



Preface

When I was a young mother, raising my two boys in rural South Carolina, I was shocked and saddened to find my children coming home with values which did not fit our family's beliefs. I remember when my younger son Craig, in first grade, came home using racist words and making sweeping generalizations about people of color. When I questioned him, trying to get to the root of the logic, he spoke about "catching cooties" and other phrases he had heard. When I asked, "But Craig, what about John?" naming his closest friend whose skin was a deep chocolate, he said, in six-year-old logic, "Well, not him." When I asked why, he said "Cuz he's my best friend." We had long talks about seeing with your own eyes and thinking with your own mind, and I didn't hear anything more about the dangers of associating with others whose skin is a different color. My job of teaching respect, tolerance and unity was made harder because these virtues were not addressed at school.

I was also distressed by the fact that my older son was constantly overwhelmed by the noise and confusion of the "open classroom" experiment, a methodology which was launched without much understanding of the changes it required. There were no boundaries in the classroom. When I observed his "teaching area", children were running and shouting, my son among them. The noise was deafening. My heart went out to him and the other children who were ill equipped to cope with the chaos. My heart went out to the teachers too. I decided to do something about it.

The next day, I made an appointment with the principal. "I know this open classroom thing isn't working, but what can I do?" he said, looking dejected. I said, "Would you let me help in a small way?" "How?" he asked. "What is your hardest class, the one with the most disciplinary problems?" He named the first grade class. He knew that I was a psychotherapist, working with children and families and he said "I don't know what you're going to do but please do it." I went to the first grade teacher, who had already raised a sweat by 11 AM. The children were restless. One little girl kept flinging herself at the teacher who kept saying, "Kimmy, stop it." I said, "I'd like to help you out a couple of times a week. Give me your five 'most challenging' kids, the ones who are hardest to handle. I'll take them out for a couple of hours twice a week." I will never forget the look on her face. She almost cried. She pointed them out, including Kimmy. A couple of days later, I arrived with drawing paper and crayons, a box of raisins, and an idea.

Mrs. Johnson yelled out the names of the five children and they gathered

apprehensively around me. I knelt down and said, "I'm going to take you to a very special place. You have been chosen by your teacher to come with me." They looked only slightly less worried. They walked, hopped and meandered behind me to a tiny supply room in which I had created a circle of child-sized chairs. "Please sit down." As I looked at them, I did a quick scan of their characteristics. Leroy, whose eyes whirled involuntarily appeared to have some neurological impairment; Johnny was so hyperactive, he was literally attempting to climb the wall behind his chair; Kimmy's clothes were shabby, her hair unkempt, and her body movements agitated. I wondered about possible abuse or neglect; Raymond was slow and obese; Timmy looked very angry. Kimmy and Johnny were Caucasian, Leroy, Raymond and Timmy African-American.

I sat on the floor before their little circle and said, "We're going to learn together about three very special things, which everyone has inside. They are respect, patience, and self-discipline." I looked only at the four who were paying attention. I ignored Johnny, still standing in his chair but beginning to tire from his wall climbing attempts. He suddenly turned around and stopped, perhaps to see if I was watching him. I took advantage of the moment. "See how Johnny is looking at me right now and paying attention? That's the kind of respect I'm talking about." Johnny looked absolutely dumbfounded and plopped down into a sitting position. I had his attention. "This class will be a secret just between us, and when you learn these things – respect, patience, and self-discipline – then you can teach them to the rest of your class."

Each week, I made words of raisins and popcorn, and when the children were able to master the words themselves, the reward was to "eat my words." They laughed and munched. The main focus of our time together was some simple life skills to help them practice the three virtues. They learned that when the teacher asked for quiet, they were to "stop like a statue." They loved playing statues and they understood that it was a way to show respect in following directions. They learned that if they wanted to respond in class, instead of jumping on the teacher, or shouting, they were to put one hand over their mouth and the other in the air. This was a way of showing self-discipline. While the others drew, Kimmy practiced "the magic circle of respect". Having no sense of physical boundaries, she would literally jump on people like a monkey. I showed her the invisible circle of personal space which was a way of showing respect for herself and others. When she was able to go for an entire session without jumping on me or the other children, I would hold her in my arms for a long hug at the end of the class. Johnny received special acknowledgments for his self-discipline when he made the effort to pay attention. Raymond showed enthusiasm and excellence in recognizing words. They all began to read within a few weeks. I received reports from Mrs. Brown that these children were showing "miraculous" changes.

