EDITORIAL

POSITIVE VIRTUES: FOR WELL-BEING & MENTAL HEALTH

Positive virtues are timeless. They were always there and will always be there if civilization is to exist. **From ancient philosophy to modern scientific psychology,** it has an infinite history of existence.

If we believe that human nature is innately good and self- regulating, we would not have the need to highlight its importance and nor feel the need to teach it to children. However, the world today is not simple by any definition and therefore, **positive virtues are not automatic.** The poor individual torn between the dictates of the social structures and his individual experience gets driven to bad behavior and evil tendencies. **He gets corrupted by the rigid, meaningless social cultural economic systems.** Therefore, we can say that even though the human being has the 'potential' for goodness and virtue, negative circumstances, inequality, poverty, social pressures, trauma, aggression, conflicts, wars, unrests, can distort the potential. From being a constructive human being, he has also the potential to become perverted and destructive person.

The efforts of religion and philosophy constantly strive to drill moral education, ethical teachings from childhood so as to help cultivate positive virtues and restrain from negative tendencies. As humanity gradually loses faith in religion and belief in science grows stronger, scientific psychology stepped in to fill the need. Psychology which was earlier part of philosophy, broke away from the parent to become 'scientific'.

'Positive psychology', a branch of psychology took shape in a formal way in the **late 1990's under the leadership of Martin Seligman,** the then President of the American Psychological Association. He postulated six core virtues with twenty-four associated character strengths drawn from cross-cultural analysis. He pushed forward empirical research in hundreds of good values and character strengths to create science-based and evidence- based theories and practices. **Studies began to emphasize the role of virtues in mental health and interventions.**

Religion always stated that a simple, honest, ethical, living will certainly lead to good physical and mental health. But civilization needs science to prove what our ancient and wise saints and philosophers taught us. Research based exercises and daily practices were being emphasized by expert psychologists. People seeking help from professionals were being taught to use prayers, meditation, gratitude, optimism and self- reflection as methods for well-being and happiness.

A distraught civilization, with fragmented selves, moral and ethical decline, neurotic and psychotic tendencies, leading to declining mental health was being resurrected by the modern 'gurus' who are not necessarily saints. It was like being served 'old wine in new bottles' as the saying goes! But it was working for the better and we were glad that we able to convince the young minds that **virtues and character strengths were important for general wellbeing.**

But virtue does not grant immunity from illness- physical or mental. Even saints and rogues can suffer from depression, trauma or psychosis. Mental illness is not a moral failure. Positive virtues such as courage, honesty, resilience helps the **individual confront the illness and treat it.** It acts as a **strong coping resource**. Psychological research in self-compassion and humility show that it **can reduce the experience of distress**. Virtues such as empathy, gratitude, forgiveness, foster social bonds and relationships. **And supportive relationships are one of the strongest factors in recovery.** Mental illness arises from a complex interplay of bio-psycho-social factors.

Positive virtues are inner capacities that promote mental health by buffering against disorders and also support healing, resilience and dignity in the midst of suffering significantly.

-Rita Aggarwal.
Editor

CORE VIRTUES SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN OUR MENTAL HEALTH!

Core virtues act like inner anchors that keep the mind steady, resilient, and emotionally balanced, especially during life changes, challenges and transitions. Mental health is not only about reducing stress or symptoms, it is about how we relate to our thoughts, emotions, choices, and relationships.

Virtues are not inborn talents alone, they are cultivated through awareness, practice, and intention.

Basic Core Virtues

1. **Honesty** – being truthful with yourself and others
2. **Compassion** – caring for the suffering of others and yourself
3. **Patience** – staying calm and steady during delays or difficulties
4. **Gratitude** – appreciating what you have rather than focusing on lack
5. **Courage** – acting rightly even in fear or uncertainty
6. **Humility** – knowing your worth without arrogance
7. **Self-discipline** – choosing long-term good over short-term comfort
8. **Kindness** – being gentle, helpful, and considerate
9. **Forgiveness** – letting go of resentment and emotional burden
10. **Wisdom** – using experience and insight to make balanced choices
11. **Responsibility** – owning your actions and their consequences
12. **Integrity** – aligning thoughts, words, and actions

The Correlation between the virtues we cultivate and the impact it has on us mentally, emotionally and socially can be further elaborated as it is very subtle but very crucial to understand.

