



Virtues 101:

A Parent's Guide to Understanding The Virtues at CHMS

At Children's House Montessori School of Reston, the Virtues are in use every day. We talk about them, read about them, and experience them in our classrooms, on our playground, and in our interactions with both children and adults. So... what are they?? What are we talking about? What do we mean? This mini guide will help you get your bearings when it comes to the Virtues. You'll understand what they are, how we use them at school, and how you can incorporate them at home. Let's get started!

Virtues and Values - What's the Difference?

In a nutshell, values are what we *care* about and virtues are *universal qualities* of character. For example:

Values:

- Anything that an individual deems important -- being on time, being organized, spending time with friends and family, money, or travel
- Sometimes they are culture specific -- respect for elders, importance of education, equality, or sustainability
- Varies from person to person and family to family -- one family might place great value on playing sports while another values academic achievement

Virtues:

- Universal qualities that are found in all people, regardless of culture or nationality -- love, respect, caring, determination, excellence, patience, and trust
- Defined as moral excellence, goodness, righteousness -- knowing right from wrong



- ❑ Present in all people in various degrees or strengths -- the essence of human potential

Is this a religious program?

No. We use The Virtues Project™ Educator Guide and Educator Cards in our classrooms, which are secular and have no mention of religion and do not use religious language. The are specifically designed to be used in a school setting where children come from diverse family backgrounds with different cultural and religious beliefs. We especially like that the cards feature photographs of men, women, and children from diverse backgrounds. The message is clear: this is a concept that relates to *all* people, regardless of where you come from or what you look like.

The Virtues Project™ Comes to Children's House

We were introduced to The Virtues Project™ through a colleague in 2007. At the time, there was a lot of research coming out about the negative effects of too much positive praise. We understood that telling children “good job” as a way to boost their confidence and self-esteem might work in the short term, but was a poor long term solution, but knowing what to say instead wasn't easy. How do you tell children that they are on the right track, making positive choices for themselves and others, without *praising* them all the time?!

We were looking for something to help us make sense of this problem we were having and The Virtues Project™ was the perfect fit. We took a training class, purchased a few materials, and started practicing what we'd learned. The results were immediate and radically changed our school culture. We finally had a roadmap for what to say instead of “good job” or “nice cutting” or “say you're sorry” and, as we implemented what we learned in our training, we saw the ripple effect occurring in our classrooms.

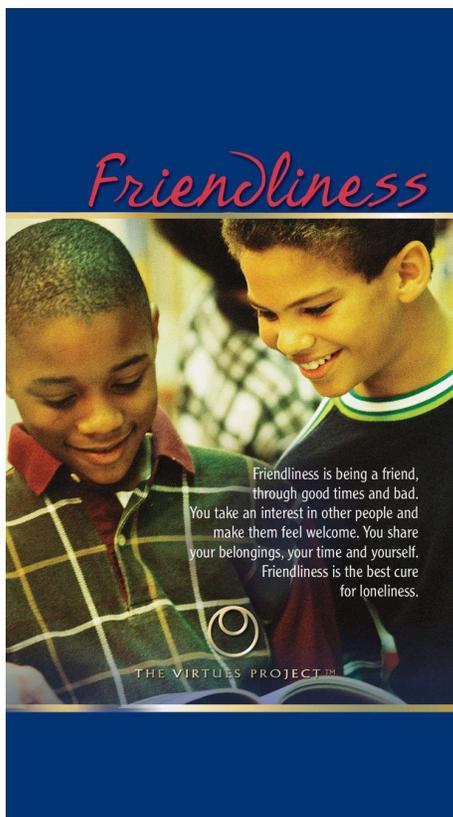
Not only were children participating in conversations with *each other* using the Virtues language, they were also taking the language home and sharing it with their parents. Parents started asking us for more information and we realized that the Virtues were spreading throughout our community.



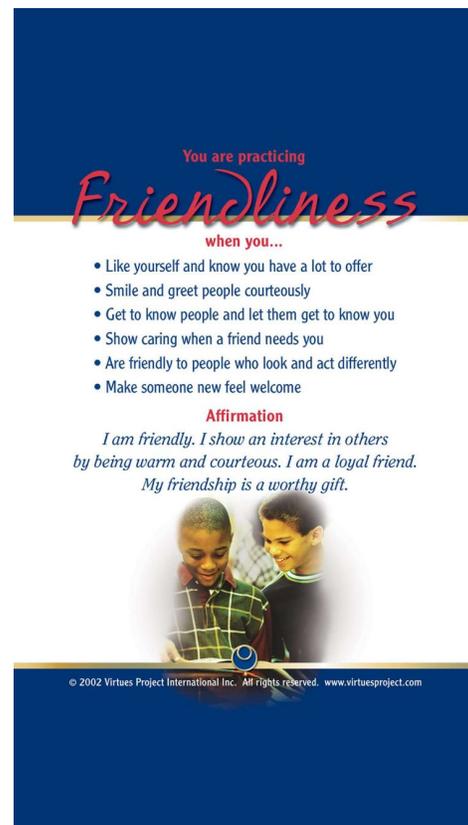
The Virtues Project™ In Action

At its core, The Virtues Project™ is an educational resource that provides a simple way to talk to children about the Virtues that are present *within* them and to help them understand *what* they are called and *how* and *when* to use them. It's like explaining the different tools in a tool box: a hammer is for driving nails, a saw is for cutting through wood, etc. By naming, defining, and explaining the Virtues, like Kindness, Consideration, Courtesy, Joyfulness, and Patience, we are teaching children to use the tools they already possess in a more meaningful and effective way.

