Teach your child to be persistent

by Michael Grose

Did you cringe when you read this headline because your child already persists at home to get what he wants?

Maybe you have a child who whines continually until someone caves in or a child who throws tantrums to get his or her own way.

There is another type of persistence that children need if they are to experience success in any area of their lives. They need to be able to persist when work gets hard or life gets tough. They need the ‘stickability’ to work through difficulties and hang in there when things don’t go their way.

Some children are more naturally predisposed to persist than others. They have a determined, even competitive streak in their temperament that doesn’t allow them to give in. These children and young people can drive themselves very hard to succeed (and their parents and teachers to distraction in the process).

Parents and teachers can develop persistence in children. It is one temperamental factor that is most likely to be impacted on by a child’s social environment.

Just as we can promote persistence we can also impede its development. We can make life easy for children so that they are not expected to persist or hang in there when things are tough.

Parents who allow children to stop work when it gets too hard, stay home from school for a minor reason or give up on a sport because they are not succeeding straight away are not doing their children any favours. These children are not developing persistence.

Parents can promote persistence by encouraging their children to keep going and not give in at the slightest hurdle or difficulty.

Parents can be sounding boards for children’s gripes but they should show confidence in their ability to cope and get through their difficulties.

“There can do it” is far more powerful in terms of promoting an attitude of persistence than “If it is a little too hard then try something else.”

Let children know that there is a correlation between effort and success. In fact, they need to learn that by GIVING EFFORT they will experience more success.

Talk about HARD WORK with your children. They need to understand that to be successful they need to do things that are NOT fun or easy. While it would be good if all work and learning was fun, in reality, this not the case.

Help children to remember times when they experienced success by HANGING IN when they were younger.

The ability to persist in the face of difficulties maybe an old-fashioned quality but it is one of best success attributes that your children will ever develop.

Quick PARENTING QUIZ

1. Can children learn how to persist?
   a) Yes
   b) No

2. Later borns are more likely to be persistent than first born children.
   a) True
   b) False

Answers: 1. a) Yes. A number of research projects have found that persistence is one characteristic that children can improve over time.
   2. a) True. Most birth order research indicates that youngest children share the quality of persistence.

“Don’t limit a child to your own learning, for he was born in another time.”

Rabbinical Saying

The most remarkable thing about my mother is that for thirty years she served the family nothing but leftovers. The original meal has never been found.

Calvin Trillin (1935 - )