

2015

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This conference paper was originally published as:

Mullins, A. (2015). From temperament to character. *19th International Family Congress*.

<http://www.familyperspective.org/icm/OCf.pdf>

Original conference paper available here:

<http://www.familyperspective.org/icm/OCf.pdf>

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This paper originally published online available at: <http://www.familyperspective.org/icm/OCf.pdf>

Mullins, A. (2015). From temperament to character. *Proceedings of the 19th International Family Congress*. Retrieved from <http://www.familyperspective.org/icm/OCf.pdf>



From Temperament to Character

Andrew Mullins

Have you ever milked a cow?

My first experience of milking cows took place earlier this year in northern Victoria. I was up before dawn, pulled on my PPE, my 'Personal Protective Equipment': gumboots, gloves, and a comprehensive apron. In the course of the next two hours the dairy farm owner and I milked 200 cows, 20 at a time. As the very last batch shuffled in sideways, one jersey cow was holding back. *"She is always the last."* I was told. *"She is timid and anxious and always waits for the other cows to go first."* This small cow had learned from very early on that if you are small it doesn't pay to be pushy. I had just discovered that cows have temperaments... differing consistent natural behaviours.

You may be happy to know that that's all I'm going to say about cows.

But now let me talk about cockroaches. Do you believe this? Scientists in Brussels have discovered that cockroaches too have differing temperaments. They too can be shy or bold, but social conformity trumps boldness. Even when there is a choice of dark corners, adventurous or timid cockroaches all end up crowding into the same dark corner. See how deeply ingrained is peer pressure!

Let's talk about identical twins. A friend and I were on the site of the PARED school to open in Melbourne next year: 16 acres on the south eastern edge of the city. The land had just been mowed and rolled into bales and we were jumping from bale to bale. He had his two year old twins, one in each arm. He said, *"Here you take Miriam"* But Miriam didn't want to be anywhere but in dad's arms. *"OK take Imi, she is adventurous"* and sure enough Imi was totally happy to be in the arms of a friend of her father. So, even identical twins have different temperaments. In fact identical twins one month old exhibit different behaviours, and a mother of identical twins told me that even in the womb, one was noticeably more active. Despite their biological identity their earliest womb experiences, and interactions, have fostered differing temperaments.

So temperament consists of our genetic and naturally learned behaviours that are with us from infancy; character is the sum total of our good and bad habits; and personality is all we are: our distinctive traits of temperament, our habits, and our talents and preferences.

Importantly we see from the cow and cockroach examples that temperaments have undesirable features as well as positive traits: the shy cow may save herself some bruises but her lack of assertion means that, by the time she gets milked, sometimes the feed bin is empty.

So there is an overlap. By temperament one person may be more naturally impatient than another, but by character they might overcome this natural trait with a learned habit. The artform in parenting is to train each child to take full advantage of their temperamental strengths but to overcome the liabilities of their temperament.



Structure

My goal in this talk is two fold:

- To cast a critical eye over the 'science' of temperament, to take from it what seems useful. Understanding of temperament gives us insight into the personality of a young person but as a descriptor it is limited. It focusses primarily on innate dispositions and very early conditioning which are not good or bad in themselves. They consist of potentially good behaviours (called 'natural virtue' by Aquinas), for example a sunny disposition, that predispose to real virtue with a loving intention that is self directed; but they also consist of potentially negative behaviours such as timidity or impulsiveness.
- Utilising an anthropology that regards virtue as the building blocks of character, we will analyse the benefits and deficiencies of an understanding based on temperament. I will make use of insights drawn from contemporary neuroscience.
- My hope is that you will walk away with enhanced understanding of the character of your child.

An aid to understanding the individual child

Temperament offers a framework that helps us better understand a child's natural strengths and weaknesses.

