



*Self-control is critical to success,
wellbeing and resilience.*

Self-control is the ability to override or even to change our inner responses to do one thing when we really want to do another thing. It's stopping ourselves from acting on impulses.

You know that moment where you want to say something unkind to one of the children because they are driving you bonkers? Self-control means we override, and thus change, that impulse. We stop ourself, remember that we love our child deeply, and we hug and make things right instead.

Self-control is getting out of bed when we'd rather sleep in. It is completing our work by our deadline when there are so many things we would rather be doing. Self-control is ignoring the little red notification on your phone that says we have a message, an email, or some other notice on social media, and deciding to look later once we're not driving, or once the children are asleep rather than during our evening routine.

And, as we shall see, self-control is critical to success, wellbeing and resilience.

Doing what we should do instead of what we want to requires self-control. But the type of self-control we show is more important than how much self-control. As an example, if we are the Cookie Monster and we see cookies and eat them, we show no self-control. If we don't eat the cookies because someone is going to punish us if we do, we show some self-control based on external controls (which psychologists often call 'contingencies'). If we show self-control even though no one is watching because we know we should we are showing introjected control. If we show control because we've let go of the desire for cookies and we know they're not a healthy part of our diet, we show autonomous or intrinsic control.

The more autonomous the self-control we show, the more resilient we are, and the happier we feel. And self-control can be taught. How?

First, our children need to know what it is. **IMPORTANT:** Don't expect too much control too soon. It takes years for children to develop autonomous control – and trying to control them so they'll control themselves is all around the wrong way.

Second, explain why they might control their behaviour in context. "We don't hit because..." "We don't eat too much junk food because..." "We turn off our screens early because..." and so on. This promotes intrinsic motivation, rather than extrinsic motivation.

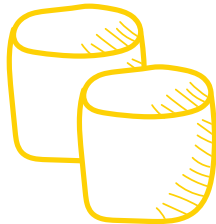
Third, be an example. If we don't show self-control, we can't expect our children to. This means holding our tongue, being patient, turning off screens (including TV) on time, getting enough sleep, and even things like keeping the speed limit. Remember... they're always watching.

Take a peek at the activities below, and start building healthy levels of self-control for your family this week.

ACTIVITY 1: The Marshmallow Test

Go to YouTube and Search for "The Marshmallow Test" by IgniterMedia. Watch it together and have a chat about what self-control is and why it matters.

Ask your child what self-control is and why it's important. Talk about people who have self-control and those who do not. How do they act differently? (Friends, family members, or others your child knows can be good examples of those with limited self-control. Parents or older siblings might be better examples of those with more self-control, but be sensitive and kind to those who don't show self-control.)



Ask your child what different things they could do to be more self-controlled at moments where it matters.

(Note – do NOT do the marshmallow experiment with your child, unless you're simply having a quick bit of fun. But whatever you do, don't use it as an interpretative measure of the extent to which your child will or will not be successful in life.)

ACTIVITY 2: Table Talk

Take some time at dinner or during your time together to share an experience from your day where you showed self-control and describe why it made a great difference. Ask your child if s/he has shown self-control and how it has helped them. Make this a regular conversation to emphasise the value of this attribute – but be sure to make sure self-control doesn't become a way of manipulating your child. We want them to show control because it feels good, not because they feel controlled.

ACTIVITY 3: Discipline vs Regret

If you have older children, share the following quote with them and ask them what they think it means.

*"It is better to live with the pain of discipline,
than with the pain of regret."*

Do they agree or disagree? In which situations would discipline and self-control be healthy and in which would it be unhealthy?