

## Teaching Children Self Discipline

Self discipline is a primary quality that will help children be successful in life. In this article, Dr. Scott Turansky, co-founder of the National Center for Biblical Parenting, provides seven key ways to help children develop self-discipline.

One of the primary tasks of early childhood is to develop self discipline. Parents and teachers often find themselves correcting their children for interrupting, being wild, not following instructions or for not controlling their hands or mouths. These all require self discipline or self-control. Young children are by nature impulsive. Some children have ADHD or other biological factors which increase impulsiveness. Part of the solution for impulse control is to learn self discipline.

A child armed with self discipline has a tremendous asset for addressing life's challenges.

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So many relational and personal problems can be avoided or controlled when one has self-control. Here are some suggestions for teaching it to children.

**1. Teach children to come when they are called.** When a teacher or parent calls a child, that child shouldn't yell, "What?" from across the house, parking lot or playground. Children can learn to come within a few feet, in order to have a dialog with you. This helps children learn that self-control sometimes means that we must give up what we would like to be doing in order to do something else.

**2. Teach children to respond positively to correction.** Most children don't like to be corrected and respond negatively in either aggressive (anger) or passive (bad attitude) ways. This is unacceptable and becomes an excellent opportunity to teach self discipline. One of the facts of life is that people often must follow directions which may not be their preference. Teach children to respond with a good attitude as well as right behavior. This requires self-control and helps

children learn to control their impulses. A good response to correction is sometimes difficult to learn but work in this area will help a child develop a skill which will help them forever.

**3. A number of social skills require self-control.** Praise children when they demonstrate this quality and point out areas they need to work on. Listening, knowing when and how to interrupt, anger control, reporting back after completing a task all require self discipline.

**4. Encourage children to take on activities which build self discipline.** They may include sports, music lessons, a paper route, the responsibility of caring for a neighbor's pet, memorization of scripture, a clean room, or a host of other activities.

**5. When a child receives a reward** like payment for a job accomplished or even a star on a chart or special treat, talk about self discipline. External rewards give a great opportunity to talk about internal rewards. The real benefit to a paper route is not the money, it's the building of self discipline. "You are pretty determined and responsible to get up every morning." "I know you would have rather played the game but I like the way you took time to walk the dog. That shows self discipline."

**6. Use bed times to teach self discipline.** Some children have a hard time going to bed without creating a battle and this becomes a great opportunity to teach self discipline to children. After all, it requires a lot of self-control for a child to stay quietly in bed while parents are still awake. Set a bedtime, develop a routine which covers all the necessary bedtime tasks and work at getting your child to stay in bed without Mom or Dad falling asleep in the room. This requires work on the part of the parent but will pay off tremendous dividends in the end.

**7. Morning routines, chores, and family schedules** become opportunities for children to learn responsibility and self discipline. Responsibility is "doing the right thing even when no one is watching." The rewards for being responsible are called privileges. The child who is responsible to get ready and be at breakfast by 7:30 a.m. is allowed the privilege of staying up until their 8:00 p.m. bedtime. Being able to choose one's clothes is the privilege for getting dressed before the deadline. Simple benefits of life are seen as privileges associated with basic responsibility. Some try to give their children an easier life than they had or they try to make their children feel good at the expense of good character. Unfortunately, this often translates into more freedom and less self-control. A wise teacher or parent will use childhood to prepare a child for success as an

adult. Self discipline is one of the most important character qualities a child can develop. Ironically, spoiled children are not happy; self disciplined children often are!

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