

What Happened to Self-Control?

I am delighted to be a grandmother and I enjoy the time I spend with my two-year-old granddaughter. There are days she greets me with “I had a fit!” And where she may not be able to tell me clearly what she had done, she will tell me she went to time-out. As a grandmother, I am pleased that she recognizes when she loses control and knows that losing self-control results in a consequence. Learning to manage her self-control and being held accountable for her actions will serve her well throughout her entire life.

Self-control is choosing to manage one’s emotions, desires, or actions and respecting the boundaries of others. It can be defined as having willpower, restraint, self-discipline, calm, and self-restraint.

First, when you discipline youth for self-control you are teaching them to behave from an internal frame of reference rather than from the external control of an authority figure-parent, teacher, or babysitter. Self-control is a necessary tool in achieving good character.

Second, it is important to teach youth to be respectful and listen to others with whom they disagree. A self-disciplined person is able to understand and project themselves in another person’s world. He/she has a respect for individual differences and is able to control his/her own speaking to allow someone else to talk. He/she respects the differences of opinions and can learn from others. It should be a concern for all of us that the media is showing more heated discussions at forums, meetings and in Congress. People screaming at each other are not good examples for youth. We need to insist that losing self control when working on community/national concerns is not acceptable.

Third, self-control is respecting the boundaries of others. A person who does not respect boundaries and takes things that don’t belong to him/her shows a lack of willpower, self-discipline, and respect.

Fourth, setting goals and working towards them is a key part of self-control. How many of us face the dilemma of fun versus satisfaction. A child or adult when armed with self-discipline can confidently chose satisfying activities, such as doing homework, rather than the “fun” shortcut of copying someone else’s work.

Fifth, teaching your child to be able to forego one’s own pleasure and personal gratification for the greater good is self-discipline. It is only when forced to make sacrifices does one truly learn the value of what one has.

My granddaughter walked into my basement storeroom the other day and exclaimed, “What a mess!” I shall take the hint and model self-discipline by cleaning up the storage area! It is time to hold myself accountable. For more information on teaching youth good character consider reading [Twenty Teachable Virtues](#) by Barbara Unell & Jerry Wyckoff.

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