

Developing Character Virtues

Source: The Virtues Project Educator's Guide by Linda Kavelin.

Educators have enormous power in children's lives. Their power comes primarily from the value they see in a child's being, and whether they see a child in a negative light or in one of positive possibilities.

So, to develop virtues in children, the way we speak and the words we use are critical. Children listen to the language being spoken and, respond to the energy of the person that they are listening to. They also observe and learn by experience.

To see a child as naughty, irritating, or nasty will only strengthen a negative sense of self. Instead focus on and start to awaken and develop the virtues and human qualities that every child has within them – innate gifts every human is born with.

It is also important that children see and hear the educator demonstrating each virtue that is being developed – role model. The Language of Virtues can be experienced using all senses:

1. **SEEING** the virtues in the student.
2. **HEARING** the student.
3. **SPEAKING** with the power of the virtues.
4. **ACTING** with virtue.

Linda Kavelin says that it is important to find SOMETHING about each child, which you can appreciate and enjoy. Be sincere and genuine. Every child needs acknowledgement and recognition. It is a fundamental human need to feel valued and know that your contribution has been noticed.

Speaking the Virtue by:

- **Acknowledging** or praising a child for a virtue they have practiced. Do not add any other feedback e.g. the child should try harder.
- **Facilitate** (guide) a child to practice a virtue.
- **Correct or remind** a child when they have forgotten to practice a virtue – made a mistake or had a learning experience.

Teachable moments:

Look for “teachable moments” where you can see the virtue being demonstrated by the child. And feed this back to them. Ultimately it is about the child choosing to demonstrate the virtue and the teacher acknowledging that they have seen or heard the virtue.

Example: “Peter you showed a lot of kindness to Susan by caring for her when she hurt herself in the playground”.

Activities:

In the following pages find examples of activities for developing the virtues of: *Cooperation, Courage, Love, and Responsibility.*

1. Activities for developing COOPERATION – Working together for the good of everyone

Cooperation Activities

Cooperative activities allow children to work together to make decisions based on creative thinking, communication, and **collaboration**. They do not have to have a sole winner, as the objective is for all teams to succeed, and are used to teach cooperation.

1. Circle Time

Start the morning with a circle and discuss what cooperation is. Write the virtue up on the whiteboard and, tell children that you will be paying careful attention to cooperation today. When you see a child, cooperating, give a **virtues acknowledgment** and write their name on the whiteboard.

Sample of a virtue acknowledgement statement:

Carter you are being very cooperative now, in the way you are doing what I have asked you to do! Or Carter at the moment you are being very cooperative by helping others tidy up the classroom.

Questions for talking about cooperation:

- When we are cooperating what are doing, what are we saying, what can we see?
- What things do you need help with to do?
- What things can you not do on your own?

2. Cooperative Hide and Seek (From *The Joyful Child* by Peggy Jenkins)

Two children hand in hand, begin as the seekers, and each time they find someone hiding he or she joins hands with them. The game ends with all children holding hands.

3. Wave Stretching <http://www.tandalay.com/KidsMoving/6-8%20subweb/68pdf/6-8%20unit9.pdf>

This is a quick, fun, cooperative building activity with which to begin any lesson. Children have fun together as they listen to one another, and physically repeat what they have asked them to do. Watch how they look at each other, and literally mimic one another. It's so fun to watch how attentive they are and how they work together to get the game rolling!

Have children form a large circle (you may even choose to do this in small groups depending on the space). Begin by picking one child within the circle. Have them call out a stretch. Going either clockwise or counter-clockwise, every child must do the stretch one by one. The idea is to pass the stretch as you go along.

Once the stretch gets back to the original child you chose, have the next child call out a new stretch. The other children will have to hold the initial stretch until the new stretch makes its way to them. You can play this activity for however long you'd like; however, depending on the age level, you may want to limit the number of stretches and eventually increase in number as they become more familiar with them game, or as they learn additional stretches.

Flipcharts for placing around the classroom...

“We all do better when we WORK TOGETHER”.

“Cooperation is friendship”.

“Teamwork divides the task and multiplies the success”.

“Cooperation = others on your side”.

2. Activities for developing COURAGE – *Being brave when you are afraid*

Courage Activities

Teaching children about the concept of courage is important, as they face intimidating situations all the time. Learning about courage can help give them strength to face a challenge. A child needs courage to stand up and present a report to class, to try a new activity or to face an illness. These activities teach children about the concept of courage and give them an understanding of how they can develop it in their own lives.

Questions for talking about courage:

- What makes you feel afraid or scared?
- What do you do when you are feeling afraid?
- In the storybooks you read who shows courage?
- When you are with your friends when would you be courageous?

1. Make a COURAGE picture

Find pictures in magazines of people showing courage. Glue a collection of these to a piece of cardboard as a class together using cooperation. Acknowledge each child when you see him or her demonstrating the virtue of cooperation. And use language that encourages cooperation such as “together we can get this done quickly”, or “many hands make light work – John Heywood”, or “we all do better when we work together – Bill Clinton”.

