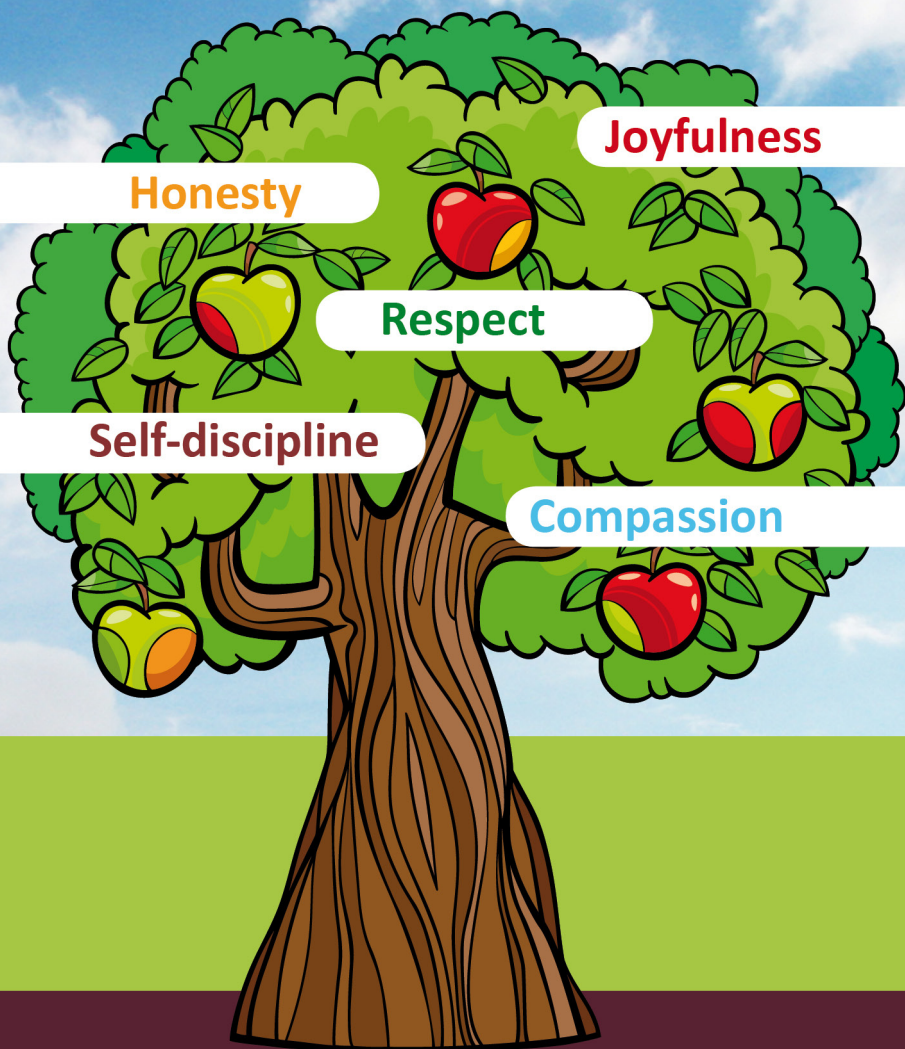


Bring out the best in your child and yourself



Raising children with virtues

Annelies Wiersma

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You get a child and all of a sudden you are a parent. But how do you bring it up? Annelies Wiersma discovered Linda Kavelin Popov's books with the 52 inspiring virtues such as courage, enthusiasm and responsibility. She became a Virtues Project Master Facilitator and gives courses based on Popov's five strategies for character education. In this cheerful book with its comic-strip drawings she brings the theory to life with examples from her courses and tells us in a touching, funny and intimate way about the practice she knows best: raising her own son.

Linda Kavelin-Popov - Virtues Project Founder:

'Annelies Wiersma's humorous, helpful and honest insights about applying Virtues Strategies as a parent, offer a welcome companion to The Family Virtues Guide.'



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Introduction

From the very first moment a child lies in the cradle, a parent wants only one thing: for the child to be happy. But how do you make that happen? How do you get a child ready to step into the world happy, cheerful and confident?

My son Daniel who is eleven now, will soon make the jump to junior high school. His teacher wrote in his last report: 'Daniel is a very outgoing and cheerful boy in the class and has many friends. He likes making jokes but also has a good sense for when to stop. He works well in groups and is always ready to help others. He also enjoys working independently and he takes his work seriously. He participates with enthusiasm in Drama and Phys Ed. He is considerate in his interaction with me. We can work together very well.'

