

Practical Steps

The prefrontal cortex is the area of the brain that regulates self-control. It isn't fully developed until 25 years of age. The only way to help it develop well and more quickly is through practice. Here are some great ways for you to model, and for your child to practice, self-control:

1. Make sure not to overreact in situations. Overreacting teaches your child that everything is an emergency.
2. Anytime your child gives up something for something he/she wants more, they're developing self-control. If they really want something it's actually GOOD for them to wait until their birthday/Christmas to get it.
3. Remind your child that she gets to CHOOSE her response to situations. Our response is our choice.
4. Encourage your child to take on activities that require self-control, like caring for a neighbor's pet/flowers or a repeated chore.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9 an analogy that teaches us about self-discipline. He tells us that when we enter a race, we're to go into strict training so we can run in order to win the prize. Training requires great self-control. What are you helping your child train for?

"Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever." 1 Corinthians 9:25

Source: ministrytoparents.com

Maybe you've heard of the experiment where a child was put in a room with a marshmallow. A teacher tells the child, "I have to leave the room for a moment. If you don't eat the marshmallow while I'm gone, I'll give you a whole handful when I get back." The video footage that's been captured watching children agonize over that small marshmallow is hilarious, but it shows us something about children: self-control is a struggle for most.

Maybe your child still tends to pitch a full-on fit when they're upset, or maybe you've watched your child stomp away pouting. Either way, we've all seen our children exhibit a LACK of self-control. We all know self-control is an important characteristic in life. You may not have known, but self-control is more important than intelligence when it comes to academic success.

So, we know self-control is vastly important, and we're probably all on the same boat in stating we WANT our children to show better self-control. The question is, HOW do we teach them that?

Teaching Emotional Self-Control



Source: ministrytoparents.com

The Concern of Self-Control

When my kids were in preschool, they sometimes threw a temper tantrum when they realized they couldn't have what they wanted. I told myself this would all get better when they were older. I longed to be past the emotional drain of a 2-year-old mad about not getting candy! Truth is, now my kids are older, there are many days I still have to work through emotional meltdowns. My kids still "lose it" at times and, at the end of the struggle, I am left wondering if this will ever pass.

Some kids are incredibly expressive when they are angry or frustrated. Some kids are reserved and withdrawn when mad. No matter how your child responds when their emotions get out of control, we know the root of helping kids tame their emotional swings is a powerful word even parents need help with - SELF-CONTROL.

Think about what sets your kid off. What's the trigger that really pushes your child over the emotional edge where they act more like Animal on the Muppets rather than your son or daughter? The root of your child's emotional outbursts, the ones that drive you crazy as a parent, is the loss of self-control. If you want to help tame your child's emotional meltdowns, then you have to start with helping your child develop self-control. It's always critical to remember that your child's emotional outbursts do not make them a bad kid! Emotional kids are just like emotional adults; we all need help embracing self-control.

The Book of Proverbs is a book of wise sayings, and there are so many incredible verses that push us to embrace self-control. I think these 2 verses will help us as parents when it comes to helping our kids with self-control:

Proverbs 25:28 (NLT)

A person without self-control is like a city with broken-down walls.

Our kids make terrible choices when they are out of control emotionally. When kids lose it they are left defenseless to many bad choices. Has any good ever come from a temper tantrum? Has an emotional meltdown ever helped your career as an adult? The answer is NO. Our kids need us to help them embrace self-control because it will help them make wise choices when they confront struggles in life!

Proverbs 29:11 (NLT)

Fools vent their anger, but the wise quietly hold it back.

I don't know about you but I never want my child to be known as a fool. In my home growing up we were not even allowed to call each other a fool until Mr. T on the A-Team made his "pity the fool" saying famous. In the Bible the word FOOL is the worst thing you could call someone. Helping our kids learn how to control their emotions actually helps them become wise. Really, that's the goal of parenting. We are here to help set our kids up to make better choices in the future - to be wise.

Model self-control when confronting your child's lack of self-control!

This is so difficult for me as a parent. When my kids are melting down, my tendency is to allow my emotions to escalate with them. I get frustrated that my child is out of control and I have to remember to slow down and stay calm. When you model self-control in tense situations you are teaching your child about self-control. You can be firm and assertive and calm all at the same time. Modeling self-control can be done while you strongly handle parenting situations.

Coach kids before tense situations arise.

When you know your child is about to confront a situation that might be difficult for them, coach them before you enter the environment. If your child struggles at grandmother's house with behavior, then, before you get out of the car, make sure and set the tone for what you expect. You will be surprised by how far a little coaching can go to help kids control their emotions.

Help your children process why their meltdowns happened AFTER the meltdown.

Never try to help your kids process why they are out of control when they are out of control. I watch parents try to help their kids process situations rationally in the heat of the moment all the time. When your child has had a meltdown, make sure and bring the situation back up later when they are calm and process how it could have gone differently. It's so critical for us to help our kids understand that, with self-control, there are always options other than melting down!