As long as we know the limits, it is good to be an expert at recognising temperamental qualities. There are various classifications of temperament: we are all familiar with the four humors of Hippocrates. Others draw on observational psychology. One, for example, classifies 40% of infants into the easy/flexible category, 10% into active/feisty, and 15% into cautious/slow to warm. Another assesses children on a range of indicators: level of activity, adaptability to routines, responsiveness to new situations, mood, intensity of reactions, sensitivity to surrounds, adaptability, distractibility, and persistence. These categories provide a framework to understand a child's way of being, and more personally, to show understanding to the child.

A child who is introspective or passive needs active redirection, guided practice. Children prone to anxieties may need early intervention to ensure they gain the cognitive tricks to manage their misperceptions of reality.

An aid to understanding ourselves

A knowledge of temperament helps us understand ourselves. It makes us aware of personal blindspots. A passive parent needs to make more effort to contribute to the decision making and to spend time with children. A goal oriented 'father protector' needs to know how to listen to the counsel of his better half. A parent capable of intense immersion in activities outside the home needs to understand how that can be off putting in relationships. A goal oriented parent needs to avoid taking over, but rather to foster in children the capacity to set their own goals.

Temperament is a messy generalisation

Temperament in itself is not positive or negative, but it predisposes. What a parent does makes a great difference both the profile of the child's temperament, and to the manner in which it develops: temperament can be modified.



We must not lose sight of the fact that temperaments are generalisations. Generalisations can obstruct our capacity to understand the unique individual sitting at the dinner table.

Beware the one sentence, life sentence "*O he is happy sanguine*", "*She is peaceful phlegmatic*". I don't like these. Our whole purpose is to understand the unique child better, we must resist the danger of failing to understand delightful nuances of individuality by squashing the child into a box. Sanguines are not necessarily more superficial than melancholies. Not all choleric are threatening to those around them. All this can be the equivalent of some generalisations about girls and boys: "*Boys are better at Maths and Science*". Are they? In reality the range of abilities within each gender is identical, it is the mean that differs. Statistically phlegmatics may be passive... but life is not statistics.

Birth order and other factors can complicate the modelling also. For example, first children often have more on their shoulders, hence they have a wonderful opportunity in the hands of diligent parents to develop great fortitude and care for others. Anxieties of expectations can also dominate. This sense of responsibility and these anxieties can flow across temperamental categories.

Be very aware too, that the attachment style that is established in early infancy plays a critical role in future flourishing. Early attachment experience colours adult life: autonomous individuals who relate positively, insecure individuals who devalue or idealise relationships, preoccupied individuals who are overwhelmed in attachment relationships, and individuals prone to grief.¹ Concerning the nature of the child parent attachment is predicted by the parent's mental "*model of attachment*", the capacity to put oneself in another's shoes, in their infant's subjective mental state: "*The caregiver's capacity to observe the infant's intentional state and internal world appears to influence the development of secure attachment*".² This capacity in a parent to understand the ideas and feelings of another, to be attuned to others, could we say "to live for others", nurtures as if automatically the reciprocal capacity in the child.

Studies now connect attention-seeking as a result of poor nurture, with a susceptibility to successive marital infidelities marked by a pathological craving for attention. Or another example: the critical role of a father's behaviour and interaction with his son is evident in the literature describing the development of same sex attraction.

Attachment style meshes imperfectly with classical understandings of temperament.

Temperament is not destiny

'Expectations determine performance' is an axiom in all education. If we put children in boxes that they cannot grow out of, they will conform to those boxes. 'If we treat a man as he is, he will remain as he is' taught Goethe. Each of your children is a different temperament, each is unique. We cannot have a four sizes fits all approach to raising children.

We need to move from thinking about 'that's the way my child is' to 'this is the young adult I hope my child will become'. For this we need an 'adequate anthropology' that understands that emotional

¹ See for example: Ainsworth MS, et al. *Patterns of Attachment: a Psychological Study of the Strange Situation*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1978; and George C. et al. *The Adult Attachment Interview*. Department of Psychology, University of California-Berkeley, 1996.

² Glen O. Gabbard, *Psychodynamic Psychiatry in Clinical Practice* (3rd Ed) Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 2000, 57.



responses are established early infancy, conscious emotional responses manifest during infancy, and by childhood (approx. 7 years) *conscious* is becoming *deliberate*. Vices or virtues are starting to consolidate.

