

First Chapter Peak:

## Chapter 1: Family Role In Education

Family units have changed appearance in the last several decades and can be composed of any number of family members, whether actual blood or not. Some kids have far more challenges to deal with than others. One of those challenges is struggling with the absence of family members.

For example, 2.3 [million](#) people are incarcerated across the country. It must be considered that those millions behind bars have children affected by their absence. That averages out to 1 child in every classroom. Sesame Street recognized the correlation of these statistics immediately and created Alex. Alex is a muppet whose father is incarcerated.



Alex was not the only resource for children with absent parents Sesame Street introduced. They also addressed deployed military parents. In 2005, Sesame Street created resources to help children with parents deployed overseas. They also introduced coping mechanisms for caregivers and children when the parent came back injured, physically or mentally--or sadly, not at all.

It is widely known that 50% of marriages end in divorce. This leaves about 1 million children dealing with the emotional struggles and brutal antics that often accompany divorce. To help kids cope with these challenges, Sesame Street provided resources in 2012 for kids whose families were going through a divorce. Sesame Street's consistent practice of correctly identifying their audience's struggles has benefited millions of children by giving them the tools they need to cope with family dynamics.

Other families have made appearances on the show as well, such as interracial, single, and those struggling with addiction. The one type of family that hasn't been depicted is [LGBTQ+](#). Although 61% of Americans approve of gay marriage, it is a crime punishable by death in some countries. A majority of

Americans are advocating for the introduction of an LGBTQ+ human family rather than a muppet on the American version of the show, as muppets on the show do not display sexuality.

Sesame Street has worked hard to navigate and respect all countries' cultural differences in their quest to enhance education with roles that children can identify with. In some countries, the ending credits are eliminated because producers and employees have been threatened for things like focusing on the importance of girls attending school. Sesame Street's creators work with local governments to ensure their program stays on the air in these countries. Hence, children learn necessary academic skills, healthy habits, and develop understanding and tolerance of different world views.

Sesame Street is an influential powerhouse of education. Over 10 [million](#) children in over 150 countries under 8-years of age watch the show. It has been around since 1969 because the powers that be recognize the need to have relevant content addressing current events and dynamics in the world today. More recent muppet additions have been an autistic muppet and one living in foster care.

Sesame Street has championed access to education through television for diverse populations for over 50 years through its constant adaptation to relevant education. The inclusion of all family units is ideal for enhancing educational wealth. What about parents who are forced to leave education up to the school system because they are immersed in the daily struggle to provide for their family? What role should family members play in education to break this vicious cycle and start on a road of generational wealth and educational fitness?

## The Stuff They Don't Tell You

You may think your role as a parent in your child's education is adhering to a homework schedule. In reality, most of us are not prepared for the seemingly innocent math question that children ask for help on. You know the one--we end up having to read the entire chapter (and the previous one) trying unsuccessfully to decipher the impossible code and end up yelling in frustration at Alexa for the answer.

The truth of the matter is, a small portion of your child's future relies on your ability, or lack thereof, to help them with homework (Praise Be!). The internet has instruction on everything imaginable with witty videos more adept at assisting students than an old-school, Trapper Keeper parent. Amazingly, children are masters of YouTube instructional video tools by age 5. It is the prerequisite to screenager culture.

Where your support is needed is in their education, not their schooling. The two are distinctly separate. Schooling is institutional learning. Education is life skills applied to situations creating a learned lesson. The result is a culmination of experiences to navigate successfully through life. Schooling + Education = Wisdom. Parental support is vital when it comes to life skills. Life skills are things like:

- Virtues
- Accountability
- Analytical (critical) thinking
- Creativity
- Service Learning

This is the stuff they don't tell you. Learning these skills will enhance a child's schooling and give them an edge when entering the professional world. Children will need these life skills to fully understand and operate with emotional intelligence and situational awareness. These two elements are key factors in a thriving career and better quality of life, no matter what profession your child selects.

## The Power Of Virtues

Life goes something like this: You come home from work and, after settling in from the chaos of the day, look across the dinner table at your child, who is preoccupied with their phone. You ask, '*So, what did you learn in school today?*' The child glances up to study your eager gaze with stoic poise and recites '*Nothing.*' Or, they toss you a list of things they need for a project--due tomorrow.

When it comes to school, a parent's voice becomes less of an authority and more of a nuisance. Knowing what your child is learning will be filed under school

reporting accountability. There is a significant role you can play in your child's life to prepare them for a better education, even if they learn *nothing* every day.

We all want better for our children, and teaching virtues at a young age will provide the skills needed to navigate the school system's complex relationships and any other life obstacle. Virtues are known as the moral 'excellence' of a person. I know a flash of Bill & Ted's '*Be excellent to each other*' ran through your mind, and to be honest, the message isn't far off.

