

# Communicating the benefits of virtues to the cyber-powered child

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Internet connectivity can make gossip, bullying and sexually exploitive pictures seem so normal for the modern child. This particular internet-hype appeals to the smaller self that seeks control and attention in worldly terms.

Think about people posting pictures to appear more successful, prettier, and richer than others; think about gossip and bullying that goes viral; or sexting in order to please a love interest. The temptation to respond impulsively is strong. So when we consider virtue as simply expressing the

dignity and power of the human spirit connected to the divinity within, it becomes a choice to be a positive influence in the world in all circumstances (Romans 12:2). For the internet-savvy child this choice can be translated as taking command of your own life by aspiring to become the person God designed you to be, and thereby overcoming the manipulations of others with a merciful heart.



pictureYouth

## VIRTUE

Moral excellence; goodness; righteousness

*A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. 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.<sup>63</sup> (Source: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc\\_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a7.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a7.htm))*

## “Smarty pants” syndrome versus self-governing

No child wants to be duped. They instinctively want to be in command of their own life journey, and the virtue of our faith helps us to govern our own hearts and minds in order to do just that. And yet, in a cyber-powered world, it is easy to believe that everything you need to know about governing your own life you can simply “google”. That is why many parents will be confronted with a “smarty pants”

syndrome when children believe they know it all, or even more concerning, they actually know too much for their own good, (think: graphic images of violence or gratuitous sex, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, etc.)

So we can explain “self-governance” as recognizing that no human knows it all, and that knowledge and wisdom are not the same thing. Wisdom is knowledge from the heart of God (Proverbs 1:7) applied in ways that are ap-

propriate for the individual and promotes personal security; wisdom is derived from life experience which parents help impart to the willing heart. While being a “smarty pants”, on the other hand, leaves you vulnerable to having knowledge without understanding which can be harmful.

Understanding the practical value of virtue helps children focus on their own relationship with the Lord and respond with confidence to the things that disturb the peace in their cyber social realms, such as gossip and bullying.

**See other side: Prudence, Chastity, and Humility**

*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. Romans 12:2*

## Parenting Ministry

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**Prudence** is knowing how to use the gifts we are given. Girls may dress and present themselves in social media with less modesty because they believe that is their value. But their value is in relationships with God, family and in the community.

**Chastity** is not just about sex. It is about a respect for who we are as people. It is the ability to recognize that we are more than what you see on the outside. “The problem with porn is not that shows too much,” he said. “It is that not enough of the actual person is shown.” When our children realize that their body is the sacrament of who you are as a whole person, including the divinity within perhaps they can begin to accept chastity as how we express our authenticity as magnificent sons and daughters.

**Humility** is the foundation of all virtue that helps us receive the wisdom to overcome the manipulations of others. No child wants to be duped or misled and they get a lot of fear and fakery in the social network. In this regard, humility is not thinking less of yourself; rather it is not thinking of yourself at all. When you put God and others first, it is possible to experience the power of God’s love in ways that bring

**Honest conversations about the practical value of virtues are worth considering as empowerment. Cyber-powered youth need to understand their own power (through embracing Wisdom in their own relationship with the Lord) which builds individual resiliency from the intense emotion stirred in the social network.**

The primary responsibility of you parents in education cannot be delegated neither to the school nor to the Church. *(St. Joseph Mareello Pastoral Letter on School Instruction and on Education of Youth in the Family, Acqui 1892)*



## Virtues conversation tips for parents



- First prepare yourself. Think about your own experience as a child and the role of virtues in your own life. Did virtue matter for you? Why or why not?
- Think about when you knew too much for your own good? When did “what you know” invoke shame? Did you talk about it with anyone? Were you able to have a conversation with your parents?
- It helps to be clear that the conversation with your child is not about you; it is about the child learning how to take command over their own life and you are the primary teacher. You may draw upon your own experience, but do not allow the conversation to digress into your adolescence and childhood. The idea here is to encourage your child to seek conversations with you about how to apply virtues in their life so you can encourage them to seek Wisdom (James 1:5) from the Lord and impart your wisdom.
- Pray.
- Consider a conversation about virtues as one of the strategies you and your child deploy to overcome the world. It helps to get your child thinking of virtue as a way to retain power; to not surrender all of the grace and wisdom God intends. It is not meant to be a way to be superior to other people. Rather it is a measure—a personal standard between you and the Lord.

“To educate is to enlighten the mind and warm the heart to the love of God.” — St. Joseph Mareello