We need an anthropology that understands the cardinal virtues, and their integral role in human flourishing.

The limitations of temperament as an understanding of personality

Temperament is a mix of emotional strengths and emotional liabilities. These must be trained. No temperament has the inbuilt capacity to act out of love for others. This must be taught. No temperament has the inbuilt capacity for ideals. This too must be learned. In this way, temperament can be developed into character.

Aristotle spoke of *training* and *education*:

- *Training* of our emotional and conditioned responses under the guidance of a parent's reason. In this way the dispositions of *fortitude* and *self-control* are established.
- *Education* in habits of self-management. Hence, our rational powers, intellect and will, are *educated* for self-mastery and self-giving.

He also stressed that obedience is essential. By obeying the reason of their parents in the formation of their emotional responses, later children will have the facility to obey their own reason.

Self-management empowers us to seek the truth and love wisely... the necessary ingredients of fulfilment and peace of heart. For this sincerity and generosity are crucial building blocks.

The starting point is to audit the temperamental emotional responses. Emotions are of course the fundamental motivations in our lives. Because temperament is composed of naturally conditioned emotional habits we have some capacity to transform temperament by substituting better habits. Rudolph Steiner spoke of this. While natural temperament may always colour our personality, we can modify it dramatically. Phlegmatic persons can become wonderful leaders. Of course choleric can learn to put people above goals. Francis de Sales reputedly had a memorable temper but you would not guess this in his calm, clear-headed writing.

At worst, putting people into temperamental boxes can be lazy amateur psychology, an insulting caricature of personality. We do better to focus on the specific temperamental strengths and weaknesses we observe in the individual child.

No temperament comes with a loving motivation

We have seen that temperament is evident in animals and is forming in humans from the first months after conception. Temperament has little it can tell us about intellectual life... only that impulsivity can hijack clarity of thought. In addition to a well adjusted temperament the virtues of justice (the dispositions of the rational appetite) and of prudence (of the intellect) are vital. Closely allied are the indispensable virtues of generosity and sincerity: the capacities to give of ourselves in love, and to seek truth and reality.

We must not confuse a genuinely loving motivation with a temperamental disposition that is merely a good starting point for a self-giving love. A temperamental disposition is not a disposition to love; we



can only love consciously, deliberately. At best temperament gives us a disposition to act with emotional control and empathetic emotion.

Let us not mistake a naturally affectionate disposition for a loving motivation. Every temperament needs to learn to act out of love. A child with the more goal oriented disposition by nature, that some associate with a choleric temperament, has a head start towards prudence, if an only if, that child sets goals that truly respect others. A child with a thoughtful temperament can use that temperament either to serve others or to become preoccupied with their own things. Phlegmatic features such as unflappability is more likely to maximise personal comfort if they are not raised to keep their focus on others.

Temperamental strengths are morally useless without a loving intention. Napoleon was a deep thinker and a remarkable doer, but he lacked a loving intention. The 9/11 attackers set goals, were brave, organised, and sacrificed comfort, but they lacked compassion and respect.

And when a child is developing a loving motivation for his or her actions let us not pour cold water on it dismissing it as a feature of temperament with words like, "*O he is a pleaser!*" In fact, a loving motivation is not a feature of temperament. Astute parenting will fan these good intentions of kindness into a rich fire of love for God and others.

Only with a loving intention do dispositions of temperament become virtue. Without justice and charity, virtue is not virtue. This is the great difference between classical and Christian understanding of moral virtue. The ancients suggested virtue should be performed for its own sake. St Augustine stressed that it is through virtues that we deliver love to others. Donald De Marco has written beautifully on this. In the car of good character, Justice is the GPS, Prudence is behind the wheel, and we are delivering a trailer of good actions for others.

We might think that before age three most children might seem practically unable to take others into account and that only after three they are laying foundations for the virtue of justice. But of course from 0-3 your example, lovingly motivated in every action, has been constantly witnessed. The quality of the nurture of a child, depends of the virtue of the parents. Your child will become an adult putting love in everything they do, if you the parent does this and gives this example. We all need virtues. As Aristotle wrote, "*Happiness is the reward of virtue*".

