

Family Viewing Guide

Character and Life Skills: **Self-control**

Grade Level: **3-5**

The Facts

The study “Self-Control and the Developing Brain” (Amanda R. Tarullo-Columbia University, Jelena Obradovic-University of British Columbia, and Magan R. Gunnar-University of Minnesota) lists the following conclusions:

1. The part of the brain, which receives messages from the prefrontal cortex, becomes more active from ages 3 to 6 years, and it is during this same developmental period that children become better able to wait for a reward and to suppress impulsive behaviors.
2. The brain gets more efficient at exerting self-control over the course of development.
3. The environment where the child grows up, temperament, and genes all influence the development of self-control. Poorer child self-control can elicit more negative parenting.
4. Children growing up in cultures that place a high emphasis on the importance of self-control tend to develop self-control abilities faster.

Start a Conversation with Your Kids

1. When and why is it important to show self-control?
2. What are some strategies you use to gain control when you need to?
3. Have you ever been in a situation when you had to show self-control? How did it go? What would have happened if you hadn't shown self-control?
4. What do you think it would be like if no one showed self-control?

Advice from the Experts

Parenting Science gives the following evidence-based tips on teaching self-control:

1. **Create an environment where self-control is consistently rewarded.** Studies confirm that our willingness to wait depends on how we weigh the risks and benefits. By rewarding children when they show self-control, they naturally learn the benefits of resisting their impulses.
2. **Support young children with timely reminders.** It's helpful to remind children about our expectations.
3. **Play games that help kids practice self-control.** Any time we ask kids to play by the rules, we're encouraging them to develop self-control. “Red Light Green Light” is a great example of a game that helps kids practice resisting their impulses.
4. **Give kids a break.** If you ask kids to go straight from one unpleasant duty to the next, their self-control is likely to suffer. Giving kids a break can help them re-charge and it's a good way to learn.
5. **Turn “have to” tasks into “want to” tasks.** Kids know that approaching tasks as if it is a nasty chore always makes things work. If parents turn chores into games, children are more motivated to participate and complete it.

