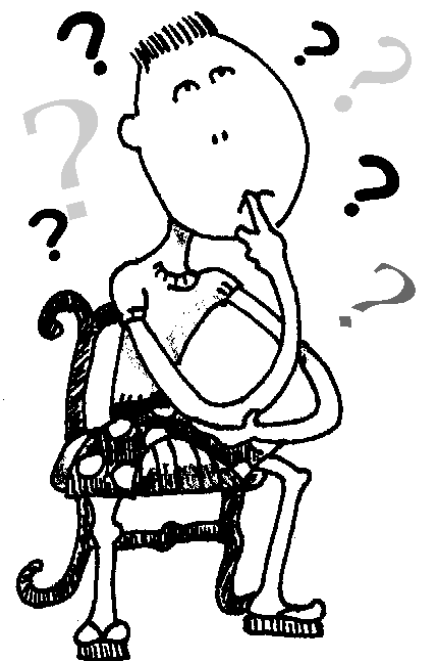


Happiness is the reward of virtue.

15 reasons to foster virtues, habitual good behaviours, in children.

1. **For over 2,500 years good habits, virtues, have been considered the building blocks of character.** This is true across most cultures. Yet in the last 50 years we are embarrassed to talk of virtues. Why?
2. **Virtues empower us to be happy:** Aristotle wrote, *'Happiness is the reward of virtue.'*
3. **Habits are most easily formed in childhood,** and good habits are the foundation of virtues. Remember, children learn most of all by imitation and first impressions can be virtually indelible. Quintilian wrote: *'We are by nature most tenacious of childish impressions...further it is the worst impressions that are most durable.'* Because, as Aristotle observed, *'We always like best whatever we first experience'* parents do well to put great care into the early experiences of children and focus on habits built in the younger years. Experts talk of 'windows of opportunity' for building particular virtues; for example a child who has not learned the importance of truthfulness by the middle of primary school may well have real difficulties in facing reality and responsibilities in adult life. If parents do not manage competing inputs from peer group and media, actively fostering positive habits, their children will suffer.
4. **The capacity to truly love others is a consequence of character with a well-rounded development of virtues.** Professor Donald DeMarco, author of *Heart of Virtue*, writes that virtues empower us to deliver love to others. This was the view of Augustine.
5. **Human maturity is a product of virtues,** the well rounded development of virtues. A weak character possesses poorly developed virtues, or vices.
6. **Virtues confer freedom.** Human virtues such as sound judgement and self control enable ease of action: they empower us to be self-directing in life - to be truly free. Freedom is not mere freedom from constraints but a capacity to carry noble convictions into action. Too often we human beings find ourselves limited and inhibited by our own failings, weaknesses of temperament, ignorance or unquestioning conformity. Virtues are the answer.
7. **An understanding of virtues is based on a proven psychology of the human being.** For example, if we possess a clearer understanding of the links between emotion, repetition and habit building we will be better able to build strategies to control our tempers, our laziness, or our negativity. Furthermore, we will be



John found himself faced with the challenge of choosing values which would lead him to happiness

ready to cut others more slack as they struggle to master their own temperamental quirks... a tendency to be oversensitive, a tendency to react impulsively, etc.

8. **An understanding of virtues makes parenting much more effective.** Parents become much more aware of the need to establish good habits, to provide consistent routines and timetables, to follow up misbehaviour before it becomes entrenched, to help a child work against temperamental weaknesses such as timidity, impulsivity, etc. Repeated behaviours build habits. Repeated positive behaviours build virtues.
9. **Parenting itself comes down to a collection of habits,** for better or for worse. A good parent does not throw in the towel. James Stenson holds that parents who do not take responsibility for the moral upbringing of their children are more likely to fail as parents.
10. **The family is the natural environment for fostering virtue.** Virtues are best learned in a family, where an overriding motivation is the welfare of the other members. In such an environment the motive for action is love. In the family, love is unconditional but failures to act well are corrected. The family, is the environment *par excellence* for fostering virtue. Institutions can also assist in fostering virtue, provided the culture is right: respect for others; high but realistic expectations; a positive approach where mistakes are part of the process of learning and where a crisis is not a disaster but an event that brings underlying causes of behaviour to light so they can be addressed.
11. **An understanding of virtues brings an appreciation of the debilitating effects of bad habits, vices.** ‘A young person’s character is like wax for the growth of bad habits’ observed the old Roman soldier poet Horace. Like virtues, vices too are fostered by repeated actions. For example, a boy who repeatedly dodges homework develops an entrenched irresponsibility; a girl repeatedly teasing others creates a habit whereby she becomes hardened to the difficulties of others.
12. **An appreciation of virtue brings with it a conviction that our heads should govern our feelings and passions.** Sound judgement, the virtue of the intellect, was regarded in ancient times as the ‘*chariot driver*’ of the other virtues. Only by choosing and judging well are we able to act well.
13. **Virtues make good deeds possible; a person who strives to acquire virtue will do more good for others.** Good intentions are not enough. The end point of all parenting is that young people act well and freely from their own dearly cherished convictions. So, the essential challenge in teenage years is to help a young person internalize the values they have learned. Good values must lead to a good heart, and to habitually good choices. ‘*It is no profit to have learnt well, if we neglect to do well,*’ wrote Publilius Syrus sometime during the 1st century BC. Virtues bestow good habits of acting. The bottom line is that kids without virtue lack the wherewithal to do good in their lives.
14. **Virtues enable us to show personal responsibility in a democratic society.** Virtues affirm personal responsibility: in normal circumstances, I am responsible for what I do and for what I decide. A society which denies personal responsibility will be doomed to mediocrity and then to decline. The virtue of justice underpins respect for others and responsibility to others.
15. **Academic performance, and ultimately the welfare of our society, are clearly linked to character,** especially to virtues of industriousness, justice, perseverance and honesty. In the 1990’s social critique *Why Johnny can’t tell right from wrong*, William Kirkpatrick wrote: ‘*The core problem facing our schools is a moral one. All other problems derive from it. Even academic reform depends on putting character first.*’

Source: **Institute of Advanced Family Studies, Internatinonal University of Catalonia, e-MEF program**
<http://www.uic.es/en/marriage-education-family>