Hence a key task is for parents to *educate* children to act habitually with a loving motivation in every action.

Foster conscience. Teach right and wrong

Aristotle insisted also on education in sound judgement: convictions about truth, conscience, and the capacity for goal setting and planning. "*I know the difference between right and wrong, I am no longer a child,*" said Telemachus to his mother Penelope in the Odyssey. To the best of the ancients, a well formed conscience, of right and wrong, was the deciding mark of maturity of character. It is conscience that tells us to love others in all that we do.

Virtues are so useful because they emphasise character over rules, or perhaps more properly, we have to 'be good' to 'do good'. Everybody does not have to have the same strengths, but ultimately everyone has to think clearly, integrate their emotional lives into the rational lives, and be champions of love for others.



From temperament to character

We have seen then that temperament refers principally to the foundations of emotional responses with which we set out on life. The task of parenting is to train those emotional responses and to educate a young person for self-management, to build the full range of intentional habits: "Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good... habits of mind, habits of heart, and habits of action."³ These habits must include the capacity to love others: Jim Stenson urges, "A child has grown up when they can look after others and want to." David Isaacs reminds us of the same important principle: "Self-knowledge leads to self-mastery which leads to self-giving."⁴

Regardless of the infinite variety of temperaments every child needs to be raised with the wherewithal to seek the truth, embrace reality, and learn to live for others in loving relationships. While the means to inculcate good habits in children of different temperaments may vary slightly - some may need more work on self-control, others on overcoming fears, others on being less self-centred, others on goal setting - the bottom line is that we all need the full complement of the cardinal virtues if we are to run our own lives effectively and with a loving intention in everything we do.

A good character requires the full array of virtues, the habits or dispositions that help us all manage our emotional lives, always take others into account, and to think clearly and practically with attention to right and wrong.

- To manage our emotional lives... our fears and our desires, we require the virtues of fortitude and temperance.
 - Train a child for self-control: Know when to stop! Choose what we pay attention to. Find pleasure in what is good, true and beautiful. Be detached from material things. Manage your face: all you say and do leaves a trace. Model optimism. Find Joy in people. Give emotional example constantly.
 - Train for fortitude: Manage fear of difficulties. Model optimism and trust. Routines and timetables. Work is a school of fortitude. Build a healthy hardiness. Duty before play. Clean up our own mess.
- To act always with a deep responsibility and respect towards others, we require the habit of justice in all we do, desire, and think.
 - Educate for justice: Kindness to all. No exceptions. Foster generous and compassionate actions. Pay attention to people. Gratitude. Find joy in serving others. Speak clearly about sex and relationships.
- To set practical goals based on the deepest truths about our lives, we need prudence.
 - Educate for sound judgement: Find time for reflection. Set priorities and goals. Listen to others. Schedule time weekly. Study right and wrong. Know thyself. Sincerity always. Be mindful of negative emotions. Build skills to divert direct emotional reactions: self talk, talk, change point of attention, conscious focus on facts, remove self from the context. Show your convictions bring you happiness. Educate for self-management in use of technology.

³ Thomas Lickona, *Character Matters: How to Help Our Children Develop Good Judgment, Integrity, and Other Essential Virtues* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

⁴ David Isaacs, *Character Building: A guide for parents and teachers* (2nd ed) (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001).



Through these four cardinal virtues we are empowered to seek the truth, thereby living in reality, and to love wisely.

Collective wisdom for training the emotional responses of children and teaching them self-management and a profound respect for others.

Here are some universal principles for fostering virtue enriched by an understanding of temperament and neuroscience.

