

The First Lesson: Self-control

Many people were surprised at the findings of a research paper released January 2011. The researchers discovered that self-control predicts physical health, personal finances, and other outcomes. In fact, they found that self-control is more important than IQ for success in life.¹ Self-control is what people use to “manage their lives, hold their tempers, keep their diets, fulfill their promises, . . . save money, persevere at work, keep secrets, and so forth.”² And the good news is that self-control can be improved over time. “Children whose self-control improved over time had better performance as adults than those whose did not, suggesting that interventions to improve self-control can make a difference down the line. Improvements can come at an individual level, as well. We do believe good parenting can improve self-control and improve life success,”³ the authors state.

As Christian parents, we invest in our children’s character development, recognizing the long term effect of actions today. If we want our children to be able to hold a job, manage their finances, be healthy, be honorable members of the community, do good, help others, and be ready for heaven then, “. . . the first lesson to be taught them is self-control; for no undisciplined, headstrong person can hope for success in this world or reward in the next.”⁴ Self-control is a skill and can be learned, developed and improved throughout life. It is best if training begins in infancy and continues throughout life, but the good news is that children (and adults) can improve their self control even if they missed out on training in the beginning.

So how do you help your children improve their self-control?⁵ Be trustworthy. Starting in infancy children need to know they can count on the adults in their lives, not just for their physical needs but also for security, love, and consistency in boundaries and discipline. In the first years of life good parents set age-appropriate boundaries and stick to them. As children grow, the boundaries may change to adapt to their new abilities, but at each stage of life parents must provide boundaries, structure, and consistency.

Don’t confuse teaching self-control with being controlling. Parents who micro-manage or force children to be compliant are actually not helping their child develop self-control but rather teaching them to be dependent on someone

else to make choices, control their actions, etc. Sometimes this is easier, and may get quicker results, but in the long run the child is not learning self-control.

KEY IDEAS:

- Ages 6 to 9: When your child is frustrated, help them walk away and calm down. Encourage your child to do this on their own when they feel angry or frustrated.
- Ages 10 to 12: It is really important to help your child learn to take time to think before acting. Helping your child think through situations out loud is a good way to help teach them how to stop and think.
- Ages 13 to 17: Teens need to learn to think about the long-term consequences. Teens can learn to talk through problems and take time to respond. Teach that yelling, hitting, slamming doors, or gossiping are not acceptable or helpful responses to a situation. If needed, discipline your teen. Taking away privileges helps reinforce the message that self-control is an important skill.
- For more practical tips on helping children of different ages learn self-control, do a search for the keyword self-control online at kidshealth.org/parent/, and read the resources recommended on the second page of this newsletter, and the citations below.

See References on page 2



This newsletter was created by CIRCLE, a service linking Seventh-day Adventist educators and resources globally. Read archived issues of parent newsletters at circle.adventist.org/browse/?browse_node=756

IN THE BIBLE

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. *Galatians 5:22-23*

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. *2 Peter 1: 5-7*

IN NATURE

With your child, observe how many animals display self-control. Predators show self-control while waiting for prey. They must be very patient, even if they are hungry. Animals like lions and wolves show lots of patience while their young climb on them, bite their tails, and scratch!

Self-Control Article References

- 1 & 3. *A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety*, 2010, www.pnas.org/content/108/7/2693.full.pdf+html and *Toddler's self-control predicts success more than IQ*, 2011, tinyurl.com/7dogkd3
2. *High self-control predicts good adjustment, less pathology, better grades, and interpersonal success*, 2004, *Journal of Personality*, tinyurl.com/76c9q9r
4. *Child Guidance*, by Ellen White, p 91
5. *Teaching Children the Art of Self-Control*, <http://tinyurl.com/6oghwwy>

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- *Kids Health*, kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/self_control.html
- *Teaching Young Children Self-control Skills*, National Association of School Psychologists, www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/behavior%20template.pdf
- *10 Christian Values Every Kid Should Know*, by Donna J. Habenicht, 2000
- *Boundaries With Kids*, by Henry Cloud and John Townsend, 1998
- *Boundaries With Teens*, by John Townsend, 2006
- *Child Guidance*, by Ellen G White, especially page 39

- If your family has a cat, encourage your child to watch it stalk a shoelace or cat toy and pounce. Look at how it moves its body, tail, ears, and feet.
- Dog owners often use treats to teach obedience. Take time with your child to watch how your dog controls himself for his treat. Watch how a dog moves his tail, head, and ears when he is calm (controlled) and when he is excited (not controlled).
- Watch the birds at your feeder. Chickadees eat in a certain order. The ones lower on the hierarchy must wait their turn.
- Help your child think about their own self-control. Talk through the following questions:
 - What kinds of things do you do to help you wait? What do you do to help keep your self-control when someone is bothering you? If your child has trouble waiting or keeping their temper work with them to make a list of things they can do when they are waiting or what they can do when start feeling angry. Then, help them do/remember those things during the day.