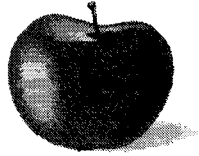
At the end of the term, with their drawings on respect, patience and self-discipline, the children paraded proudly into class. “We are your teachers for today,” Raymond announced confidently. “We will teach you respect,” said Johnny, grinning from ear to ear. “We will teach you patience,” said Kimmy, smiling peacefully. Leroy and Timmy went on to demonstrate the left hand up and right hand over mouth technique. We played Respect Statues with the whole class. My kids beamed with pride as the other children applauded wildly. Based on that simple program of virtues development, the school instituted an ongoing program called “ABC: Aiding Behavioral Change”. Other volunteers came forward to keep it going.

This early experience brought me hope and was the seed for The Virtues Project, which my husband, my brother and I founded 16 years later in 1991. It has become a grass roots movement spanning the globe, spreading the philosophy that by focusing on the virtues – the best qualities within our children – we can encourage them to be at their best.

We need ways to transform our schools into safe, happy learning environments. The purpose of The Virtues Project is to help develop a culture of character where respect, patience, self-discipline, tolerance and joy for learning are among the virtues our children master. The character education of our children has become our first priority. It’s time to make our schools caring communities where all students are encouraged to live by the virtues – the best within them.

Linda Kavelin Popov

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How to Use this Book

The Virtues Project Educator's Guide is designed to give educators tools and strategies to help them shape character by creating a positive, empowering culture or environment in which children are learning and growing. These strategies can be easily integrated into the curriculum, the disciplinary system and social atmosphere of any school or organization. The Virtues Project is a positive, holistic program which has been used in many cultures and countries throughout the world to bring out the best in children and adults.

This Guide highlights Examples of Excellence from schools around the globe to give you concrete examples of how to apply The Virtues Project strategies in your own school or program.

The activities at the back of each chapter and each virtue are designed for a wide range of age and grade levels, from K to 12. Many of them apply to all ages. However, we leave it to you to decide which activities are appropriate for the age, social and cultural group with whom you are working and how to adjust the activities to fit your students.

Counselors will find Chapter 5 on the Art of Spiritual Companionship particularly useful in their work with students. It presents a method which helps students to "get to the heart of the matter" and call on the virtues of their character to solve their own problems. It is a useful tool in grief work and suicide prevention as well.

This Guide is divided into three sections and contains:

Section 1: Simple Ways to Create a Culture of Character

- A chapter on each of the Five Strategies of The Virtues Project.
- Methods for applying each strategy.
- Examples of Excellence from schools and programs throughout the world.
- Classroom activities, student activity sheets, and school-wide activities at the end of each chapter.
- A Chapter Summary, with a list of key points.

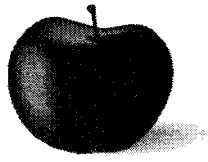
Section 2: Virtues: The Gifts of Character

- 52 Virtues, from Assertiveness to Unity.
- How to use the virtues for classroom and school-wide activities.
- A definition of each virtue, why practice it, role-playing scenarios, signs of success and an affirmation on the first page of each virtue.
- Suggested activities, reflection questions, art projects, and “quotable quotes” which can be posted, on the second page of each virtue.
- A poster: “Virtues: The Gifts of Character” at the end of the section.

Section 3: Resources

- Information on The Virtues Project website.
- Books and music about the virtues.
- Information on how to order Virtues Project materials.
- How to arrange for Virtues Project presentations and workshops.