- Unity between spouses makes parenting more likely to succeed. Put your spouse on a pedestal in your children's eyes; back up each other's decisions. Don't argue in front of kids; make up in their presence if you argue in their presence. Listen. Be the first to apologise. Admire the strengths of your spouse; don't get fixated on faults. The sum point of raising children is to teach them to live for others and all that we do leaves an impression so we must model love, and living for others. A joyful unity of parents is essential.
- Dedication. Be dedicated. Don't leave the heavy lifting to your spouse. Put in the time. Work together.
- Talk nightly about your children. "*There is nothing better in this world than that man and wife should be of one mind*" writes Homer in his *Odyssey*. How true this remains. Agree on approaches.
- "Know thyself". Know own temperamental strengths. Foresee areas of clash with temperament of your child. Be honest to yourself about your own temperament and faults. Kids see through hypocrisy.
- Be positive. When you find yourself focused on negatives or responding with negative emotion, list the beautiful qualities of your child and make sure the list is longer the negatives.
- Relationship, relationship, relationship. Build habits of heartfelt communication with your child. Don't just *do* things with your son or daughter: create times you talk easily. From the years of childhood, provide loving ongoing guidance in human relationships and love, at first foundational and then more and more specific. This confident talk must bring you and your child so close through adolescence.
- Know your child. Be quick to identify incipient patterns of behaviour, both positive and negative, in children, and readiness to intervene in the case of negative patterns that can lead to bad habits and, with complacency, to vices. Appreciate the debilitating effects of bad habits, vices. "*A young person's character is like wax for the growth of bad habits,*"⁵ observed the old Roman soldier poet Horace.
- Foster the strengths of your child's temperament. Admire these qualities, and teach them to see that these natural advantages are gifts to be used well. A child with natural persistence is 'predisposed' to develop the patience that with a loving motivation becomes the virtue of fortitude. A child who is analytical has been given a powerful tool to grasp reality. A child who communicates openly and simply already has a head start in relationships.
- Know your child's temperament but think virtues constantly. If teachers, with the benefit of a longitudinal perspective and of a knowledge of many, many children find it hard to see clearly what each child needs, how difficult it can be for a parent to raise one, three, six children, with

⁵ Horace, *Letters* "To the Pisos", 153.



a clarity of what needs to be done now. Great diligence, reflection and prayer, and team work are required. Whatever the temperament of your child, and yourself, we all need virtues. *"All the gold on earth or below earth are not equal in price to virtue,"* taught Plato.⁶ Aristotle wrote *"Happiness is the reward of virtue."* The capacity to truly love others is a consequence of character with a well rounded development of virtues. Virtues make love possible.⁷

- Give importance to the cardinal virtues. The cardinal virtues are not an arbitrary or random list. They are dispositions in the four powers of the soul- the intellect, and in the rational and sensible appetites- required for self-mastery and ultimately disposing us to love well. Hence they are dispositions in the act of reason, in the will, and in our well governed desire for pleasure, and in our readiness to put up with difficulties for a good reason.
- Decisive guidance in the early years in the development of fortitude and temperance is essential. Remember: expectations determine performance. As a Louisiana reform school headmistress said, *"I give them lots of love and tell them that we don't tolerate that behaviour here."* Don't make excuses for your child. Don't overprotect. When it is not putting children into moral or physical danger, have them solve their own problems and wear their mistakes. As Hesiod, one of the most ancient poets of the Greeks said, *"... the Gods have made virtue the reward of toil".*⁸
- Commit to meticulous parental example. *"Children of drunkards cannot walk straight in mind or in body"* observed Plato. A necessary consequence of this priority is that parents themselves strive to develop virtues in their own character and to eliminate bad habits. We can train ourselves to catch up on the good habits we missed out on. When parents grasp also that their own parenting comes down to a collection of habits... good and bad, they can then improve their parenting practices more easily. Identify your own character defects and mistakes in order to minimize negative example. 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, to follow up misbehaviour before it becomes entrenched, to help a child work against temperamental weaknesses such as timidity, impulsivity, etc. Key parental virtues include:
 - Sincerity about the deepest values that underpin one's behaviours.
 - Sound judgement. Consistent and clear headed prioritizing.
 - Generosity: loving dedication to one's spouse and family, and a capacity to model solidarity and compassion for those in need.
 - Fortitude and self-control: a demandingness on oneself. We have heard the words of Saint John Paul II about his own father, *"He never had to be demanding on me, he was so demanding on himself."*
 - The virtues of humility, human warmth and approachability, and the capacity to show affection and understand others.
- Teach order to small children. Simple timetable, simple jobs, simple routines. Be patient but persistent in teaching them the importance of order. Keeping order is an everyday school of

⁶ Plato *Laws* 728a.

