

Developing Self-Control

Working in schools can be stressful!

These articles are intended to help the great people who work in schools.

Self control is important to intrinsic motivation - motivating yourself, rather than seeking extrinsic rewards

Praise effort NOT intelligence

Highlight the importance of self-control

Watch and discuss the 'Marshmallow Test'

Demonstrate setting your own goals using 'When I...then I ...' language

Motivation is the art of getting people to do what you want them to do because they want to do it.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Helping students develop self-control is important, not only for their behaviour but also for their ability to stay on task and complete things. Developing intrinsic motivation (*the internal drive to focus and remain on task*) is far more helpful than constantly trying to motivate them through extrinsic means - *carrot and stick!* The following are suggested strategies to help develop self control.

Praise Effort Instead of Intelligence

Stanford Professor Carol Dweck has researched and written a great deal about the importance of praising hard work and persistence in overcoming challenges and helping people identify the strategies they used. This reinforces a 'growth mindset' - one where people feel energised and knowledgeable about how to overcome barriers.

Dweck contrasts this with a 'fixed mindset' that is promoted by praising intelligence ("You are so smart getting that finished so quickly.") People with this kind of 'fixed' perspective tend to want to look "smart" and value that more than learning.

To praise effort instead of intelligence, it can be helpful to describe or question, for example: "*You really listened to the other questions students were asking and clearly tried to think of an original one. That really stood out!*"

Help Understand and Develop Self-Control

The psychologist Walter Mischel initiated the famous 'marshmallow experiment' 40 years ago. Mischel left a succession of 4-year-olds in a room with a marshmallow. They could eat the marshmallow at any time. However, if they didn't eat the marshmallow and waited for him to come back, they could then have two marshmallows.

Only one out of three students had the self-control to wait. The children who waited longer went on to get higher academic scores. They got into better universities and had, on average, better adult outcomes. The children who rang the bell quickest were more likely to become bullies. They received worse teacher and parental evaluations 10 years on and were more likely to have drug problems at age 32.

A great way to introduce students or colleagues to the concept is through viewing Joachim de Posada's TED video - Don't Eat the Marshmallow. After viewing the video discuss examples of 'marshmallows' they face and how they develop the self-control to stay focused and not be distracted.

Model and Encourage Self-Set Goals

Setting our own goals ensures that we feel a sense of autonomy and helps us to develop self-discipline. Modeling and encouraging the following language pattern can be helpful. 'When I...Then I...'

When I have completed the first 10 maths questions on my homework, then I'll watch TV for 30 minutes.

When I have studied for 30 minutes, then I'll have a snack and break for 15 minutes.

When I have completed this task then I'll take a coffee break.

Steve Francis MScM, BEd, DipT, CSP

www.stevefrancis.net.au

Steve Francis is an expert in work-life satisfaction and is the author of three books, 'Time Management For Teachers', 'A Gr8 Life...Live it now!' and 'First Semester Can Make or Break You!'. He was a Principal for 20 years. Steve lives in Brisbane with his wife and two school aged children. For further strategies read Larry Ferlazzo's "Helping Students Motivate Themselves" and "Self-Driven Learning: Teaching Strategies for Student Motivation".

