

Tough Love

Teaching kids self-control & responsibility



Apr 2013

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A parenting
special by
Dr Justin Coulson

Apr 2013



This Month...

- Mo 1 Easter Monday
Su 7 **Divine Mercy
Jesus Lives!**
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Who are you?**
Tu 16 St Bernadette
Soubrious
Su 21 **Easter 4
The Good
Shepherd**
Tu 23 St George
Th 25 **ANZAC Day**
Fr 26 St Mark
Su 28 **Easter 5
Love One
Another**
Mo 29 St Catherine of
Siena

Self-control is the ability to say “no” when you really want to say “yes”, or to say “yes” when you’d prefer to say “no”!

Self-control is delaying gratification and controlling our impulses.



Print version

A classic experiment on self-control

In 1972 one of the most iconic, well-known psychology experiments of all time was conducted by a psychologist named Walter Mischel. Mischel wanted to discover how children responded to an opportunity to exercise self-control. He gave a bunch of children aged between 4 and 6 years a simple test. One at a time, the children sat at a table and were given a marshmallow on a plate. They were told they could eat it now, or if they waited a few minutes until he returned they could have two! (They actually had to wait fifteen minutes in total.)

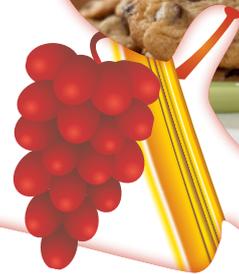


Here's some superb (and cute) footage re-enacting how it looked.

Mischel conducted follow up studies with his original participants later on and found that those who exercised self-control enjoyed greater success in a variety of ways later in their lives compared to those with less interest in self-regulation.

Other research has shown that compared with people who have high self-control, people with low self-control die younger, have more psychiatric issues and disorders, are less healthy, are more likely to be obese, smoke, drink or use drugs, are more likely to have unsafe (and impulsive) sex, drive drunk, and commit crimes! And those with more self-control have better relationships, more successful work lives, and have higher wellbeing.

What a list!



So how do we teach it to our children?

There are two important issues to be aware of. First, if we constantly try to influence and subtly (or explicitly) control our children they will not develop self-control. That's because we will be in control.

Decades of research shows that being too controlling of our kids is bad for their development. They don't become responsible. They simply wait to be controlled.

Second, demanding that a child show self-control and be responsible can sometimes be too much, too soon. We must ensure we are encouraging our children to do things that are age-appropriate. (Additionally, making such demands ironically means we're in control rather than them, and we're being responsible!)

To teach self-control (and impulse control/ delayed gratification) to your children,

1. *Be a model*

If you are calm, intentional, and 'in control' of yourself, your children will learn from your behaviour. However, if you are explosive or 'lose control', your children will learn the same behaviour no matter how much you 'demand' something better of them. If you leave mess, don't exercise, or stare at a computer all day, the kids will follow your example.

2. *Set limits*

Children will be far more likely to regulate their behaviour when they understand limits, particularly if they are involved in the process (where appropriate).

For tips on setting limits, check out this [blog post](#):



Print version

3. Give responsibilities

Expect children to contribute (again in an age-appropriate way. We can't ask four year-olds to do a perfect job mowing the lawn! But they can "help" with the dishes, tidying up, and so on). The more responsibilities they have, the more they need to develop responsibility and a sense of control.

When they fail to live up to their responsibilities, take their tasks/chores back a notch, and then boost it again a few weeks later. Alternatively, give those responsibilities they had to another sibling, but give additional privileges to that sibling as well (while simultaneously reducing privileges for the less responsible child). Things will change pretty fast!

4. Let your children make decisions for themselves

No, I'm not suggesting open-slayer. It's not a free-for-all. But the way that children learn how to make decisions is by making decisions – not by following directions! When a decision needs to be made, talk about the ramifications of their decisions and help them think through the consequences of their choices.

5. Talk about self control

Share this information with your children. Talk about the psychology of control. Watch the **video** with them. Laugh about it, but also share the ramifications (positive and negative) about self-control.

It may be particularly useful to encourage your children to tell you about times when they did or did not control themselves. Have them identify the outcomes of their choices to use self-control.

6. Do your own experiment

Once you've watched the video with the marshmallows and talked about it, have some fun with it. Show your children that they CAN develop self-control, and that the outcomes are worth it.

Teaching children self-control requires a delicate balance, an ability to guide rather than direct, and lots of encouragement. But if you can control yourself as you guide your children, you will be putting them on a path that leads to success in life!



Print version

What Your Child Needs from You: Creating a Connected Family

Dr Justin Coulson

A practical manual for creating a connected family, delivering concrete strategies to help parents build meaningful relationships with their children.

What your child needs from you outlines the methods through which parents can cultivate emotional availability with their children and so learn to really understand them.



Happy Families
inspired parenting



Dr Justin Coulson is a parenting expert and the author of *What Your Child Needs From You: Creating a*

***Connected Family* available from ACER press. He is available for speaking engagements via his website. Justin and his wife Kylie are the parents of 5 children.**

St George

One of the most popular saints, St George is the Patron saint of England and of soldiers. As a Roman soldier, he was beheaded on Apr 23, 303 AD by the Emperor Diocletian protesting the persecution of Christians. Icons show him on a white horse driving a spear through the head of a dragon to rescue a maiden.



Rich in symbolism, these images depict not a literal story, but an allegory of the battle between Truth and Goodness (the maiden) and evil (the dragon).

