

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

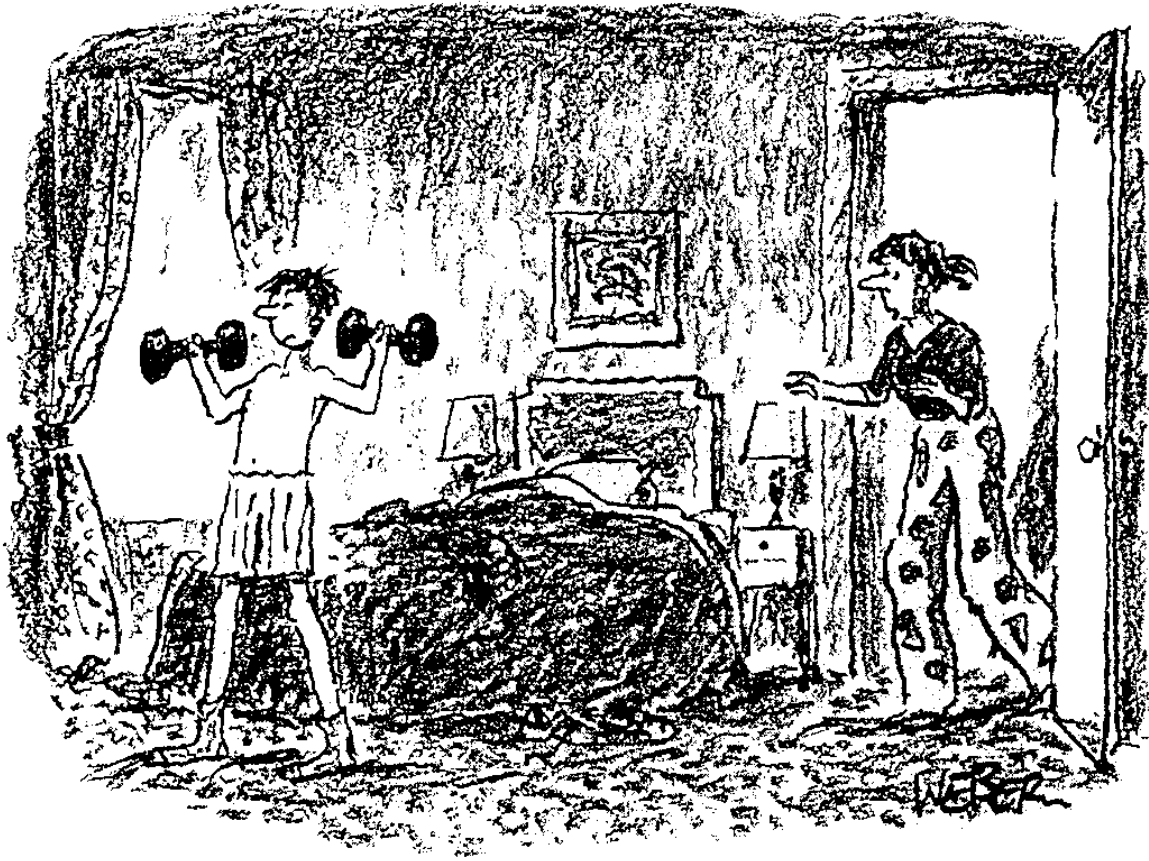
Effort,
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Growing Resilient Young Adults

- 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”