⁷ Donald DeMarco, *Heart of Virtue* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996).

⁸ Quotation in Protagoras.



fortitude, and it gives our lives peace and effectiveness. Do not deprive a naturally messy child of this benefit.

- Train the emotional responses of your child. Aristotle places fortitude and temperance as the necessary dispositions at the very heart of human desires: to seek pleasure and avoid pain according to right judgement. The lives of children, as much as that of intemperate men are governed by their desires.⁹ The governance and training of wise parents makes all the difference. Small children must be trained to manage their emotions. Aristotle says the art form in raising children is to foster in them “refined attitudes to pleasure and pain”. Without such refined attitudes we succumb to hedonism, to our fears and pains, and ultimately to a self-centred existence. Self-mastery is at stake.
- Lovingly expect obedience. By obeying the reason of their parents when they are small, children prepare themselves to be able to obey their own reason later. Untrained emotional responses to pleasure and difficulty highjack decision making. Obedience to parents transfers progressively to obedience to one’s own reason. Parental guidance gives way to self-education and self-talk. That our society has so many teenagers and young adults who cannot tell themselves what to do is first of all a failure of fortitude and temperance, a failure of parenting.
- Don’t indulge your kids. “All the surveys show that beyond a certain level of income, happiness doesn’t increase,” writes John Menadue.¹⁰ Teach that people are more important than things. Teach that relationships are the bedrock of happiness in life. Affection is best shown more in time, attention and understanding. Better holidays are not necessarily more expensive holidays.
- Recognise the virtually indelible nature of first experiences and their role in maximizing learning. Habits are most easily formed in childhood: “Good habits formed in childhood make all the difference.”¹¹ First impressions can be virtually indelible: “We are by nature most tenacious of childish impressions...further it is the worst impressions that are most durable.”¹² Because, as Aristotle observed, “We (human beings) 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. Also be conscious of windows of opportunity for building particular virtues¹³; a child who has not learned the importance of truthfulness by middle primary, at the latest, is likely to have real difficulties in facing reality, etc.
- Appreciate the role of attention. Focused attention is required for cognitive learning but it is also central to conditioning our desires. What we think about, we desire, and what we look at, we want. Where our thoughts go, our actions easily follow. Teach children to be masters of their senses. On the positive side, we can teach strategies such as visualisations and rehearsal of physical actions assist in building virtues; thought facilitates behaviour, and behaviour can facilitate intention. Positive self-talk drives away negativity.
- Ask a lot. Establish high, lovingly communicated, expectations teaching your child to strive for behaviours that are achievable and truly enriching. Follow up with patient encouragement and

⁹ Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.12.

¹⁰ <http://www.johnmenadue.com/book/Menadue.pdf> (Accessed 8 May 2015)

¹¹ Aristotle 1103b

¹² Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. HE Butler (Loeb Classical Library). (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), I, I, 1-7.

¹³ Professor David Isaacs displays a chart in his *Character Building* which shows the most appropriate virtues to focus on in the various stages of childhood. David Isaacs, *Character Building: A guide for parents and teachers* (2nd ed) (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001).



accountability. Emotional reinforcement facilitates learning. *"Every piece of research on effective childhood socialisation identifies two broad parameters, emotional support (affection) and limit setting,"* writes Prof Don Edgar former Director of the Australian Institute of the Family. Explicit advice and calm correction with consequences all contribute: *"One consequence is worth a thousand words"*. *"Demand with affection"* urged St Josemaria. Correct out of love; guide with love: understand the power of *"I'm really proud of you"* and the very occasional *"I'm disappointed"*.