St George has inspired thousands of young people, particularly boys, brave, chivalrous and self-disciplined. His banner of the red cross of a martyr on a white background, was adopted for the uniform of Crusader Knights and later became the flag of England.

Self-Control Games

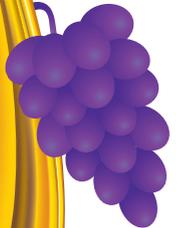
Test your kid's self-control with these little games. One of our favourite games as children was to softly tickle the soles of each other's feet to see how long we could resist scratching or squirming. We used feathers, a hair brush, wind, satin ribbons... anything we could find in the quest to make our opponent squirm. The blinking game was similar; staring into each other's eyes, the first to blink lost the round.

Self-Control leads to Self-Giving

Francine & Byron Pirola

We all know that people with a capacity for self-control can accomplish amazing things in life – athletic prowess, academic excellence, financial independence, social revolution – pretty much anything worth doing in life benefits from a disciplined approach.

It's the same with relationships. Marriage, parenting, friendships – they all do a whole lot better when the participants practice self-control and they all suffer in its absence. Here are five areas where self-control offers big payoffs in a marriage.





- 1. Encourages careful verbal expression**, helping to wisely choose an appropriate time to raise a difficult topic and respectful in the way we express our point of view. We've seen many marriages suffer when one spouse believes they have the 'right' to get anything and everything 'off-his/her-chest' whenever they felt like venting.
- 2. Allows us to be prudent with our spending**, carefully planning how to use our financial resources and respecting the values and goals of our spouse. It's not uncommon for one spouse to be more financially cautious than the other, or to have different financial goals. Self-control enables us to embrace the values of our spouse and act in a way that respects them, even when personal investment in those values is less.
- 3. Supports moderation in how we use our free time**, encouraging us to be other-centred in the decisions we make. For example, the capacity to delay 'relaxing in front of the TV' in order to be present to a child struggling with homework or to help a spouse burdened by incomplete housework, makes for a deep sense of partnership.

4. Self-control is essential when under stress or in conflictual situations, enabling us to refrain from hateful words and physical aggression.

Too often, spouses inflict damaging insults on each other because they are unable to resist the temptation to score points against each other in an argument.

5. Encourages self-mastery over our sexual expression, making us considerate and generous lovers as well as honouring our vow of fidelity. The lover who is able and willing to delay his/her own sexual gratification in order to attend to the needs of the spouse is expressing deep love.



SMART Loving
Because Every Marriage Matters
Seminars | Resources | Articles



Find out more about Catholic marriage and how you can enjoy deeper intimacy and spiritual connection.

Thinking about each of the five areas, rate yourself 0-10 in terms of how well you do in your marriage:

	Unregulated	Highly Disciplined
Verbal Expression	0...1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9...10	
Financial Management	0...1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9...10	
Time Management	0...1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9...10	
Arguments & Stress	0...1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9...10	
Sexual Expression	0...1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9...10	

Choose one area to focus on and identify a concrete action you will take to develop your self-control in that area.

- Eg, Verbal expression: I will ask my spouse if he/she is able to give me some time to talk rather than just talking AT him/her.
- Eg, Time Management: I will limit the amount of time I spend on internet recreation to three hours a week.
- Eg, Sexual Expression: I will keep my distance from the work colleague who I find sexually attractive and avoid temptation.

After one week, choose another focus, or another action to extend your capacity for self-control further.



Annunciation | Apr 8

This year, the Annunciation falls on the 8th of April, exactly 8 1/2 months before Christmas Day. It is normally celebrated on the 25th of March, which this year is in Holy Week.

Craft Activity: The Annunciation Candle

See CathFamily Activities for full instructions.

Resurrection Garden

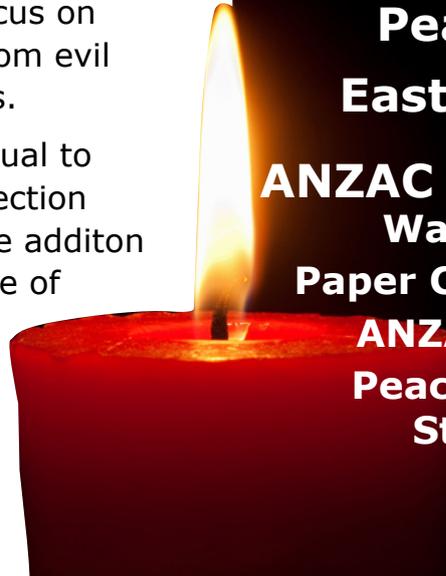
This is a great gift alternative to chocolates and a wonderful symbol of hope and joy for your family's prayer space.



Stations of Glory

Easter is not just a weekend, it's a whole season! Beginning on Easter Sunday, it runs through to Pentecost; seven weeks in duration. The colours gold and white are used during this time to signify the glory of the Lord and our joy in the resurrection. It is a time when we, as a Church, focus on the promises of Jesus to save us from evil and be with us throughout our lives.

The Stations of Glory is a prayer ritual to engage your children in the Resurrection story. Each station is marked by the addition of an extra candle leading to a blaze of candlelight.



Easter Activities

Lord of Joy

**Embracing Divine
Mercy Every Day**

Peace Tree

Easter Rituals

**ANZAC Day | Apr 25
War & Peace**

Paper Chain of Peace

ANZAC Biscuits

**Peace Prayer of
St Francis**

