

Parenting Tools:

Self-Control



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Teaching self-control is one of the most important things that parents can do for their child. By learning self-control at an early age, your child can make appropriate decisions and respond to difficult situations that can yield positive outcomes. Your child can learn to manage emotions, anxiety, and impulses well enough to resist temptations, at least most of the time. Kids need to be taught that self-control is an individual responsibility, and a parent cannot do it for them. However, you, as a parent, have the responsibility to guide your child's behavior with God's Word as your teaching tool. Learning for preschoolers happens through discovery and repetition, not through harsh words and punishments. Learning self-control happens slowly through childhood. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..." says Galatians 5:22-23.

Some steps to developing self-control in your child:

1. Build trust. Parents who are responsive to their child's needs foster trust. Every time parents attempt to soothe anxiety and foster a feeling of safety and acceptance, parents help their child reach a more mature stage of self-control.
2. Model appropriate behavior. When parents cannot manage their own emotions and react with anger, it teaches children to respond in this manner as well. As parents, you must learn to regulate your own emotions, so you can stay calm and loving with your child.
3. Set limits. When we set limits that our child accepts, it helps them practice self-control. Make sure the limits are acceptable to you and your spouse, and make sure that your child understands the limits you are setting.

4. Explain impulses. Help your child become aware of his or her impulses before they lead to a bad choice.

5. Allow do-overs. Children learn from experience far more than they learn from words. The best way to increase a child's learning is with repetition. After you have completed instructive corrections, make sure to give your child a chance to "try again." Make the experience a teachable moment. Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I control my emotions and anger?
- Do I respond in a loving and kind way when I discipline my child?
- Does my child understand the limits and rules?
- Do I make teachable moments?

God will help you through these challenging years if you only seek His help. It will not be easy, but it will be rewarding as you see your child grow and develop in God's grace and love in the years ahead. Find strength in Luke 11:9, "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find..."