1. Virtues Create Emotional Regulation & Inner Stability
Patience helps us tolerate discomfort without panic or irritation, **Compassion** softens harsh self-criticism and **Forgiveness** releases stored anger and resentment. It reduces anxiety, emotional overwhelm, and chronic stress.

2. Virtues Reduce Inner Conflict
Honesty brings clarity by acknowledging what we truly feel, **Integrity** aligns values with actions and **Responsibility** reduces blame and helplessness. There is less rumination, guilt, and self-doubt; more mental clarity.

3. Virtues Strengthen Self-Worth & Identity
Self-respect grows through integrity and responsibility, **Humility** removes the pressure to be perfect and **Courage** builds confidence in facing difficult emotions. It Improves self-esteem, reduces shame and emotional resilience.

4. Virtues Improve Relationship Health & Mental Peace
Kindness and **compassion** reduce conflict, **Honesty** builds trust and emotional safety and **Gratitude** shifts focus from lack to appreciation. It lowers emotional stress, fewer interpersonal triggers, deeper connection.

THE ONE-DAY KINDNESS EXPERIMENT

What would happen if, for just one day, we made a quiet decision to practice intentional kindness? No dramatic gestures. No extraordinary sacrifice. Just small, thoughtful choices woven into an ordinary day.

The experiment begins in the morning.

Instead of rushing through conversations, we pause and truly listen when someone speaks. We greet others with warmth. We choose patience when delays test us, and respond gently when someone seems distracted or short-tempered. We slow down, even just for a moment, rather than reacting immediately to frustration. These may seem like tiny, almost invisible choices, but they shape the emotional climate around us; not just for others, but for ourselves. Our tone softens, our breathing steadies, and almost immediately, the day feels less overwhelming, less combative, and more manageable.

By mid-day, the practice deepens.

Maybe someone around us seems stressed, quiet, or distracted. Instead of brushing it off or reacting with impatience, we pause and offer a simple act of kindness. We could smile, ask if they're okay, or listen without interrupting. We might offer help with a task, share a word of encouragement, or simply acknowledge their efforts. Even small gestures like holding the door, sending a thoughtful message, or offering a thank-you can make a difference. These actions may seem minor, but they communicate a powerful message: You are seen, you are valued, you are safe here. When people feel emotionally supported, tension eases, confidence grows, and connections strengthen. Slowly, the atmosphere around us becomes calmer, and our own mind feels lighter, more centered, and better able to respond rather than react.

As the day winds down, the focus turns inward.

Evening is often when our minds replay the day — the conversations, the tasks, the moments we judged ourselves too harshly. Instead of trying to "fix" everything, we can practice self-kindness in small, realistic ways. We might notice one thing we handled well, let go of a worry that can't be solved tonight, or acknowledge an emotion without judgment. These subtle shifts don't take extra time or effort, but they soften our inner critic and create space for calm.

Self-kindness is not about grand gestures or "perfect" evenings. It is about small, intentional shifts in how we relate to ourselves: noticing our effort, pausing before judgment, and choosing understanding over criticism. Over time, these tiny shifts strengthen resilience, reduce stress, and help us feel more grounded. By the end of the day, just as our outward acts of kindness have nurtured those around us, these inward acts create a gentler, more supportive inner environment.

Mental health is strengthened in ordinary moments. It is built through tone, timing, and tenderness — both outward and inward.

As Mark Twain said,

"Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see."

Kindness is not accidental. It is intentional. Maybe tomorrow, we begin with just one day. One intention. And let it grow from there.

-Anjali Anil Salani
Therapist & Counselling Psychologist

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POSITIVE VIRTUES AS SHIELD OF ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH - A VEDIC PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

Aryan, a 14-year-old boy, sat across, shoulders curved inward, eyes resting somewhere near his feet. His mother was anxious. "He doesn't talk back. He doesn't retaliate. He keeps everything inside." Teachers labelled him "too soft". Friends dismissed him as "too quiet and boring".

In an inquiry about a classmate who bullied him, he replied softly, "If I hurt him back, I will become the same. My grandmother says anger returns doubled." In that sentence lived an old Indian teaching ahimsa not as passivity but as conscious restraint. Everyone around him mistook this virtue for vulnerability.

