



How Should I Act?

In order to live a life of joy, peace and fulfillment, we need to develop good habits. These good habits, also referred to as virtues, strengthen us to withstand temptations from outside influences, as well as from within our own heart, that would otherwise lead us into sin. This growth in the virtues comes about especially as we cooperate with the grace of the Holy Spirit, leading us to become people of integrity. A person of integrity lives in such a way that their thoughts, words and actions are all virtuously aligned with each other. We also refer to this as developing character and maturity. “Maturity means you know the truth and strive to practice it, even if that means making sacrifices” (p. 39 of the Student Workbook).

Practice Makes Perfect

Given our culture’s tendency toward instant gratification – getting things when and how we want them – it is difficult for us to embrace the necessarily gradual process of growing in virtue. But proficiency in virtue is analogous to proficiency in playing a musical instrument. It requires dedication and daily practice, until it becomes second nature.

Your guidance is crucial for this dimension of your child’s development. Your son or daughter needs you as a coach, with rules, structure, reinforcement, and consistency to support growth in virtue, like a young plant needs stakes and ties until it is strong enough to hold itself up. With those supports, your child will be much better able to withstand temptations that come from within or without, often through peer pressure.

Forming your child now in virtues such as patience, honesty, fortitude, and perseverance will have lasting ramifications, from here to eternity! Of course, this formation requires you to model virtue for your children, so they have an example to follow. As they grow in virtue, you can give them more freedom and responsibility, reflecting your trust in them and building a strong, lifelong relationship.

Piety and Marital Love

Pope St. John Paul II said the most important virtue for married love is piety. That might sound odd until we understand that he is referring to a kind of *reverence* that we owe not only to God, but to one another. A married couple lives out the virtue of piety through a deep mutual respect, calling to mind the vows of their wedding day. If formation of your child in the virtue of piety begins now, it will lay a solid and peaceful foundation for whatever vocation he or she is called to by God.

See the *Parent’s Guide*, page 43 for some excellent ideas for “Family Application.”

Engage with your son/daughter

Pray for them: Dear Holy Spirit, give our child Your loving power so that he/she grows in virtue, becoming a true man/woman of God. Amen

- 1) I noticed that you have grown in the virtue of _____. Mention a concrete example. How does it feel to live with that virtue as a real part of your life?
- 2) I remember when I was your age that I sometimes acted differently around certain people to be considered cool. I later realized I should just be myself. Around what people do you think you find it hard to be yourself? Why?

Adapted from *Theology of the Body for Teens, Discovering God’s Plan for Love and Life Middle School Edition: Parent’s Guide*, Ascension Press, 2012.