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Introduction



Our Schools Are In Trouble

Too many schools have become war zones. The incidence of violence is alarming. The leading cause of death of youth in North America is murder. Many youth in North American cities go to school with weapons. Metal detectors and armed guards are needed at the doors. Too many of our children are technical wizards and moral incompetents. Students are dropping out of school at an alarming rate. Teachers are increasingly stressed by the threat of violence and are already overburdened by the demands of academic requirements. We know that unless we get to the root causes of these problems, they will persist and worsen.



The Loss of Meaning

A study out of the Harvard Center for Moral Education asked the question "Why did you do it?" of youth jailed for committing random acts of violence. Ninety per cent of these youth said "Because I was bored." Boredom is a spiritual disease – the disease of meaninglessness.

If loss of meaning is the disease, the cure must incorporate a way for young people to connect with meaning and purpose. There is a longing deep within adolescents to make a difference, to have impact. It comes from the developmental urge to fulfill their innate virtues of idealism, purposefulness, and creativity. It is the call of early adulthood saying "Make your mark." When that fierce idealism is not given a positive focus through opportunities for young people to explore and experience what is meaningful in their lives, it seeks another channel.



A Renaissance of Values and Virtues

Thankfully, there is a renaissance of values and virtues to address the heart of the matter. The purpose of life as described in all the world's wisdom traditions is the cultivation of the virtues. There is nothing new about justice. There is nothing original about love. Virtues are the oldest ideas in the world.

Yet, we are spiritually and morally parched for these simple, timeless practices. Many teachers and administrators are finding that applying the strategies of The Virtues Project is transforming the culture in their schools by helping them to create a **total environment** of caring and respect. They have replaced discouragement with empowerment, having discovered that words such as “lazy”, “stupid”, “no good”, “hopeless”, and “unacceptable” were literally demoralizing and dis-courage-ing their students. When they fill their classrooms with encouraging words, such as “helpful”, “excellent”, “compassionate”, “self-disciplined”, and “kind”, they find that these behaviors flourish.

Why Virtues? Why Not Values?

Values are what we value and care about. They could be anything. We may value getting rich and famous, we may value being the best criminal the world has ever seen, we may value power over others, but that doesn't mean we will have good character. Also, values are culture-specific. What some families or cultures value, others don't. Virtues are much more elemental than values. While values are culture-specific, virtues are universally valued by all cultures.

“Virtues are what's good about us.”

Sharon, Age 6

An Inclusive Approach

Sometimes educators get bogged down in their pursuit of character education by the dilemma of how to introduce values without offending people of diverse belief systems, including the religious and the non-religious children. How do we introduce character education in a pluralistic society? How do we safeguard against imposing the values of any one belief system? A simple way to address this issue is by focusing on the development of virtues.

We cannot afford to wait until the values debate is resolved. Too many of our children are dying. And this program side-steps the debate and gets on with the business of how to inspire the courage, honor, justice, and compassion in our kids. All parents, of whatever faith or of no faith, support having their children develop the integrity of their character.

The strategies of The Virtues Project are a simple, proven methodology which helps children to remember who they really are, and to know that the purpose of life is to have a life of purpose. Virtues are the content of our character, the elements of the human spirit. They exist within each child in potential. What is needed is a method to help children act on the best within them. The purpose of a true educator – which literally means “one who leads forth” – is

to awaken the virtues which already exist within a child. This book is about simple ways to do that.

The best time to awaken a child's qualities of character is in the early years. Early childhood education is the ideal time to introduce an awareness of virtues as the core of life's meaning, yet we have found it is never too late to help them discover it.

Virtue is alive and well within our children — it merely needs to be awakened. As this practice spreads, "virtue will triumph everywhere".

*"Cultivate Virtue in your self, and Virtue will be real.
Cultivate Virtue in the family, and Virtue will flourish.
Cultivate Virtue in the village, and Virtue will spread.
Cultivate Virtue in the nation, and Virtue will be abundant.
Cultivate Virtue in the world and Virtue will triumph
everywhere."*

Lao Tsu

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