

From the Health Clinic



Mrs. Maureen Earner (mearner@stambroseschool.org)



"I should try that. I have trouble watching what I say too."

Teaching Your Child Self-Control

When children melt down in the middle of a crowded store, at a holiday dinner with extended family, or at home, it can be extremely frustrating. But parents can help children learn self-control and teach them how to respond without just acting on impulse.

Teaching self-control is one of the most important things that parents can do for their children because these skills are some of the most important for success later in life.

Helping Children Learn Self-Control

By learning self-control, children can make appropriate decisions and respond to stressful situations in ways that can yield positive outcomes.

For example, if you say that you are not serving ice cream until after dinner, your child may cry, plead, or even scream in the hopes that you will give in. But with self-control, your child can understand that a temper tantrum means you will take away the ice cream for good and that it's wiser to wait patiently.

Here are a few suggestions on how to help children learn to control their behavior:

Up to Age 2

Infants and toddlers get frustrated by the large gap between the things they want to do and what they are able to do. They often respond with temper tantrums. Try to prevent outbursts by distracting your little one with toys or other activities.

For children reaching the 2-year-old mark, try a brief timeout in a designated area - like a kitchen chair or bottom stair - to show the consequences for outbursts and teach that it is better to take some time alone instead of throwing a tantrum.

Ages 3 to 5

You can continue to use timeouts, but rather than setting a specific time limit, end timeouts once your child has calmed down. This helps children improve their sense of self-control. And praise your child for not losing control in frustrating or difficult situations.

Ages 6 to 9

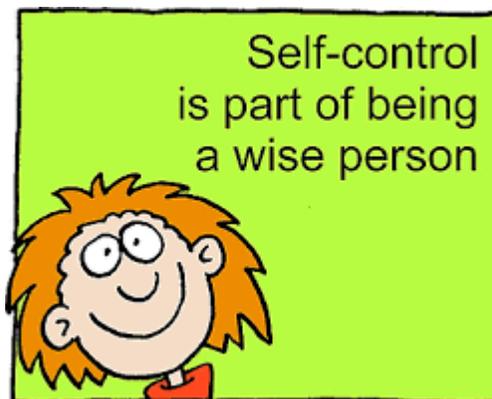
As children enter school, they are better able to understand the idea of consequences and that they can choose good or bad behavior. It may help your child to imagine a stop sign that must be obeyed and think about a situation before responding. Encourage your child to walk away from a frustrating situation for a few minutes to cool off instead of having an outburst. Praise children when they do walk away and cool off - they're more likely to use those skills again.

Ages 10 to 12

Older children usually better understand their feelings. Encourage them to think about what is causing them to lose control and then analyze it. Explain that sometimes situations that are upsetting at first do not end up being so awful. Urge children to take time to think before responding to a situation. Compliment them as they use their self-control skills.

Ages 13 to 17

By now children should be able to control most of their actions. But remind teens to think about long-term consequences. Urge them to pause to evaluate upsetting situations before responding and talk through problems rather than losing control, slamming doors, or yelling. If necessary, discipline your teen by taking away certain privileges to reinforce the message that self-control is an important skill. Allow him or her to earn the privileges back by demonstrating self-control.



When Children Are Out of Control

As difficult as it may be, resist the urge to yell when you are disciplining your children. Instead, be firm and matter of fact. During a child's meltdown, stay calm and explain that yelling, throwing a tantrum, and slamming doors are unacceptable behaviors that have consequences - and say what those consequences are.

Your actions will show that tantrums will not get children the upper hand. For example, if your child gets upset in the grocery store after you have explained why you will not buy candy, do not give in - thus demonstrating that the tantrum was both unacceptable and ineffective.

Also, consider speaking to your child's teachers about classroom settings and appropriate behavior expectations. Ask if problem-solving is taught or demonstrated in school.

And model good self-control yourself. If you are in an irritating situation in front of your children, tell them why you are frustrated and then discuss potential solutions to the problem. For example, if you have misplaced your keys, instead of getting upset, tell your children the keys are missing and then search for them together. If they do not turn up, take the next constructive step (like retracing your steps when you last had the keys in-hand). Show that good emotional control and problem solving are the ways to deal with a difficult situation.