- Provide abundant daily opportunities for critical practice. Aristotle observed, *"It is easy to perform a single good action but not easy to acquire a settled habit of performing such actions."*¹⁴ But he also wrote, *"We become just by performing just actions, temperate by performing temperate actions, brave by performing brave actions."* Give jobs. Form good habits through modelling the behaviour, consistent expectations, opportunities for repetition, correction, guided practice, reflection. Reinforce recent experiences given that the common experience of human beings is that they can more readily repeat recent actions than those further in the past.¹⁵ All our behaviours are essentially self-reinforcing, for better or for worse. The foundations for this are evident in the Hebbian law of association operating at the neurobiological level: *"Neurons that fire together wire together."*
- Care for your emotional example. The 200cm² of your face not only establishes the culture and the emotional tone of your home, but as your children are tuned to your face from their earliest infancy, there they learn what gives you joy and what gives you pain: your face must teach them the true value of people and of things. St Josemaria encouraged us: *"Put your temperament in your pocket when you get home... make the effort to smile."* Pass on your values on your face. Show on your face what is good, true and beautiful. Show what pains are worth enduring for a good reason. Our faith and our family members must give us joy. Insignificant things don't take away our happiness. We can show that we have too many first world problems! Solidarity and care for others must provoke compassion. Parental stress and impatience can be corrosive.
- Therefore take full responsibility for a positive home environment. Enjoy the moment. Parental emotion is "contagious". Understand the role of habitual parental affection, specific emotional reinforcement, praise, positive emotional associations, emotional engagement in moral learning.
- Form your child's intellect. Pass on to children an understanding of rational anthropology, including an understanding of the integration of rationality and emotional life, what virtues are, how they are acquired, and the role of virtue in human flourishing. Anticipate questions and have the answers ready.
- Teach justice. How important this virtue is... it is the foundation of love for others. Every one of our actions involves justice. A child who is not raised to think of others, to think how his actions impact on others, is incapable of love. Your example, your respect for others, and your effective communication with your child are prerequisites to teach justice and all moral learning.

14 Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.9.

15 Joel Kupperman insists on the importance of "longitudinal close looks at the reality of human lives" through history, stories and biographical studies. His book *Character* contains a very useful appendix of strategies for moral education. J. Kupperman, *Character* (Oxford: OUP, 1995).



- Be so close you know what your teenager is thinking. Aristotle writes of training and also of education. You must be so close through adolescence that they confide in you. There is no other way to educate an adolescent. You must be closer than all the competition... that means time and affection and humility. Foresee the big issues and give clear reasons on the range of challenges your child will face: faith, drugs, attitudes to sexuality and relationships, business ethics, modesty, etc. Have ongoing conversation, give ongoing guidance about human love and relationships. Speak clearly but affectionately about things that are not right, or not good enough.
- Manage the non-parental inputs. *"Remove indecent pictures and speech from the stage and from the sight and hearing of the young,"* urged Aristotle. And be particularly attuned to the values of relativism and a false individualism that can seep in through consumer culture, technologies and peer group. Sit and chat with your child in front of the television. Talk around the dinner table about issues.
- How do we teach prudence? First of all prudence is openness to reality, to truth. Teach right and wrong clearly. *"My mother, I am no longer a child, I know the difference between right and wrong,"* announced Telemachus, son of Odysseus when he asked his mother for permission to set out to look for his father. Prudence is conscience. Foster heartfelt convictions. Children must learn to pursue their own wise goals; not your goals for them.
- Prudence is also in the capacity to think for oneself, to think clearly about issues. The essential challenge in teenage years is to help a young person internalize the values they have learned. Coach children to set their own worthy goals. Give them freedom when they are younger in safe contexts to make their own minds up... and then debrief. Good values must lead to a good heart, to habitually good choices, and to self-management.
- Teach children to motivate themselves. Motivation is closely aligned to our emotional responses to experiences. What we like, what we love, we pursue. Therefore we must seek to train children when they are young to delight in family, in the actions of our faith, in service. We must seek to inculcate a love in them for all that is good, true and beautiful. Otherwise, our emotional lives, rather than enrich us, drag us into behaviours we would rather not choose. The capacity to manage our desires and fears stands out as a hallmark of a mature personality. Hence we must develop resilience in the face of fears of failure of discomfort, of pain. And we must foster the capacity to put off pleasures for a good reason. Habituation, early training and conditioning of our reward expectations, is so necessary. The remarkable impressionability of infants and children assists.
- What is intrinsic motivation? The capacity to set goals and pursue them. Children need practice in this. But those goals must also be wise. For this they need a good heart towards others, a right conscience and strong convictions. David Isaacs insists that children must discover the joy of doing good for others: service to others is a vital ingredient of growing up so that we are profoundly disposed to generosity.
- Raise your children to do good. Put the emphasis on deeds not words. Xenophon remembers how Socrates stressed not only the importance of seeking wisdom, but the end point had to be in considered action. When he was asked what he thought was the best occupation for a man,



