

Resilience, Emotional Intelligence, and Marshmallows: Preparing Our Children for Success in the World

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“We’ve created a safe, nonjudgmental environment that will leave your child ill prepared for real life”

The Marshmallow Study

- Conducted by Walter Mischel, starting in 1968, at Stanford University
- Over 600 Kindergarten children participated
- 70% ate the treat before researcher returned (average delay- 3 minutes)

“Don’t! The Secret of Self-Control” by Jonah Lehrer.

New Yorker Magazine. May 18 2009

“Low-Delay” v. “High-Delay” Kids

- **Low-delay kids** had more behavior and attention problems at school and at home
- They had more problems with friendships and in dealing with stressful situations
- As adults they had higher BMIs and more problems with drugs and alcohol
- **High-delay kids** scored on average 210 points higher on their S.A.T.s than low-delay kids



The Cognitive Hypothesis

For the past 20 years education has been driven by what is being called “the cognitive hypothesis”; success in life, especially academic life, is due primarily to intelligence, as measured by IQ tests

“Non-Cognitive Skills”

More recently, there’s been an interest in a different set of skills and qualities now described as “non-cognitive skills”.

Or, “Character”

Character

Moral Character

- Generosity
- Empathy
- Kindness
- Fairness
- Integrity

Performance Character

- Effort
- Diligence
- Persistence
- Self-control
- Curiosity
- Grit
- Conscientiousness
- Zest

“Even as a child Julie was essentially uncurious. You could walk in the door with an aardvark on a leash and she wouldn’t ask why, and I suspect this lack of curiosity was, more than anything else, the reason Julie was never much of a student.”

Richard Russo
Straight Man

Grit

- Angela Duckworth's construct
- “Passionate commitment and unswerving dedication to a mission”

The Grit Scale

1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.

Very much like me

Mostly like me

Somewhat like me

Not much like me

Not like me at all

2. Setbacks (delays and obstacles) don't discourage me.

3. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.

4. I am a hard worker.

5. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue (follow) a different one.

Conscientiousness

- Conscientiousness refers to individual differences in the propensity to follow socially prescribed norms for impulse control, to be task- and goal-directed, to be planful, delay gratification, and follow norms and rules
- By definition, conscientiousness is not a single, unitary entity. Rather, it is better thought of as a conglomeration of more specific traits and trait domains.

Brent Roberts research on conscientiousness has revealed 5 replicable facets of conscientiousness:

1. **Orderliness:** The propensity to be organized and neat versus messy and disorganized
2. **Self-control:** The propensity to inhibit prepotent responses
3. **Industriousness:** The propensity to work hard
4. **Responsibility:** The propensity to be reliable, especially in social situations
5. **Traditionality:** The propensity to follow socially proscribed norms and traditions



“Now, remember, be the yourself we talked about.”

Why Are Character Traits Important?

- One in seven high school graduates has a G.E.D.
- Young adults who leave high school and opt for a G.E.D. are, as a group, considerably smarter than high school dropouts
- Yet, when looking at young adults (early 20's) on measures of annual income, unemployment, divorce, and substance abuse, G.E.D. recipients are indistinguishable, as a group, from high school dropouts

Prospective Studies

- Angela Duckworth: Assessed 8th graders at the beginning of the school year on measures of IQ and “self-discipline”
- The measures of self-discipline were better predictors of G.P.A. at the end of the year than was the student’s IQ score

Prospective Studies

- Measures of self-control/discipline are more predictive of college success than any combination of standard academic scores such as G.P.A., S.A.T. score, class rank, or IQ
- A New Zealand study measured self-control between the ages of 3 and 11 and then assessed the subjects at age 32
- Self-control in the childhood predicted overall health, credit rating, legal problems, divorce, and substance abuse

“We acquire [virtues] by first having put them into action... we become just by the practicing of just actions, self-controlled by exercising self-control, and courageous by performing acts of courage”

Aristotle

Gabriele Oettingen at N.Y.U

Three Goal Setting Strategies

Optimists: Indulging

- Imagining the future they want- the 'A' on the test, the summer job- and imagining how wonderful it will be
- This feels good, but is not associated with actually attaining the goal
- “Wishful thinking”

Pessimists: Dwelling

- Imagining all the potential roadblocks- present, and future- and becoming discouraged
- Not associated with success

Waiting for the Motivation Fairy



Mental Contrasting

- Envisioning a positive outcome WITH a realistic analysis of the potential obstacles
- The student develops “implementation intentions”
- I.D.D.
- Also known as M.A.P.s: Motivated Action Plans

Mental Contrasting

- Implementation Intentions or M.A.P.s are specific, proximal plans to overcome obstacles and continue on with one's “unswerving dedication to the mission”
- Often in the form of “if-then” rules: “If I become bored and restless doing homework I will walk around the block and return to the work rather than check my Facebook page”