I don't think it's a coincidence that I recognize many virtues in the teacher's description of Daniel's character. Children all have their own character, yet I am convinced that much of his teacher's appreciation of him is the result of his being raised with the virtues.

The Virtues Project

The Family Virtues Guide came on my path at a time when I felt stuck with raising Daniel. Linda Kavelin Popov's book so inspired me that not before long I attended a course *Awakening the Gifts of Character* from the Virtues Project™. For me it was a revelation. What a positive way of raising children!

The Virtues Project sees a child as a being with all virtues – good character qualities – latent inside. Think of a sunflower seed, lying on the earth. It is destined to grow into a beautiful sunflower. But it won't get there unaided: it needs the right circumstances, the sun and moon, the earth and rain, to come to its full development.

It is not different with a child's development. For a child's virtues to develop optimally, it needs to be given the chance. The child needs its good qualities to be noticed and its less good qualities to be reshaped. As parents – and

teachers – you can make substantial contributions to a child’s developing character.

Virtues and their language

From the Virtues Project I learned about 52 virtues and 5 simple strategies to follow in our daily interaction. Daniel was into his third year when we started on the virtues approach. I often encountered difficult situations as I tried to raise him where I needed to practice patience, determination and flexibility.

Linda Kavelin Popov, founder of the International Virtues Project, encourages us with the first strategy to speak ‘The language of the Virtues’. When for instance your toddler is trying to tie his own shoelaces, you can say ‘I see you showing a lot of determination’, rather than ‘this is taking too long, I’ll do it’. That certainly sounds very positive and much better for your child’s self-image, but for me it was like learning a whole new language!

Recognizing teachable moments and setting boundaries

As I immersed myself into the virtues and their meaning, it becomes more natural for me to think and speak the virtues way. Daniel passed through the famed milestones of growing up: the toddler years, starting school, the beginnings of adolescence. These are the stages where children want to explore boundaries. Like many parents I tended to step in early, like in situations where something could go wrong. You want so much to protect your child, or think you know better how to go about things. Yet according to the Virtues Project, these are missed opportunities. To explore and do independently, within safe boundaries, is just what makes kids strong.

The Virtues Project teaches us to discern or ‘Recognize teachable moments’ in difficult situations with our children, and ‘To set clear boundaries’. It is just at these points of conflict, when things go wrong, that you can both look at which virtues are needed here. That way you are stimulating qualities in your child, and not wasting important teachable moments.

Guiding the spirit

Dealing with joy and happiness usually isn't very hard to do. But what about pain, frustration, anger, disappointment and sadness? Naturally, your heart will ache when you see your child having a hard time. The Virtues Project taught me to not pass over negative feelings, but rather to listen and show interest. That way, Daniel learned that strong emotions were also a part of him, that he could openly – free of my opinions or advice – talk about. He often surprised me when I was using this fifth strategy of 'spiritual companioning' with him, by showing his sense of responsibility and his wisdom, and coming up with a far better solution to a problem or dilemma than I would have.

The way in which a child learns to deal with sadness or anger is essential for his ability to feel happy and to reflect on his own feelings and behavior.

My child can handle himself

The Virtues Project approach demands time, practice, patience and trust. For us, it has been a long-term investment. Not only has Daniel grown up to be a well-balanced person, it has also deepened our contact, and made me a steadier parent. It has brought me tranquility: 'my child can handle himself'. Time and energy: Daniel makes his own lunch, picks up his clothes and takes responsibility for his schoolwork. And above all, he looks after himself (and others!) to be happy.

The work of my heart

I have given my heart to the Virtues Project. I have integrated the virtues and the strategies in my communication training courses. This book and its real life stories of raising a child has come out of that. I hope that it will inspire you and your child(ren), and I wish you much enthusiasm and trust as you discover the virtues in your child and yourself!

Annelies Wiersma

PART 1: The Virtues in Practice

Page

15	How we discovered <i>The Family Virtues Guide</i>
18	Mum, thank you for your patience
22	Mum, please don't do that again
23	I will not forgive Harry
24	The virtue lies in the middle
27	Looking after yourself
28	Developing your own virtues language
29	Using clean language
30	Values, norms and virtues
33	Do you think that is courteous?
35	Looking with different eyes
37	I don't think, I talk
38	How can we be flexible?
39	You know what you want
41	Virtues often work in mysterious ways
43	My daddy knows everything
45	Too much virtue?
47	You call that a friend?
50	The development of conscience
52	Your ears are smoking
54	Finger-wagging
55	Positive and negative attention
57	Hey, that's not respectful!
60	What about emotions?
62	Educational spanking?
66	Growing up in an environment of trust
67	Having a nice family meal together
69	We now stand for something
70	Listening without rescuing

