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# *Catholic Parent*<sup>®</sup> KNOWHOW

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Conversations  
for *Busy  
Families*

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POSITIVE  
Discipline  
gets *Results*

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Steps to  
LIVING A  
*Virtuous Life*

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Virtue &  
Discipline

# Dear Parents,

Welcome to a positive approach to discipline. In raising my own children, I remember those times I wished I hadn't lost my temper with them, or given unfair punishments when I failed to hear the whole story. Does this sound familiar? Our goal with *Virtue and Discipline* is to help you blend faith with formation as you consider ways to help your child stay on the path of goodness. For busy families, this guide will help you, in simple ways, improve yourself and the way you approach discipline.

## Learning About Holy Habits

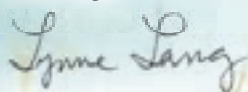
It may sound odd to use the words “virtue” and “discipline” together. After all, virtue is a holy habit that is good, and misbehavior is anything but virtuous! Parents often express frustration with their own harsh outbursts when they lose patience with arguing children who refuse to do their chores without a battle. All in all, when it comes to discipline, parents agree wholeheartedly that, “We can do better!”

*Virtue and Discipline* can help you and your family learn and practice habits for holiness — namely, the virtues. This is impossible without God, so as you practice virtue, you will be following the two greatest commandments: “*Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (Matthew 22:37-39).

## Making Sense of Faith and Discipline

This guide provides simple steps for helping children return to goodness when they stumble. When we seek God's wisdom in parenting our children, we are able to mirror divine love and forgiveness, and model true discipleship. Enjoy the journey as you cultivate habits for holiness as a family.

Blessings,



Lynne M. Lang



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# The Virtue-Based Approach

**Virtue is always an expression of goodness.** The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions. “The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God” (1803).

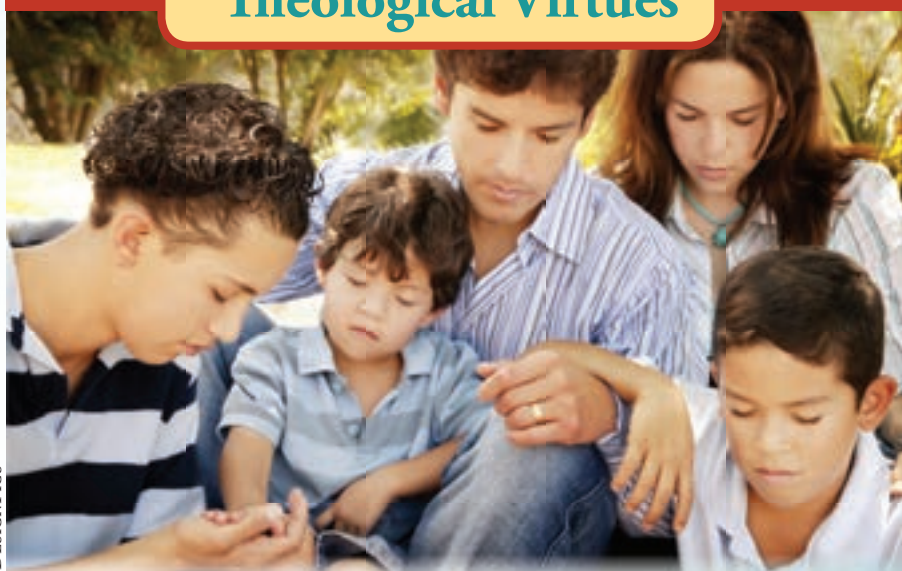
Hearing the age-old expression “patience is a virtue” may well have been your introduction to the idea that virtue is identified in concrete actions or behaviors that eventually become everyday habits for holiness. Examples of patience include waiting for someone who is late, waiting for a child learning to tie a shoe, or listening to someone else’s point of view without interruption. These actions illustrate the virtue of patience.

Virtues also counteract vices, which are bad habits. Both virtues and vices are habits that form character, so the only way to help children grow to become faith-filled, holy adults is through the practice of virtue. When you correct a child’s misbehavior, take time to consider how you can grow in virtue. These actions are good for you and your child, and pleasing to God.