This is where adolescent mental health often falters, not due to lack of strength but due to misreading virtue in a noisy world.

Indian tradition has long recognised adolescence as **a *sandhi kaal*, a delicate threshold between dependence and responsibility.** Our scriptures, folk stories, and family systems never rushed this phase. Today, adolescents face academic pressure tied to self-worth, early exposure to adult anxieties, and digital comparison replacing community grounding.

Neuroscience tells us the adolescent brain is emotionally charged yet cognitively unfinished. Indian wisdom adds something equally important. Values function as inner anchors. When outer structures shake, inner virtues steady the mind. They are mental buffers rather moral lecturers. Virtues were rarely taught as rules. They were lived in, narrated, and observed from *Panchatantra* stories to grandmother's kitchen conversations, character was shaped subtly.

Modern psychology now confirms virtues act as protective factors for mental health, an idea explored in depth in the scholarship on Indian psychology by K. R. Rao and later elaborated in the works of Cornelissen, Misra and Varma.

Hope (Aasha) reflects trusting the future without denying pain. Indian households lived in quiet hope as farmers waited for the monsoon, mothers saved patiently, and students tried again after failure. **Adolescents with hope show lower depressive symptoms, stronger motivation and better emotional endurance.**

Gratitude (Kṛtajñatā) reminds us what holds us. A pause before meals or acknowledging effort cultivates emotional balance. Research links gratitude with improved emotional regulation, reduced stress hormones and better sleep. **In a comparison-driven world, gratitude returns adolescents to a sense of enoughness.**

Self-control (Indriya nigraha) reflects inner mastery rather than suppression. Indian philosophy valued restraint over impulsivity. Adolescents with stronger self-regulation show lower substance misuse, reduced emotional volatility and better long-term mental health.

Compassion (Karuna) is often mistaken for softness. Studies show self-compassion reduces anxiety, depression and shame while helping adolescents respond to failure with resilience rather than harsh self-criticism.

Purpose (Dharma) gives a reason to stay emotionally invested. Adolescents who feel their effort matters demonstrate lower depressive symptoms, reduced risk-taking and stronger emotional stability.

Traditionally, children learnt virtues by watching adults rather than hearing lectures. Adolescents need adults who model emotional regulation, respect effort over rank and allow failure without humiliation.

Months later, he spoke again, still quiet but steadier. "I still feel hurt sometimes. But I don't feel wrong for feeling it." **Positive virtues do not eliminate distress. They teach how to live with it without breaking.** Mental health grows in values passed gently, lived daily and protected fiercely.

-Dr Sripriya Shaji Ph.D
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COMPASSION

A virtue that is often used interchangeably with empathy, is 'compassion'. While empathy means feeling how the other person feels, **compassion means being concerned for others' sufferings and helping them**. According to Martin Seligman, the father of positive psychology, compassion is an essential, high-level gratification- rooted in total engagement, kindness and acting in service of others to alleviate their suffering. But compassion is an important psychological resource too- research suggests that practicing compassion towards others and towards yourself is linked to **lower anxiety and depression, better emotional regulation and improved life satisfaction**. (Wu, X., Zhu, Q., Zhang, S., Yao, J., & Peng, S. (2025)). It helps our nervous system shift from threat to safety and reduces cortisol levels, fostering connection and hope. (Kowalski, M., Sánchez-González, M., & Patel, R. (2025)).

Majorly, self-compassion plays an essential role in mental health. When we replace the inner critic's voice with a more compassionate voice, it invites understanding during stressful situations. A person cultivating compassion is often **better equipped to tackle setbacks**, because they talk to themselves with patience instead of shame. That's because, when we respond to our mistakes with compassion instead of criticism, our nervous system shifts from threat to calm. We become less anxious, less defensive, and more open to growth.

Self-compassion does not make us weak, it makes us resilient. It allows us to fall without collapsing, to fail without defining ourselves by it, and to heal without harshness. In a world that constantly demands more, self-compassion reminds us that we are worthy- even when we may be struggling.