Produced

Fall 2011
circle.adventist.org

Issue Author

Rosemary Bailey
rjbailey@andrews.edu

Editor

Glynis Bradfield
glynisb@andrews.edu

Graphic Designer

Robert Mason
masondesign@me.com

The First Lesson: Self-control

Many people were surprised at the findings of a research paper released January 2011. The researchers discovered that self-control predicts physical health, personal finances, and other outcomes. In fact, they found that self-control is more important than IQ for success in life.¹ Self-control is what people use to “manage their lives, hold their tempers, keep their diets, fulfill their promises, . . . save money, persevere at work, keep secrets, and so forth.”² And the good news is that self-control can be improved over time. “Children whose self-control improved over time had better performance as adults than those whose did not, suggesting that interventions to improve self-control can make a difference down the line. Improvements can come at an individual level, as well. We do believe good parenting can improve self-control and improve life success,”³ the authors state.

As Christian parents, we invest in our children’s character development, recognizing the long term effect of actions today. If we want our children to be able to hold a job, manage their finances, be healthy, be honorable members of the community, do good, help others, and be ready for heaven then, “. . . the first lesson to be taught them is self-control; for no undisciplined, headstrong person can hope for success in this world or reward in the next.”⁴ Self-control is a skill and can be learned, developed and improved throughout life. It is best if training begins in infancy and continues throughout life, but the good news is that children (and adults) can improve their self control even if they missed out on training in the beginning.

So how do you help your children improve their self-control?⁵ Be trustworthy. Starting in infancy children need to know they can count on the adults in their lives, not just for their physical needs but also for security, love, and consistency in boundaries and discipline. In the first years of life good parents set age-appropriate boundaries and stick to them. As children grow, the boundaries may change to adapt to their new abilities, but at each stage of life parents must provide boundaries, structure, and consistency.

Don’t confuse teaching self-control with being controlling. Parents who micro-manage or force children to be compliant are actually not helping their child develop self-control but rather teaching them to be dependent on someone

else to make choices, control their actions, etc. Sometimes this is easier, and may get quicker results, but in the long run the child is not learning self-control.

KEY IDEAS:

- Ages 6 to 9: When your child is frustrated, help them walk away and calm down. Encourage your child to do this on their own when they feel angry or frustrated.
- Ages 10 to 12: It is really important to help your child learn to take time to think before acting. Helping your child think through situations out loud is a good way to help teach them how to stop and think.
- Ages 13 to 17: Teens need to learn to think about the long-term consequences. Teens can learn to talk through problems and take time to respond. Teach that yelling, hitting, slamming doors, or gossiping are not acceptable or helpful responses to a situation. If needed, discipline your teen. Taking away privileges helps reinforce the message that self-control is an important skill.
- For more practical tips on helping children of different ages learn self-control, do a search for the keyword self-control online at kidshealth.org/parent/, and read the resources recommended on the second page of this newsletter, and the citations below.

See References on page 2



This newsletter was created by CIRCLE, a service linking Seventh-day Adventist educators and resources globally. Read archived issues of parent newsletters at circle.adventist.org/browse/?browse_node=756



IN THE BIBLE

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. *Galatians 5:22-23*

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. *2 Peter 1: 5-7*



IN NATURE

With your child, observe how many animals display self-control. Predators show self-control while waiting for prey. They must be very patient, even if they are hungry. Animals like lions and wolves show lots of patience while their young climb on them, bite their tails, and scratch!

Self-Control Article References

- 1 & 3. *A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety*, 2010, www.pnas.org/content/108/7/2693.full.pdf+html and *Toddler's self-control predicts success more than IQ*, 2011, tinyurl.com/7dogkd3
2. *High self-control predicts good adjustment, less pathology, better grades, and interpersonal success*, 2004, *Journal of Personality*, tinyurl.com/76c9q9r
4. *Child Guidance*, by Ellen White, p 91
5. *Teaching Children the Art of Self-Control*, <http://tinyurl.com/6oghwwy>

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- *Kids Health*, kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/self_control.html
- *Teaching Young Children Self-control Skills*, National Association of School Psychologists, www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/behavior%20template.pdf
- *10 Christian Values Every Kid Should Know*, by Donna J. Habenicht, 2000
- *Boundaries With Kids*, by Henry Cloud and John Townsend, 1998
- *Boundaries With Teens*, by John Townsend, 2006
- *Child Guidance*, by Ellen G White, especially page 39

- If your family has a cat, encourage your child to watch it stalk a shoelace or cat toy and pounce. Look at how it moves its body, tail, ears, and feet.
- Dog owners often use treats to teach obedience. Take time with your child to watch how your dog controls himself for his treat. Watch how a dog moves his tail, head, and ears when he is calm (controlled) and when he is excited (not controlled).
- Watch the birds at your feeder. Chickadees eat in a certain order. The ones lower on the hierarchy must wait their turn.
- Help your child think about their own self-control. Talk through the following questions:
 - What kinds of things do you do to help you wait? What do you do to help keep your self-control when someone is bothering you? If your child has trouble waiting or keeping their temper, work with them to make a list of things they can do when they are waiting or what they can do when start feeling angry. Then, help them do/remember those things during the day.

Produced

Fall 2011
circle.adventist.org

Issue Author

Rosemary Bailey
rjbailey@andrews.edu

Editor

Glynis Bradfield
glynisb@andrews.edu

Graphic Designer

Robert Mason
masondesign@me.com