Socrates replied, "*Effective action*".¹⁶ Invest yourself in committed actions of service to others. Human beings cannot focus only on their own needs, virtues that dispose us to good deeds. Good intentions are not enough. Children without virtue lack the wherewithal to do good in their lives. The end point of effective parenting is that young people act well and freely from their own dearly cherished convictions. "*It is no profit to have learnt well, if we neglect to do well,*" wrote Publius Syrus sometime during the 1st century BC. "*Never see a need without doing something about it,*" Mary Mackillop, Australia's first saint used to advise. Virtues affirm personal responsibility... that in normal circumstances, I am responsible for what I do, or for what I have decided. A society which denies personal responsibility will be doomed to mediocrity and then to decline. Virtues enable a person to take responsibility in a democratic society.

- Teach a loving intention. Give a living example of round the clock love that never gets fed up or runs out of patience. Live for your spouse. In your own life model the habitual kindness and service that underpins true virtues. Make service to others the lynchpin of your family life and give constant example of it. Your family is the natural environment *par excellence* 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; a failure to exercise virtue is corrected. Institutions can also assist in fostering virtue, provided the culture is right: respect for others; high but realistic expectations; a positive philosophy of education where mistakes are part of the process of learning and problems are not disasters because they bring the underlying cause into relief so that it can be addressed.
- Model peace of heart. The need to overcome temperamental liabilities by constancy of character is not a new challenge. In a magnificent essay we know as "On the avoidance of anger" Plutarch wrote,
*"A magnificent house, massive wealth, a splendid genealogy, and high office, eloquence and fluency, are all incapable of giving life the degree of fair and calm weather that is afforded by a mind which is untainted by bad actions and intentions and which bases life on a character that is calm and clear."*¹⁷
- Keep fixing yourself. Strategies parents may employ to change their own behaviours may include:
 - Humility. The necessity of sincere acknowledgement of mistakes.
 - Contrition for our mistakes – genuine sorrow and shame act subliminally as disincentives for the repetition of negative behaviours.
 - Realistic goal setting puts changes in train (eg. structured anger management programs, monitored action plans on paper).
 - Acceptance of the support of others, including one's spouse, in order to change one's behaviour.
 - Constant practice of the new behaviours. Appreciation of way we can teach ourselves to overlay old habits with new preferred behaviours: eating the right foods, being the first to get up, smiling when tired, and smiling at setbacks.
 - Deeper and deeper dependence on the assistance of grace.

¹⁶ Xenophon *Conversations of Socrates* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990). "Memoirs of Socrates" 3.9.13

¹⁷ Plutarch, *Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992). "On the avoidance of anger" 477a.



In summary

Every child is unique and every child needs the full spectrum of virtues if they are to have a strong and mature character. Temperaments give a head start in some or other areas, but also bestow liabilities that require emotional retraining.

Virtues are established dispositions of emotional management, of always taking others into account, and of thinking clearly and practically with attention to right and wrong. A virtue based approach helps us distinguish talents from qualities of character that we all need. Above all, they empower us to deliver love to others. Everybody does not have to have the same strengths, but ultimately everyone has to think clearly, integrate their emotional lives into the rational lives, and be champions of love for others.