

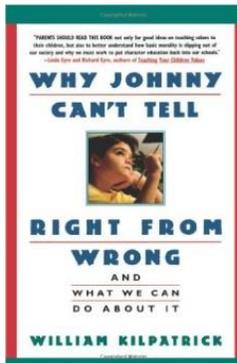
# Character Education in the Discipline Process

By: Torgun Lovely, LCHS Principal

Kids make mistakes. When juvenile mistakes occur here at Liberty, we view them as valuable learning opportunities – occasions for lovingly asserting our character-education objectives when they are most in need.

As a longtime educator, I am convinced the approaches we have developed over the years are among the best I have ever encountered, mainly because they give students the greatest chance to truly learn from their mistakes. We assist them in developing a moral compass pointing toward the good life.

In one of Liberty’s founding books, *Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right from Wrong*, author **William Kilpatrick** described several flaws in the modern-day approach to teaching students “decision-making skills” in lieu of teaching character education. Of one common flaw, Kilpatrick wrote:



*Finally, it [the shift away from character education] has helped create an educational system with a de facto policy of withholding from children the greatest incentive to moral behavior—namely, the conviction that life makes sense—a policy of doing everything possible to prevent them from learning the larger purposes or stories that give meaning to existence. In failing to impart these stories, schools have deprived children of both moral context and moral energy.*

We have intentionally built our discipline process around the explicit idea that children can shape and strengthen their character upon making mistakes. A perfect time to learn moral lessons is while a student is young and still morally pliable.

At Liberty, our disciplinary process entails a handful of commonsense tactics with the goal of eventually discussing our Capstone virtues at a scholarly level within the context of a student’s story. At the onset of our disciplinary intervention, students are engaged in a dialogue with an administrator to ensure they are well aware of why their mistake was wrong.

We want to verify the student has a clear understanding of how their errant behavior affects those involved (themselves, their instructors, other students, and the school in general). From there, the discussion is directed toward effectively reconciling an offense against other persons.

Students are brought to see that an apology needs to be forthcoming to all affected parties, especially their parents. Students are coached on how to formulate and articulate a full and proper apology. This includes a brief acknowledgment of the offense, a statement of regret to show understanding and remorse for how the incident caused harm to others, a commitment to avoid such an offense in the future, and an unambiguous request for forgiveness.

Students write apology letters and deliver them in conjunction with redundant verbal apologies to recipients. Learning to make a full and proper apology is a valuable life skill beneficial well beyond a school setting, and is an act of justice too rare in modern-day society.

At some point in the conversation, students are asked which of the school's Capstone virtues were most obviously betrayed during the time of the infraction. Students are then assigned a "Capstone research project" focused on the virtue they identify (prudence, temperance, justice, fortitude, patriotism, or gratitude).

This exercise has proven to be one of the more unique and ultimately successful tactics employed at Liberty. Students are assigned either a written paper or a verbal presentation with an administrator. The project involves researching the identified Capstone virtue in order to:

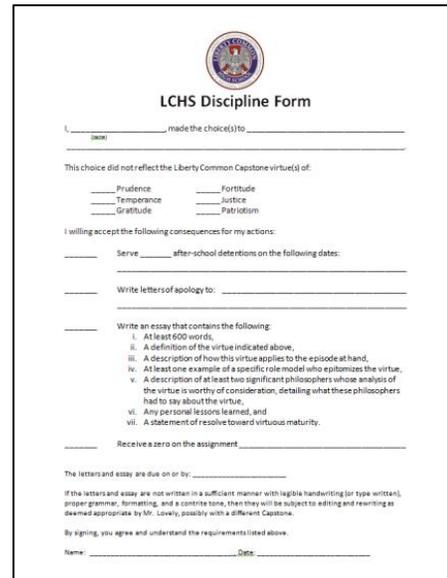
1. Give a definition of the virtue,
2. Detail how that virtue applies to the episode at hand,
3. Describe a role model in their lives to whom they can look as an example,
4. Describe two philosophers whose analysis of the virtue is worthy of consideration, summarizing a few main points the philosophers have contributed to our modern understanding of the virtue,
5. Describe any personal lessons learned; and,
6. Make a statement of resolve toward virtuous maturity in the future.

Students who complete these projects typically end up feeling empowered. They enjoy new confidence in their ability to make better choices by further internalizing powerful classical virtues. This is especially true when the projects are completed with the guidance of their parents.

The follow-up conversations with school administrators are particularly powerful and uplifting. Students are enabled to articulate an impressive amount of knowledge regarding classical philosophical ideas. They have an opportunity to apologize for their actions and solemnly reflect on the consequences incurred by all involved.

They find peace and closure upon knowing directly that others have forgiven them. Often, an enormous burden is lifted, replaced by a sense of personal growth and encouragement.

This process has been particularly impactful in cases of cheating or plagiarism – the most common serious disciplinary offense we deal with at Liberty. Kids are typically unaware of how detrimental academic dishonesty is to an instructor, and how cheating or plagiarizing directly undermines a teacher's job.



The image shows a "LCHS Discipline Form" with a circular seal at the top center. The form contains the following text and fields:

**LCHS Discipline Form**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, made the choice(s) to \_\_\_\_\_

(name)

This choice did not reflect the Liberty Common Capstone virtue(s) of:

|                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| _____ Prudence   | _____ Fortitude  |
| _____ Temperance | _____ Justice    |
| _____ Gratitude  | _____ Patriotism |

I will accept the following consequences for my actions:

\_\_\_\_\_ Serve \_\_\_\_\_ after-school detentions on the following dates: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Write letters of apology to: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Write an essay that contains the following:

- i. At least 600 words;
- ii. A definition of the virtue indicated above;
- iii. A description of how this virtue applies to the episode at hand;
- iv. At least one example of a specific role model who epitomizes the virtue;
- v. A description of at least two significant philosophers whose analysis of the virtue is worthy of consideration, detailing what these philosophers had to say about the virtue;
- vi. Any personal lessons learned; and
- vii. A statement of resolve toward virtuous maturity.

\_\_\_\_\_ Receive zero on the assignment \_\_\_\_\_

The letters and essay are due on or by: \_\_\_\_\_

If the letters and essay are not written in a sufficient manner with legible handwriting (or type written), proper grammar, formatting, and a concrete tone, then they will be subject to editing and rewriting as deemed appropriate by Mr. Lowly, possibly with a different Capstone.

By signing, you agree and understand the requirements listed above.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

When a student comes to understand an instructor's professional responsibility for delivering both content and assessing student comprehension, the student gains a deeper appreciation of why his or her actions are so offensive to an educator, to the school, and to the community. The student is also led to understand how academic dishonesty is incredibly damaging to oneself.

The student learns how reliance upon cheating and plagiarism inevitably leads to harmful adult habits and dire consequences if unaddressed. Discussions about the widespread epidemic of cheating in other schools, on college campuses, in business, and in life are helpful to students, especially when framed by the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude.



Liberty's Capstone virtues are not merely words displayed on posters in each of our classrooms. They are the essential components in seeking the good life.

All Liberty students are expected to understand and to be inclined toward beauty, truth, goodness, and perfection – the essence of wisdom. When they fall short, typically through the commission of some juvenile error, our school capitalizes on a ripe opportunity to reinforce lessons that ought to last a lifetime.

We purposefully encourage all students to avoid all matters warranting disciplinary action at school. Nonetheless, when students do make mistakes, we feel fortunate they make them at Liberty Common School.

Students finding themselves in these situations usually agree.

*For additional information, please see the Liberty Common Policy Manual or Student-Parent Handbook.*