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## Theological Virtues



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- **FAITH:** Even though faith seems abstract, the truth is that we profess our faith each time we proclaim the Apostles’ Creed or the Nicene Creed. Don’t get discouraged if you sometimes have doubts about your faith. Even the apostles had doubts — this is natural with our human limitations. The expression “doubting Thomas” comes from the apostle Thomas, who claimed he needed to touch the nail marks of the risen Jesus before he could believe. Hebrews 11:1 tells us, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Our faith *must* rely on surrendering to what lies beyond our human understanding, which is why faith is a supernatural virtue.
- **HOPE:** Hebrews 10:23 says, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” It must be our will to surrender to the hope that our God is loving and faithful. Praying with confidence against hopelessness can seem insurmountable, but St. Paul tells us in Romans 8:18, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Hope relies on what is *unseen*, so our faith is integral to hope.
- **LOVE:** Jesus told his apostles: “Love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). St. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 13:13, “Faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” This is the pure love that is beyond our human capacity, and therefore is supernatural. How many times do we get angry and hold a grudge against another? While anger is not an unhealthy feeling, many times our inappropriate actions that result can cause serious harm to those around us. This can result in pain and anxiety for our children. If love is the greatest of the commandments, we must attempt to put the greatest amount of effort into practicing it.

## Cardinal Virtues



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- PRUDENCE:** “The virtue that disposes practical reason [the mind thinking about what should be done] to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it” (CCC 1806). Prudence is having clear thinking and reasoning in any given circumstance so one can choose and act for the good. Avoiding evil, negativity, and foolishness are linked with wisdom. Prudence demands this type of restraint as a way to grow in wisdom. Proverbs 14:18 states, “The simple acquire folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.”
- TEMPERANCE:** “The moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods” (CCC 1809). According to scriptural teaching, this moral virtue challenges us to moderation and restraint in our desire for created goods. We practice temperance when we strive to be healthy, set limits, and avoid overindulging. For example, use good judgment when watching TV or checking your phone so that you are a positive role model for your family.
- JUSTICE:** “The moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the ‘virtue of religion’ [or ‘piety’]. Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships ... harmony” (CCC 1807). Biblical justice is not the same as legal justice. Acting in fairness with compassion toward humanity may result in decisions that appear different in our homes than in courtrooms. For instance, you may expect less from a younger child than you would an older sibling when assigning chores, and give a lesser consequence for failing to meet the expectation.
- FORTITUDE:** “The moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life” (CCC 1808). Courage in the natural world is easy to identify in situations such as a young person choosing to stand up for another child who is being humiliated by others, or a student refraining from cheating on an exam or plagiarizing. Praying for courage draws us closer to God when the grace we receive strengthens us for the task at hand.

## Steps to Living

**1. Become a student of virtue.**  
 1. Learn about the foundational virtues found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. As you learn more about the cardinal and theological virtues, you may also want to consider the virtues found in Galatians 5:22. Learn as many as possible — and have one you focus on while also using the others — as you need them in everyday life.

**2. Choose one virtue at a time to cultivate deeply in your life.**  
 Give yourself time to pray and reflect on what it is that God is calling you to work on. Many immediately think patience is the most important, but you may be called to work on temperance or fortitude. Sometimes we forget to ask God’s opinion and miss out on an opportunity to experience the deep spiritual benefits that come from conforming to his will. It is easy to look at the list and pick one we think might help us. Journal about the fruit of your actions, and when you feel satisfied with your experience, gradually add other virtues over time. You will know you are successful when others begin to express appreciation for your good acts.

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# a Virtuous Life

## 3. Teach your children about virtue.

As you learn about virtues, share this understanding with your family. Recognize these acts, and “catch” your children in the acts of virtue with such comments as, “Hey, that was generous of you to help with your brother’s homework. Thank you.” Giving compliments that express the genuine goodness in your home will bring about a cheerful heart. There can be nothing more comforting to children than seeing the significant adults in their lives living in harmony. This has transcendent value for them and for us. It is the comfort of knowing that parents are getting along, children are happy, and all these things filter down to kinder interactions for everyone. These are the fruits of living a virtuous life — such things as patience, kindness, gentleness, love, joy, peace, etc. When children begin to comment on the virtue they see in us, we have won them over! This is a true sign that we are living a virtue. For this reason, it is important that families work together in developing virtues.



*“To live well is nothing other than to love God with all one’s heart, with all one’s soul and with all one’s efforts; from this it comes about that love is kept whole and uncorrupted (through temperance). No misfortune can disturb it (and this is fortitude). It obeys only [God] (and this is justice), and is careful in discerning things so as to not be deceived by deceit or trickery (and this is prudence).”*

— St. Augustine (CCC 1809)

## Discipline with Virtue

In Proverbs 10:17, we are advised, “He who heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof goes astray.” By forming your child’s heart to become a disciple of Christ, you are providing a foundation for the self-discipline necessary to love God and love one another. Discipline and discipleship go hand in hand, as they both are defined as instruction, following, and correction.

