



Self-Discipline

Lesson Content

I was talking with a group of competitive swimmers, and I asked, “What’s most difficult about swimming? A young swimmer raised his hand and said, “At 5:30 in the morning my bed is much warmer than the pool.” The bottom line is that self-discipline is tough because there are always attractive, easier options luring us away from what’s best for us in the long-run.

- A brownie is more attractive than a carrot or apple
- Watching a movie is more attractive than studying for a test
- Hanging out with friends is more attractive than practicing drills

Self-discipline usually involves doing the HARD THING. This raises the key question for parents: How do we teach our children this important life skill of CHOOSING to do the things we don’t feel like doing, but we know are good for us? Here are three suggestions to help you teach this lesson.

Break large projects down into smaller bite-size pieces. Thirteen-year-old Nicholas had to prepare for a promotion exam that would elevate him to a Brown Belt in Karate. He had 30 days to practice his skills, but procrastination was setting in! His mother helped him by providing a calendar so he could schedule just a few skills to practice every day. Breaking down the task into manageable daily bites gave Nicholas the confidence to chip away at his list of skills a little bit at a time.

Give children some control over making tough choices. Another strategy for strengthening self-discipline is to have your children practice doing the hard thing the majority of time, but less than 100% of the time. If the goal is to eat healthy snacks, allow your children to choose their snacks throughout the week, but they can only choose junk food 3 times per week...all other choices need to be healthy. This strengthens the self-discipline muscle.

Put triggers in their environment. The third strategy involves the use of triggers, or visual cues that remind us to do the hard thing. When our son was in grade school, he struggled to learn his spelling words each week. So, we placed a large white board in his room. Each day he would repeatedly write some of the spelling words on the board. The presence of the whiteboard was a trigger to remind him to do the work, and it made the memorization more fun. Triggers work!

Jim Rohn said, “We must all suffer one of two pains; the pain of self-discipline, or the pain of regret. The difference is self-discipline weighs ounces, but regret weighs tons.”





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Discussion Guide

1

What stories can you tell your children about your struggles with self-discipline?

2

How could you utilize bite-size pieces, limited choices, or triggers to help your child experience self-discipline?