However, being compassionate only to others without extending it to your own self can be exhausting and may lead to **compassion fatigue**- a state of feeling exhausted emotionally, with reduced empathy and effectiveness. It's like a sign of the caregivers' emotional resources being depleted. It is important to recognise this fatigue and take necessary measures for it- **peer support, adequate rest, supervision and intentional self-care** can help manage compassion fatigue better.

Compassion heals- but only when we aren't **pouring from an empty cup.**

-Devika Gokhale
Counselling Psychologist, Nagpur

5. Virtues Help the Mind Respond, Not React

Wisdom creates pause before reaction, **Self-discipline** prevents impulsive behavior and **Patience** allows space between stimulus and response. It enables Less emotional reactivity, better decision-making, calmer mind.

6. Virtues Build Long-Term Mental Resilience

Courage helps face fear, **Acceptance & humility** reduce resistance and **Gratitude** nurtures hope and meaning. It helps in Greater resilience, emotional endurance, and psychological flexibility.

In simple words Virtues don't remove life's challenges, but they change how the mind experiences them. A virtuous mind is Less chaotic, more compassionate, more grounded, more emotionally free.

Do Gentle Reflection for daily mental hygiene

Ask yourself: *"Which virtue would help me feel lighter today?"*
Keep Evolving

Kavita Sarraf- Mental & Emotional wellness coach (Nagpur)

PATIENCE

Patience can be defined as a capacity to endure difficulties, frustrations, and suffering with some sense of calm. Evidence suggests that patience is an important factor for mediating life's challenges while also contributing to a sense of personal well-being and meaning in life (Schnitker & McAnnally-Linz, 2021).

As the saying goes, patience is a virtue but not just a natural one. Patience can be developed and improved by all of us if we decide to do so.

Being patient for conventionally considered smaller things in life is equally, if not more, important as it is for being patient for the bigger or more important things.

As important as it is to wait to turn a certain age before you can learn how to drive, it is also important to **learn to wait** for an artist to reveal their art in a reel that you are watching at 2x speed or are just willing to skip, or not rush your friend into finishing a thought when they are talking to you. Practicing patience in all these little activities makes it easier to be patient; to give yourself and others time to think, time to experience the moment you are in, time to be humans who barely realise that they are not in a race.

Patience is the ability to stay calm in the face of adversity. Patience helps us become more resilient and face all problems that come our way, it helps us remain calm; reducing the effects that anxiety and stress may have on us.

For a very meticulous person, even the smallest of delays seem very troublesome.

There is a theory, the **'Burnt Toast Theory'** that suggests that some inconveniences in our life occur to protect us from things we might not see coming.

If we lose our calm every time things get difficult or every time something happens that inconveniences us, we might just spend our entire lives complaining, cribbing and being angry. Instead, if we choose to be patient and calm no matter what life throws our way, we make it a better experience not just for ourselves but even for the people around us.

Patience is that virtue that can truly help one be more resilient, and look at events of our lives with a positive lens. This will indeed help us find joys and peace even in the smaller moments of life.

We must learn to be patient, for even us humans took 9 whole months to be ready to take birth; and we must continue to choose to be patient because even we took about 3 years to start talking in proper sentences.

-Sara Pimprikar
Mental Health Ally, Member, DAGMHI

EMPATHY: SEEING THE PERSON BEHIND THE BEHAVIOUR

Last week, a student sat across from me and said quietly, "Everyone thinks I'm rude. I'm just tired." That sentence stayed with me. It reminded me how quickly we judge behaviour and how rarely we pause to understand the emotion behind it.

We live in a time where replies are expected instantly, opinions are formed rapidly, and reactions are often stronger than reflections. Someone responds late to a message and we assume they do not care. Someone cancels plans and we label them irresponsible. Someone raises their voice and we call them aggressive. But how often do we stop and ask what might be happening beneath the surface?

Empathy is the ability to understand and share another person's emotional experience by consciously placing ourselves in their situation. It is not pity, and it is not agreeing with everything someone does. It is the willingness to look beyond behaviour and recognise the feeling driving it.

From a psychological perspective, behaviour is often the visible expression of an invisible emotional state. Anxiety can look like irritation. Burnout can resemble laziness. Hurt may present itself as anger. Withdrawal may be mistaken for arrogance. When we respond only to what we see externally, we react. When we try to understand the internal experience, we connect.