73	You're responsible when we're biking together
75	Loads of confidence
76	Showing character
78	The most important role of parents
80	It's not nice to trick small children
81	The good Samaritan
83	Letting go
85	Time out
86	Childhood baggage
89	In love!
91	Do you want to see her grave?
93	Smelly voice
95	Biting your tongue
99	Gratitude is very nice
101	Sharing family stories
103	The mystical side of life
105	Cleaning up
107	Respecting the dead
108	Where were you?
110	Enough is enough
111	The use of affirmations
113	I play computer games with moderation
114	I think I know all virtues by now
115	Final thoughts on Part 1

Mom, thank you for your patience

The first virtue I read in *The Family Virtues Guide* was patience. Coincidence? I don't think so. It is a virtue we need regularly. I read that patience means that things don't always happen immediately and we sometimes have to wait. Most of our wishes don't have to be fulfilled immediately. If you think that, you will get irritated or upset if things don't happen your way, or not quickly enough. If something does not go the way you wanted it, patience can help you to remain calm and tolerant. Being patient also means that you wait if results don't happen straight away. Then it means not forcing things, but trusting in them. Being patient also includes perseverance - keep at it until it is finished, until all goals have been achieved... And, this was probably the most important insight I took from the book: you can learn patience by practicing it!

Patience is an essential quality, really. I immediately thought of lots of situations in which both of us, parent and child, could have used patience. Correction: practiced patience! We do both have this quality, but we could get better at it. That week I started paying attention to Daniel showing patience. If he was sitting quietly instead of impatiently hovering around me while I was making his drink, I praised his patience: 'It's nice that you're waiting quietly while I make your drink. You show a lot of patience and so I can now make us some treats.'

Initially Daniel (who was just over two years old and a late talker) would look bemused and say: 'Patience, what is that?' I told him in my own words what I remembered from the description in the book. And almost every day I had the opportunity to come back to it. I kept naming it every time I saw Daniel practice patience.

At this time he was happiest playing with his toy cars. He would put them in a long line in a particular order. I was watching him do that and wondering which virtue he was showing the most: patience! I would then express my appreciation by naming the virtue: 'You're showing a lot of patience

(perseverance, determination...). That is a big job, but you're not stopping until it is finished.' If I wanted to make a phone call without interruption I would say: 'If you're patient for five minutes, I can finish making this phone call.' Or after putting the phone down: 'Thank you for being patient.'

It worked! Daniel was fascinated by patience. Our night time ritual included telling a story or talking about the day. Daniel now asked regularly: 'Mummy, please tell me about patience.' I then told him when he had shown patience that day or when I had found it difficult to be patient. He then told me when he had seen me being patient or when he himself had been patient. This bedtime chat at the end of the day also gave me the opportunity to mention his moments of patience I had not acknowledged during the day, because I still struggled with doing that. The atmosphere between us improved and became calmer. We paid attention to the good qualities of the other and we even noticed our attempts to practice patience.



*Daniel has all the patience in the world
while he is sorting out his cars.*

Some examples of acknowledging patience:

If we found a long queue in front of the checkout at the supermarket, I would say: 'This will require patience.' Daniel would agree and calmness would come over us...

A game in the car: 'Who can be quiet the longest?' Very difficult for the both of us. So, we always ended up laughing when one of us said something first. Practicing patience became a game that we both enjoyed.

We still do. If Daniel is really enjoying the swing and I want to go home, he will say: 'Mum, thank you for your patience letting me go on the swing a bit longer.'





DON'T: Don't always say 'That is really nice of you', or 'That is really good'. Children can become dependent on your compliments or they modify their behaviour just to please you. If you on the other hand are grumbling a lot about their behaviour, they will stop listening and it can create a very unpleasant atmosphere.

DO: Pay attention to the virtues your child shows and name them. Tell your child how you noticed a virtue and its effect. The first few times you name a virtue, also explain the meaning. You can use the Family Virtues Guide or the virtues cards and examples from your own lives. Talk about situations in which virtues were required and talk about it if you find it difficult to practice a particular virtue. Children often find this a fun way of talking about virtues: 'That's a yummy cake, it'll be really hard to use moderation.' Repeated acknowledgement and naming of the virtues your child is showing, will make it easier for them to identify with this 'part' of their character. You can remind them of the virtue in situations where that virtue would be really helpful but your child is not showing it. 'Shall we try to be patient with your sister? She is a bit on edge because of the difficult exam she has to take tomorrow.'