There are fifty-two virtues in The Virtues Project™ curriculum. Each one is featured on a card. On the front is a definition of the Virtue and on the back are examples of what it means to practice that Virtue. The examples are clear and easy for children to relate to. There is also an affirmation, which we repeat together, that highlights the essence of what it means to be a person who uses that Virtue.



front of card



back of card



Each morning at Children's House we start our time together with a Virtues Pick. The children and teachers gather together in the Sunrise Room and sit together on the carpet. A teacher or a child randomly pulls a card out of the stack and shares it with the group. We read the front and back of the card out loud to the children and, together, we say the affirmation, before starting our morning work period.



Later on in the morning, when work time is over and we are sitting together for circle time, the teachers will re-read the Virtue card for anyone who might have arrived later in the morning and, at this time, the class engages in a conversation about the chosen Virtue. We discuss what it looks like when we use that Virtue at school and how we can use it at home.

As time goes on, these definitions and examples are helpful as we guide children through various situations. Two children who are disagreeing over a game on the playground might have a conversation with a teacher about cooperation, kindness, or caring. A child who forgets to clean up his work will be reminded that cleanliness and orderliness are important in helping us find things in our classrooms. And a child who continues to interrupt the teacher at circle time will be encouraged to call on patience and use it to put her hand up and wait to be called on before speaking.

The Virtues are in constant action and we use them throughout the day in different ways. It's more meaningful to ask a child to "please remember to use patience at circle time, by raising your hand and waiting to hear your name," than to simply say, "put your hand up" or "please don't interrupt me."



If you're ready to give this a try, read on for the basic strategies that we use at school and you can use at home to make the Virtues language part of your life.



When and How to use the Virtues Language

There are three situations in which to use the Virtues language:

- ❑ **Present** -- To **acknowledge** children for a Virtue they are currently using.
- ❑ **Future** -- To **guide** or **prepare** them to practice a Virtue and to set the stage for expectations for things that are about to happen.
- ❑ **Past** -- To **correct** or **remind** them when they have “forgotten” to practice a Virtue. This is how we reflect on how we could have made different choices and how we talk about things that just happened.

And there are three parts to a Virtues acknowledgment, guidance, or correction:

- ❑ **An opening phrase** -- draws the child’s attention to what you are about to say
- ❑ **Naming the Virtue** -- increases awareness of the many different Virtues we possess
- ❑ **Details about the situation** -- provides evidence that deepens a child’s understanding of the Virtue and how to use it

Don’t worry! It sounds more complicated than it is!

This framework takes the place of reflex phrases -- phrases that adults use almost automatically with children, like *good job, way to go, please stop, say you’re sorry, use your words, or I said no now.*

Rather than simply responding to what is happening, just happened, or is about to happen, we are naming and explaining. By helping our children identify *what* they are doing, *what that’s called*, and how to do it again, we are helping them gain understanding about themselves and the world around them.

Take a look at the examples on the next page. Say them out loud and imagine the different situations that are referenced.



	Opening Phrase	Name the Virtue	Give Details
Acknowledgement (Present)	I see your...	Determination	...in sticking with that puzzle until it was finished!
	Thank you for your...	Patience	You're waiting so calmly as we get ready to leave the house.
	I appreciate your...	Helpfulness	You carried in that bag inside without even being asked!
Guidance (Future)	We will need to use...	Orderliness	...to get these toys put away properly.
	Please remember...	Courtesy	...when we're at Grandma's house today and use your manners.
	Let's use...	Purposefulness	... and make a plan for how we're going to get this job done.
Correction (Past)	I think we forgot to use...	Friendliness	...at the playground today. That boy wanted to play with you and it's okay to play with new friends.
	Next time you try the monkey bars, remember...	Confidence	You can do hard things.
	If she says that to you tomorrow, use...	Assertiveness	... to speak up and ask for help from a teacher, if you need it.



Using the Virtues language is the best way we have found to reinforce positive behavior, illicit internal motivation, and truly help children understand their emotions and navigate different situations. It feels a little weird at first, we'll be honest, but it gets easier with practice.

When used consistently between home and school, this effective method of communicating with children about their emotions, experiences, and choices, is a powerful tool. It empowers children with the language they need to express themselves, and it gives parents and teachers the resources they need to have meaningful conversations with children about what they are feeling.

We know that if you stop for a second before responding to something your child has said or done, and just think about what Virtue was present in that moment and how you can use that experience to deepen your child's understanding and awareness, you'll come to love the impact that this program can have on your life at home. Here is the full list of Virtues highlighted in The Virtues Project™. If you have any questions about them, please don't hesitate to reach out and ask for clarification.

The Full List of Virtues

Assertiveness	Friendliness	Peacefulness
Caring	Generosity	Perseverance
Cleanliness	Gentleness	Purposefulness
Commitment	Helpfulness	Reliability
Compassion	Honesty	Respect
Confidence	Honor	Responsibility
Consideration	Humility	Self-Discipline
Cooperation	Idealism	Service
Courage	Integrity	Tact
Courtesy	Joyfulness	Thankfulness
Creativity	Justice	Tolerance
Detachment	Kindness	Trust
Determination	Love	Trustworthiness
Diligence	Loyalty	Truthfulness
Enthusiasm	Moderation	Understanding
Excellence	Modesty	Unity
Flexibility	Orderliness	
Forgiveness	Patience	



For more information on The Virtues Project™ or to purchase the Virtues Educator Cards that we use in our classrooms, you can [visit their website](#) and purchase the cards through their online store.

Each month on the Children's House blog, we highlight three or four Virtues and give you examples of how to use the Virtues language at home. If you haven't already done so, be sure to [subscribe to the blog](#) for future Virtues info.