Recent Marshmallow-Related Studies

- Self-control is a better predictor of academic performance than is a child's I.Q. score
- Brain imaging research suggests that self-control is associated with the ability to direct attention

Strategic Allocation of Attention

Mischel observed that high-delay kids distracted themselves:
covering their eyes, singing songs,
hiding under the table

Anything but looking at the
marshmallow



Strategic Allocation of Attention

Mischel taught a new group of 5-year olds simple tricks to significantly increase their self-control:

picture the marshmallow as a cloud or as only a picture inside an imaginary frame

Mindfulness Exercises

- Observing the breath
- Eating
- Listening
- Smell
- Touch
- Seeing

Definitions of Commitment

- A pledge or promise: obligation
- The act of committing, pledging, or engaging oneself
- The story we tell ourselves
- The choice to limit our choices

Definitions of Acceptance

- To agree or consent to
- To regard as true or valid
- To take or receive what is offered
- To accommodate or reconcile oneself to

Commitment and Acceptance: Two Sides of the Same Coin

To Be A
Good
Team-
mate

Effort,
Frustration,
and
Sacrifice

Commitment and Acceptance: Two Sides of the Same Coin

To Be A
Good
Student

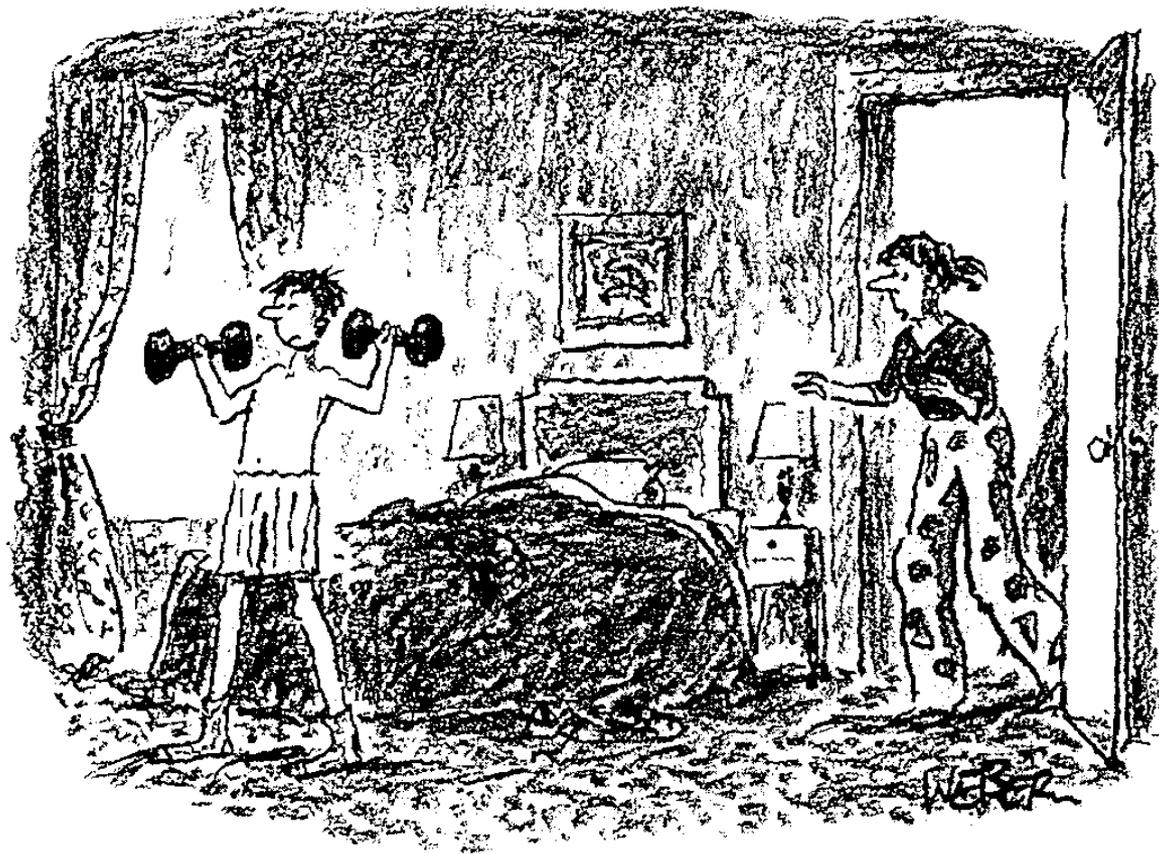
Effort,
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Growing Resilient Young Adults

- Regular exercise
- Healthy diet
- Good sleep habits
- Friendships and community connections
- School success
- Clear, (reasonably) consistent expectations

Growing Resilient Young Adults

- Structure and Routine
- Listen and validate
- Model/Teach self-care: Think out loud as you cope and problem solve
- Create context and narrative (spiritual, philosophical, historical) so that effort and struggle have meaning
- Acknowledge mistakes and move on



“Let me help you, Dear”