2. Craft Activities

Encourage children to be courageous when facing new challenges. Help them create courage badges. Children can wear their courage badges whenever they face an intimidating challenge to remind them that they are brave and can carry through.

Cut circles out of cardboard and allow children to decorate them. Write the word “Courage” across the center, and provide crayons, markers, fabric scraps, glitter, glue and some stickers for embellishment. Attach a safety pin to the back of the cardboard with duct tape. Children can wear the badges when they must learn a new concept at school or speak in public.

Have every child create a “Certificate of Courage.” Collect the certificates to keep at the front of the room. Then ask each child to come to the front of the room and share a story of courage. The story could be about how they faced going to the hospital with a broken arm with courage, or it could be about someone else. Not only are the children sharing about courage, but they are also exhibiting it by speaking in front of the class (a task many if they are high C’s find intimidating). When a child is done speaking, choose a Certificate of Courage at random for the child to take home as a reminder of a job well done.

Flipcharts for placing around the classroom...

“Some days you just have to create your own SUNSHINE”
“Courage is DOING what you are afraid to DO”
“COURAGE gets you from moment to the next”
“Courage is...standing up to SPEAK and sitting down to LISTEN”

3. Activities for developing LOVE - Some children’s definitions of love:

- When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth." *Billy - age 4*
- "Love is when you go out to eat and give somebody most of your French fries without making them give you any of theirs." *Chrissy - age 6*
- "Love is what makes you smile when you're tired." *Terri - age 4*
- "Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is OK." *Danny - age 7*

Questions for talking about love:

- What are some things that you love to do and that make you happy?
- Name some things that you do when you are being loving?
- What are some ways that we show love to animals? How do we treat them?

Love activities

Source: <http://www.momentsaday.com/activities-to-teach-children-about-love>

1. **Make a list and create a photo album** of family members, friends, pets etc. Use the list and album to remind children that there are lots of people who care for them. Discuss the idea of love being limitless – no matter how many people we love, there is always more love in our hearts. Love is endless to receive and endless to give.
2. **Choose a song children like and make up actions** or dance moves you can do together. Love feels so good that we often smile, laugh, sing and dance when we are with those we love. Being joyful helps us show and accept love.

Song suggestions:

Bruno Mars – Don't give up

Hi 5 – You and me or ... Hi 5 – Inside my heart

Will.i.am – What I am

The Wiggles – You make me feel like dancing

3. **Have children make a card for someone they love.** Ask them who they would like to make a card for and talk about why they chose that person. Is that person kind to them? Do they enjoy spending time with that person? Ask them to think about how that person makes them feel and how can we try to display these same qualities to other people around us. Arrange for each child to post or deliver his or her card.
4. **The sign for "I love you" in American Sign Language** is the pinky finger, index finger, and thumb pointed straight (with the middle two fingers held down to the palm). Teach your child this sign or make up an original sign together for your own family to use to tell each other how much you love each other.

Flipcharts for placing around the classroom...

"Love is being gentle"

"Love is listening with your heart"

"Love is sharing"

"Love is showing kindness"

4. Activities for developing RESPONSIBILITY – others can depend on you and trust you

Responsibility

Responsibility isn't just about having the willingness to complete a task. "It's also about teaching children that being responsible is about having the right attitude - the idea of taking action and being proud of doing it. Responsibility is about not laying blame on others or justifying your actions when you have made a mistake.

Questions for talking about responsibility:

- What are you responsible for at home?
- How can being responsible make you a better friend?
- What is good about being a responsible person?
- How do you feel inside when you do something wrong?

1. Role-play responsibility. First ask children in what situations would they need to be responsible, write a list on the white/black board. Then next to each situation write what people would see them doing and what people would hear them saying. Then choose some children to role-play a situation where they are being responsible. Have the children identify observable behaviors the children are demonstrating in the role-plays. Puppets can also be used to demonstrate responsible and irresponsible situations and behavior.

2. Make a poster. Give children magazines to look through to find pictures that they can use to make a poster about responsibility. Give some examples of what type of pictures can be used e.g. a boy watching his little sister while his mum is doing something, or someone feeding their pet, or a mother or father cooking a meal. Then have each child share his or her poster with the class.

3. 10-12yrs activity - Mr. "No Excuse" Goose/Duck - Materials: soft toy/puppet of a goose/duck or a picture of one. To help children understand the importance of both accepting responsibility and following through, introduce them to your friend Mr. "No Excuse" Goose/Duck. Mr. Goose/Duck shows responsibility by doing what is expected of him. He does not blame others or make excuses. People can count on Mr. Goose/Duck to get the job done. Role-play with children the different ways Mr. Goose/Duck would respond to a situation. For example, "It's time for Mr. Goose/Duck to take out the rubbish. Does he say, 'I'm too tired or ask someone else?' NO, Mr. Goose/Duck does not make excuses...he gets the job done!"

Suggested books to read to students:

- *Annie Shows Off, Shelagh Canning*
- *Clean Your Room, Harvey Moon! Pat Cummings*
- *Pigsty, Mark Teague*

Flipcharts for placing around the classroom...

"Be RESPONSIBLE...No blaming others...No excuses"
"People can DEPEND on ME"
"I DO what I say I will DO"