[Virtues](#) instill strength of character and are heavily influenced by the caregivers of children. Aristotle identified 11 virtues for a strong character that exude moral excellence. He believed achieving this virtuous behavior would lead to a happy, prosperous life with the comfort and confidence of knowing your value. He was big on not asking '*What Should I Do?*' and instead asking '*What Kind of Person Should I Be?*'.

Aristotle believed virtues played a significant part in successfully sustaining relationships and navigating complex social and societal dynamics. Virtues were the essence of living your best self. Aristotle believed virtue was the medium between *absence* and *excess* of a trait and defined these virtues as:

- **Courage:** Between *rashness* and *cowardice*. You observe moral strength in the face of danger. The virtue of courage is combined with knowledge, wisdom, and opinion. You are aware of the risk, but commit to action anyway.
- **Temperance:** Between *overindulgence* and *insensitivity*. Temperance is voluntary self-restraint. For Aristotle, never drinking and drinking too much were *both* viewed harshly. Temperance is balanced--'everything is good in moderation.'
- **Liberality:** Between *charity* and *miserliness* (giving more than you have). Liberality is the measured habit of doing good with your wealth without putting yourself in a bad position. Today, we would see this as charitable contributions, volunteering, and paying it forward.

- **Magnificence:** Between *stinginess* and *vulgarity*. Living too extravagantly or too flashy as opposed to living in squalor. The type of expenditure made should be appropriate to the circumstance. Such as spending money to bring grand things to the world versus spending money for a 16th car that you don't need or enjoy. This virtue is hardly a problem for the majority of people. Well, unless you are a casual gamer and therefore suffer constant buyer remorse.
- **Magnanimity:** Between *pride* and *delusions of grandeur* (narcissism). This is a big word with significant meaning. It encompasses more than the words to define it; words don't do it justice. Magnanimity is about self-worth (knowing your value) and the ambition to move forward in life doing marvelous things. Simply put, it is to be excellent in mind and heart. Concentrating on noble, purposeful actions and not spending time and energy on pettiness. Your self-confidence makes actions calm, speech unhurried, and walk authoritative (think catwalk strut without the indignation, like Superman)—a champion for causes and humanity.
- **Patience:** Between *anger* and *fury*. Exercising temperance in not getting too angry or not getting angry at all when it is justified. Patience controls your temper and to endure something tedious or monotonous. For example, standing in line at the DMV or explaining the same set of instructions 30,000 times. Even when anger erupts, it is controlled and expressed constructively.
- **Truthfulness:** Between *habitual lying* and being *boastful* or acting without tact. The definition extends beyond telling someone the truth. It also means knowing the truth about yourself and the world around you. Interpretation of the world without bias and seeing what is really there. This interpretation should correspond with what you think and say.
- **Wittiness:** Between *buffoonery* (joker) and *boorishness* (boring). Having a good sense of humor that shows tact and is not at the expense of others causing pain. Wittiness means you understand the balance between the time to jest and the time to be serious. Like most of Aristotle's definitions, it extends to what you put out (say) as well as what you take in (who & what you listen to).

- **Friendliness:** Between *unfriendly* or being *overly-friendly* with too many people. Aristotle believed friends were a vital component of a good life and explained different kinds of friendships. The most meaningful kind of friendship to him was virtuous friendship as opposed to friends of pleasure or usefulness. Two people that are virtuous and bear nothing but goodwill to each other was the ideal friendship. Bringing out the good in themselves and their friend were the friendships that would endure and add value.
- **Shame:** Between *shy* and *shameless*. Shame is essential to understand when a moral or social foul has been committed so you can adjust course. Aristotle defined shame as '*a certain pain or agitation over bad deeds, present, past, or future that appear to bring one into disrepute*'. Shame helps balance your moral compass.
- **Justice:** Between *selfishness* and *selflessness*. Aristotle had several forms of justice but focused on *lawful* and *fair equitable distributions*. Justice refers to the proportional application according to people's equalities and inequalities. The punishment fitting the crime *and* the person that committed it--tailored justice. Justice is a term that applies to transactions, communications, treatment of others, endowments, and facilities.

Aristotle created these virtues on a sliding scale because developing virtues is full of trial and error--no one is perfect. Sliding scales leave room for improvement and are not applied in finalities or absolutes--this is important later. It is a personal journey requiring thoughtful reflection on what type of person you want to be. No one can force virtue on you; it can only be introduced. Developing it is something that you *decide* to do.