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Parents are the first teachers of conflict management with their children. Make sure you teach first about love. As you reflect on your style of discipline, consider the virtue your child might see in you. Have a discussion when the conflict is over about ways you and your child learned from one another.

# Make Discipline More Positive

## 1. Make it easy

In your busy family life, take every opportunity you can to talk about your values, whether you are in the car, at the table, or just relaxing. Tell your children about the adults who shaped the goodness in you as you were growing up and the good people who loved you even when you failed. Chances are you will be talking about people of virtue, who practiced patience, kindness, prudence, and justice. Our children need to know God created them perfectly, and even when they fail, they are still good. This is a time to share the good you see in your child. Talking about the virtue you see in them is the easiest way to teach it while reinforcing good behavior.



## 2. Formative vs. punitive

Harsh correction or punishment may actually cause more harm than good. For this reason it is essential to view discipline as *formative* rather than *punitive*. “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). By taking the time to reflect on God’s mercy toward us, we can be inspired to show mercy to our children. This does not mean we “let



them off the hook,” but rather that we allow them to learn from their mistakes by their making things as right as possible, and we forgive them when they have taken the necessary steps — fix what is broken, apologize, and talk about how they will try to avoid repeating the behavior.

## 3. Seeing with virtue

When we view discipline through the sacred lens of virtue, we will be striving to cooperate with God’s will for our lives in disciplining our children. We typically pattern our style of parenting after what was modeled for us as children. We may even find ourselves surprised at how much like our parents we can become at times. Whether your parents were permissive or strict, playful or serious, or expressed warmth or were distant, virtue can help you to do some soul-searching about the habits you have acquired that are holy, and the ones that need improvement.



## 4. When disciplining with virtue, reflect first on yours

**From what virtue am I operating?** The goal is to cultivate a prayerful mindset so your actions are focused on goodness. In that way, when things go wrong, you are already reflective of the virtue you are choosing to practice to make things right.

**How will I handle this situation with virtue?** Consider the difference between shouting at your child and stopping to pray for guidance, and a virtue that will bring out the goodness in you and your child. Taking time to say a brief prayer will give you the right mind to solve conflict effectively.



**What do I want to accomplish in my disciplinary actions?** Inspire your children to be their best, and encourage virtue as they correct their error in judgment. Strive to prevent, rather than punish, bad behavior or poor judgment.

**How can I help my child learn from mistakes?** Give your child the opportunity to talk about what was done, who was harmed, and how it will be made right. Take time to develop the skills to listen and talk with your child when conflict occurs.

# Two Kinds of Discipline

Some forms of discipline are focused on faultfinding, while restorative discipline is based in constantly evaluating ways to improve the way we deal with misbehavior. If you rely on a faultfinding model of discipline, you may find yourself falling into the **H.U.R.T.** formula:

*Having trouble seeing anyone's perspective other than your own.*

*Unwilling to pray or share your virtue.*

*Regretting the way you handled the situation afterward.*

*Talking too much, asking too little.*



You are on the right track if you find yourself using this **H.E.L.P.** formula:

*Have involved parties do most of the talking.*

*Everyone seeks solutions rather than blame.*

*Listening with compassion.*

*Praying and speaking about virtue, and integrating sacraments.*



## Conversations for busy families can take place anywhere, anytime:

- ❑ ***Do others see the virtue in me?*** Your effort to cultivate virtue should be evident to others. This is an effort your family can work on together. Pray about virtues together, talk about examples you have seen in others, and ask God to show you ways to practice virtue.
- ❑ ***Have I genuinely complimented each person in my family today?*** Be sure to take notice of virtue in one another, and talk about the ways virtue is shown toward others.
- ❑ ***Did the compliment mention a virtue?*** Examples: “Thank you for your patience,” or “It was prudent of you to choose to go to the movies with your friend rather than go to the party last night.” Paying genuine compliments to others will bring about a cheerful heart.

## Personal Reflection

***How can I do better tomorrow?*** Reflection is the best way to change over time. As you are waiting to fall asleep, give yourself time to pray about your actions. God wants us to grow closer to him first, and as we do so, we are becoming more virtuous for those we love the most.



# Praying as a Family

**Dear Jesus,**

Help us to act with fairness as we follow your footsteps. We know when we are good, and when we choose to do the right thing, it shows our love for you and for one another. Today help us to master the holy habits of virtue that feed a world that is hungry for divine kindness. Help us to avoid the mistakes that cause us to need discipline, and when we fail, teach us once again about love and forgiveness. We pray this in your holy name.

**Amen.**



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