

## Character Trait for March, 2015 – Self Control

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The Character trait for the month of March, 2015 is “Self-control” which is defined as having power and control over one’s emotions, actions, and words and *not* relying upon reactive impulses. Another way of putting it: self-control involves thinking about your words and actions, and the possible consequences they might have on the situation you’re in, *before* making choices, so that the choices you make are the right ones for you.

*Why does self-control matter?*

Developing a strong sense of self control not only helps us get along with others, it prevents those “impulsive, first reaction” behavior patterns from emerging into potentially destructive behavior *habits* for children and adults alike – some of which have dangerous or negative outcomes which can’t be altered once carried out. As Christian Evangelist Joyce Meyer once said, “I have learned that I really do have discipline, self-control, and patience. But they were given to me as a seed, and it’s up to me to choose to develop them.”

Helping our family members develop this important behavior pattern will help them in life as they face choices such as going along with the crowd versus *not* following everyone else when the situation can get you into trouble, or *not* going after instant gratification solutions when the “inner voice” – that place where a strong sense of right and wrong resides – tells them that if they will just think things through before taking actions, a greater, more satisfying result awaits them. As Theodore Roosevelt once said, “With self-discipline most anything is possible.”

So how do we help our families – or maybe even ourselves – develop a strong sense of self control? Here are a few examples of positive steps to take:

1. Start by recognizing that emotions are always involved when it comes to making a quick, impulsive decision to do or say something which might get us into “hot water”.
2. Make note of those situations which ignite our emotions and devise a “plan of action” on how to best deal with those *before* being confronted with them!
3. Learn how to “count to 10” or take some deep breaths before reacting to overwhelming or negative situations. Just because others demand an “immediate response” doesn’t mean one has to be given right away.
4. Peer pressure is *not* a valid reason for doing something you’re not comfortable doing. Teenagers can come up with practical “responses” they can say when classmates try to talk them into doing things they shouldn’t. Help them understand that a major part of being a person of integrity includes being someone who does what is right, even when no one is looking – or – *when everyone is doing what isn’t right!* Example: No, I’m not going over to “So and So’s” house with you. I can’t afford to stay out after my curfew. If I do, I won’t get to [*fill in the blank with something cool!*] because I’ll be grounded.”
5. Make a plan of action for yourself whenever you *know* you’ll be walking into a stressful / confrontational situation. Write down answers to question about “what will I do if...” and then make the effort to practice them before the “real situation” presents itself.

6. Map out the consequences of the options available to you and then decide what consequence you'd rather live with, and then make your decision for a plan of action from that.

Self-control, when developed and utilized, helps anyone keep all options open in both short term situations and long term life decisions. When we teach our children self-control we offer them a tool for success in life! A Psychological study completed in 2005 at the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, on self-discipline studies, the following conclusion was put forth:

In a longitudinal study of 140 eighth-grade students, self-discipline measured by self-report, parent report, teacher report, and monetary choice questionnaires in the fall predicted final grades, school attendance, standardized achievement-test scores, and selection into a competitive high school program the following spring. In a replication with 164 eighth graders, a behavioral delay-of-gratification task, a questionnaire on study habits, and a group-administered IQ test were added. Self-discipline measured in the fall accounted for more than twice as much variance as IQ in final grades, high school selection, school attendance, hours spent doing homework, hours spent watching television (inversely), and the time of day students began their homework. The effect of self-discipline on final grades held even when controlling for first-marking-period grades, achievement-test scores, and measured IQ. These findings suggest a major reason for students falling short of their intellectual potential: their failure to exercise self-discipline.

The conclusion to several other studies on self-control back this study's conclusion. The positive side of the conclusion is this. Those who develop and utilize self-control in their lives have increased predictions of "good adjustment, less pathology, better grades, and more interpersonal success."

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