Virtues are essential because they assist a person in finding happiness by achieving a fulfilling life. Virtues elevate society--politicians, leaders, and citizens alike. We cheer the heroes in movies and root for them as they defeat evil-doers and show villains the error of their ways. Disney makes bank on it. What would a society of heroes look like?

Aristotle's virtues are too big for most children to comprehend, much less apply. We start with age-appropriate virtues. There was a song on a kid's show called *Yo Gabba Gabba* that my kids loved.

The catchy tune was named, "*Don't bite your friends*" -- solid advice in theory and practice, which is why I kept it on-hand for my vicious daughter. On a side note, I didn't realize how old I was until *Green Day* appeared as a guest band in bug costumes on *Yo Gabba Gabba*. If you understand what you just read---I'm sorry.

Introducing virtues in the home *before* school-age and reinforcing them throughout school years will give your child the tools they need to excel in their schooling's structured activities and social elements. If we don't introduce virtue, the consequences may *bite* us (sorry, had to).

## Origin Story of Virtue Education: The Why

Virtue Education has been instilled in *some* public and private elementary schools and higher education institutions rebranded as 'Character Development' Education. There was a firmly established myth that *virtue* glowed with the tint of *religious* connotation-it doesn't. Aristotle virtues do not speak of higher powers or the many gods the Greeks worshipped. Virtue speaks to the moral fiber of a person and their relationship with society.

Character Development observed in current education is close to virtue education, and a good step forward. Teaching character development in and of itself isn't the only thing that needs to be implemented in schools for quality education and stellar student behavior. Elevating the school atmosphere will culminate all items mentioned in this book and working together in all parts.

I say this because some studies have shown character development does not notably make a difference in student behavior, while other studies show increased desired behavior. I firmly believe the entire ideology discussed in this book must be incorporated for change, not only one piece. These studies included lessons focused on character development itself and did not include dynamics of the complete ideology.

It is essential to distinguish character development from virtue education. Virtues are a sliding scale, not in terms of absolutes--big difference. It wasn't schools

that started virtue education in motion; it was parents. Theodore Roosevelt put it best:

***“To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.”***

Parents in the 1990s grew increasingly concerned about the decline of the traditional family (remember our Sesame Street conversation?). They felt that children’s well-being and moral fiber were declining significantly, as was the educational level of parents. If you remember, there was an explosion of teen pregnancy and all the reality and talk shows that came with it. Teen parents quit school.

The family dynamic was changing at an alarming rate as teen parents and their relatives jockeyed for position. The result was an overwhelming population of children struggling with financial and emotional fall-out, which negatively impacted their academic careers. There was a dramatic increase in aggressive behavior and a preoccupation with homelife rather than being able to immerse themselves in the classroom.

This life circumstance was felt by a tremendous amount of kids and parents that started the push for virtue education to help stabilize the phenomenon and increase the self-worth, desired behavior, and academic success of young girls. The 1990s carried some scary trends and [statistics](#) there was:

- A rise in youth violence
- Increase in dishonesty in academics and society
- Disrespect for authority
- Bullying
- Increased racial tensions & bigotry on campus
- Work ethic decline
- Promiscuity and teen pregnancy (US had the highest rates of pregnancy & abortion)
- Lack of civic responsibility & overabundant self-centeredness
- Self-destructive behavior
- Decreased knowledge & practice of ethics



- Male homicide rates soared for 15 to 24-year-olds (40X higher than Japans)
- Increased drug use (US highest again)
- Astounding youth suicide rates (tripled)

Parents rightfully freaked out. Luckily, parenting was the furthest thing from my mind during this time in history. I was within the age group to get into a lot of trouble, and I did. I was also a product of divorce living with a single mom who was a waitress. I was living the dream (that was sarcastic).

We were seen as a world spinning out of control, and unlike our parents, it was more than '*loud, devil-worshipping rock music.*' There was something bigger going on--more profound. It seemed a lack of moral fiber created holes that led to a deteriorating social fabric. Politicians' ears heard the parents' outcry, and both agreed that ignoring the moral element of schooling allowed:

- Achievement scores to decline
- Behavior problems to increase
- Adversarial positioning of parent v. school

President Bill Clinton had five conferences on character development. He used this term rather than 'morals or virtues' in hopes the religious tint would dissipate. Clinton's goal was highlighted as *forming good habits and eliminating poor habits*. How to create a good citizen 101 type definition for character development.

If you remember in Aristotle's virtues, there was a sliding scale and not a DO this DON'T do that finality. The individual would have the freedom to explore the depths of their virtue and potential with Aristotle. President George Bush latched on to character development as proposed by Clinton and made it a priority on the educational agenda, and some schools began to adopt the change.