

Teaching Self Control

As parents and those who work with children, we want to help each child to succeed to their full potential. One of the most important life skills we can help our children to develop is self control. Self control is the foundation that allows children to learn essential skills, values, and lessons in life. Rules, limits, rewards, and consequences help guide our children in controlling and maintaining their behaviors and feelings; however, it is also important that we find ways to develop our children's own sense of self control. By strengthening their self control, they will have greater ability to manage their impulses, respond to problems, and deal with difficult feelings when you are not directly with them.



Self control is “the ability to make choices about how one behaves and acts rather than relying on impulses” (www.crescentlife.com). Self control is necessary to function in a healthy manner in social settings, school, and work. In addition, self control is necessary to be able to self-regulate emotionally and physically as an individual.

A child with self control will:

- evaluate a situation before acting
- consider the consequences and effects of their actions
- accept limits and delay their own gratification until the timing is appropriate
- wait their turn, share with others, and interact well with peers
- put thought into decision making and problem solving make decisions for themselves
- deal with peer pressure effectively apply effective coping strategies to address difficult feelings
- learn how to relax their body and manage stress which regulates their body and overall health (www.crescentlife.com)

The difficulty arises in that children have to learn and understand self control for themselves in order to truly be in control of themselves. We can talk, lecture, and educate a child about self control; however, until they experience a sense of self control for themselves, this value will not be solidified. If adults are always managing children's impulses, behaviors, and feelings, then they do not truly have self control. Some children are less impulsive than others, and some children develop self control easily. We can use strategies to help a child build self control and also learn to recognize and reinforce the numerous times a child is already using self control.

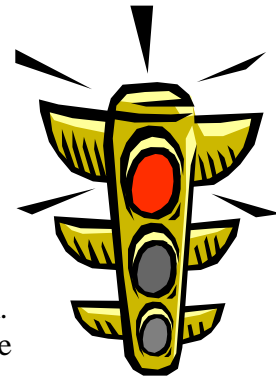
One of the most effective strategies for helping a child to develop self control is to notice and tell the child when they are already using self control. A lesson is best learned when the child is having a first hand experience. A child will better understand what the abstract term self control means and feels like if you let them know when they are using self control. You may feel that your child does not have any self control. If this is the case, I challenge you to find even brief moments when your child has used self control and point these moments out to your child. Recognizing your child using self control will reinforce this behavior, and it

will likely increase development of self control (Glasser & Easley, 1998). Here are a few situations when you can tell a child they are using self control:

- Did not hit or fight when angry or upset
- Walked away when upset
- Accepted “no” or limits you set
- Used words to say how they were feeling
- Used words to express their needs instead of tantrumming
- Waited their turn
- Used a healthy coping skill
- Did not interrupt
- Considered the consequences before acting
- Put thought into decision making
- Shared with another
- And many more!!!

Here are some additional strategies for teaching self control.

- Parents should model self control even when upset.
- Speak to your child in a calm voice. If you stay in control, your child is much more likely to as well.
- Ignore negative behaviors and reinforce positive behaviors. Do not give a lot of attention to tantrums or times when a child is not using self control.
- Teach your child to visualize a stop sign or traffic light before making a decision... “stop, think, and go.”
- When giving time-outs, end the time-out as soon as the child is calm. This teaches the child they are now using self control.
- Set up a spot in your house where a child can take their own breaks when upset.
- Make a credit system or behavioral chart to reinforce when child uses self control.
- Help a child feel successful by having them wait for gratification briefly, reinforce their self control, and gradually increase the time they wait.
- Play gross-motor games like “red-light, green-light” that help a child learn to control their body, wait their turn, and follow set rules.
- Try relaxation and stress management techniques as a family.



References:

Glasser & Easley, (1998): Transforming the difficult child: The Nurtured Heart Approach.
Vaughan Printing: Nashville, TN

www. Crescentlife.com. Teaching your child self control. (internet source)

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