for the kindness he has received in his life, and living with determination in passing forward acts of kindness to others. Hopefully, this story will inspire us to consider how we can live with kindness.

Discussion Question Options: *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses)*

Before beginning our discussion, let’s read over the virtues and their definitions, found in the online lesson as a separate document.

1. What first established the connection between Harris and the Soape family?
(Mrs. Soape reached out to Harris letting him know that they were praying for his well-being during the pandemic and continued to reach out to him with messages of support and encouragement.)

How did Harris view this outreach from the Soape family as something different than the normal fan posts?

(Harris said it was obvious that they **cared** more about him as a person and not just as a player.)

Although we typically don’t think about the difficulties of being a star athlete, do you think Harris has a point that a star performer in any field may come to believe that people only care about their ability to perform and don’t care about them as a person?

2. How did Audrey’s mother live with **determination** in striving to help her?
(Mrs. Soape was completely committed to finding the right person to take her daughter to the daddy daughter dance and went as far as asking an NFL player!)

How did Harris live with **determination** in the story?

(Harris was completely committed to making the night special for Audrey)

3. Anthony Harris and the Soape family have very different backgrounds and life experiences yet they have come together and created a real sense of **solidarity** in having a unity of spirit and purpose with each other. Let’s talk more about how they created this bond.

Both Harris and the Soape family commit to do something to help each other during different times of need. What was that? (they both committed to praying for each other)

What life situation do Harris and the children share? (Harris was raised by a single mom and now the Soape children are now being raised by a single mom)

What attitude toward others do Harris and the Soape family share? (They both want to **care** and help others in need)

Let's share some stories of when we came to share a bond with someone we didn't expect. It could be a fellow student from a different peer group or someone with very different interests or background.

4. Harris mentioned that in addition to offering support for Audrey Soape in her time of need, there is another reason he wanted to take her to the dance. What is that reason? (Harris stated that he wanted to show others that "you can one day potentially be a support system to someone else," he said. "You don't have to know somebody to help them.")

Do you agree with Harris that we should have a personal sense of **duty** to care for others we don't know?

5. **Caring** for other has three other virtues that inspire us and help us to care for others – **empathy, compassion and generosity**. Let's read over those virtues in our sheet of virtues and discuss how Harris has lived out each of these.
6. Let's share some stories of when we have passed on to someone else the goodness that we have received.

Journal Writing

Write about an experience when someone helped you, and it made a real difference. The action doesn't have to be something significant. Often even small acts of kindness can make a big difference. What was the act of kindness, how did it help you, and have you already or would you consider passing it on to someone else?

Washington Post Article

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2022/02/10/father-daughter-nfl-anthony-harris/>

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