Today's reality makes empathy even more necessary. Students are not just preparing for examinations; they are navigating pressure, comparison, and uncertainty about their future. Adults are not simply managing work; they are balancing responsibilities, financial stress, and personal expectations. Social media shows achievement and confidence but rarely reveals panic, self-doubt, or emotional fatigue. In such an environment, many people carry silent struggles behind composed appearances.

Psychologically, when individuals feel understood rather than judged, their defensiveness decreases and their sense of safety increases. A simple statement like, "You seem overwhelmed. Do you want to talk?" can calm more effectively than criticism ever could. Empathy does not mean excusing inappropriate behaviour, but it does mean trying to understand the emotional context before responding.

Equally important is self-empathy. Many of us extend compassion to others while being excessively critical of ourselves. We reassure friends that it is okay to struggle, yet tell ourselves we are not doing enough. When we learn to acknowledge our own emotions without shame, we become less reactive and more patient with others. Healthy empathy also requires boundaries; it means being present without absorbing another person's pain entirely.

In a world that rewards speed and certainty, empathy requires courage. It asks us to slow down, to replace assumption with curiosity, and to choose understanding over immediate judgment. Perhaps the person is not rude but overwhelmed. Perhaps they are not careless but carrying something heavy.

Sometimes, the most powerful thing we can offer another human being is not advice or solutions, but the reassurance that they are seen and understood. And in today's emotionally complex world, that simple act of understanding may be one of the most transformative virtues we practice.

-**By Aditi Sethi**

Counselling Psychologist | Trauma Informed Practioner | Author

PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Pro-social behaviour refers to voluntary actions intended to benefit others. It includes kindness, sharing, helping, comforting, cooperating, and standing up for someone or offering emotional support. At its core, **pro-social behaviour reflects our capacity to care beyond ourselves**. While these behaviors may appear small; they nurture connection, reduce isolation, and strengthen resilience. Collectively they form the **backbone of a compassionate and emotionally healthy society**.

Pro-social behaviour is: **Voluntary** (not forced or coerced), **Intentional** (driven by a desire to help), **Beneficial** (aimed at improving someone else's well-being) and **Empathy-driven** (rooted in understanding another person's emotions).

Pro-social behaviour can take different forms. **Reactive pro-social behaviour** occurs in response to a situation, such as helping someone who has fallen or comforting a friend in distress. **Proactive pro-social behaviour**, on the other hand, is intentional and planned—like volunteering regularly, donating to a cause, or initiating a mental health awareness campaign. It can also be classified by motivation. **Altruism** refers to helping without expecting anything in return, while other forms may involve reciprocity, social approval, or shared community values.

Pro-social behaviour is rooted in empathy - the ability to feel another person's emotional experience (**emotional empathy**) and understand their perspective (**cognitive empathy**). Empathy allows us to respond to the needs of others with sensitivity and care. Alongside empathy, qualities such as compassion, moral reasoning, cooperation, and a sense of social responsibility shape how and why we act in supportive ways.

Healthy societies depend on pro-social behaviour because it promotes trust, **builds relationships, reduces conflict, and promotes collective resilience**. Communities that nurture empathy and cooperation tend to experience better mental health outcomes. **Acts of kindness also benefit the giver** in the form of positive emotions, reduce stress, and increase life satisfaction. **Pro-social actions can encourage help-seeking and create safe spaces for vulnerable conversations**.

In today's digital age, social media significantly shapes pro-social behaviour. Online platforms can amplify awareness, mobilize support, and normalize conversations around mental health. Campaigns, fundraisers, and peer-support communities often thrive in virtual spaces.

Sustainable pro-social behaviour requires balance. The act of care is grounded in both compassion for others and respect for oneself. Because, like any positive trait, pro-social behaviour has a shadow side when taken to extremes. Self-sacrifice, compulsive urge to help or people-pleasing may stem from low self-worth, fear of rejection, or a need for approval. Without boundaries, persistent self-sacrifice may lead to burnout, resentment, or emotional depletion.

Pro-social behaviour is not just about grand gestures. It is found in everyday moments — listening without judgment, offering support, or simply choosing understanding over criticism. In doing so, pro-social behaviour becomes not just an action, but a pathway toward collective emotional well-being.

Dr. Aabha Pimprikar
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