

Learning how to self-control; a path to a healthy digital life

Description



I wish I had a better word to describe the current digital world but to call it a “jungle.” Because there is no standardized law and order to protect our children practically, it is operated by greed feeding off of people’s impulse desire to “consume humans’ attention.” As David S.H. Rosenthal, a retired chief scientist of the LOCKSS Program at Stanford University, said, “The digital economy

is based upon competition to consume humans'™ attention. This competition has existed for a long time, but the current generation of tools for consuming attention is far more effective than previous generations. Economies of scale and network effects have placed control of these tools in a very small number of exceptionally powerful companies. These companies are driven by the need to consume more and more of the available attention to maximize profit'• (Anderson & Rainie, 2018).

Our children are thrown into this digital jungle, often unprepared. There are many skills to teach children to survive and thrive in the digital world; however, the most critical one is self-control. Whether we like it or not, children will go online alone. We can not monitor them 24/7 and must rely solely on a child's™ discernment and decision-making skills to practice self-control. Self-control is about discipline and regulating yourself, making the right decision to ensure well-being. It doesn't™ happen overnight but develops over the years, with some significant changes occurring between the ages of 3 and 7 (Duckworth, 2018).

We've all heard about the famous experiment, Stanford marshmallow study, a clever self-control test administered to a group of 4-year-olds in the late 1960s. In the study, children were each given the option to eat one marshmallow now or wait fifteen minutes and get two. For a four-year-old, fifteen minutes could feel like an eternity, but many children already knew that two is always better than one when it comes to treats. So, the children used a variety of approaches to keep from eating the marshmallow before the fifteen minutes were up. The children most successful in doing this were those who looked away, engaged in other activities, talked to themselves in private, sang, and invented games with their hands and feet. Some even made an effort to sleep. Studies conducted in their adult life showed that those kids who could resist temptation were happier, healthier, and more successful at school and then in their careers, and had stronger relationships (Duckworth, 2018).

Furthermore, young children with poor self-regulation skills tend to make less academic progress (McClelland et al 2007; Welsh et al 2010; McClelland et al 2014). Throughout the school years, they are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and aggressive behavior problems (Martel et al 2007; Eisenberg et al 2010; Raaijmakers et al 2008; Ellis et al 2009). In the long run, kids with poor self-control are at higher risk for poor health outcomes, like obesity and drug dependency (Sutin et al 2011; Moffit et al 2011). They are more likely to commit crimes and less likely to become wealthy (Moffit et al 2011). Also have higher risk of online addiction according to each academic discipline that studies addiction, including medicine, psychology, neurology, and economics, saw correlation to habit formation and issues with self-control (Sutin et al 2011; Moffit et al 2011).

These are some profounding evidence showing how lack of self-control negatively affects all areas of a child's™ life. Here are some ways we can help children maintain self-control:

1. Avoiding risk by not putting yourself in tempting situations: Out of sight, out of mind make sense.
2. Consistently reward self-control behaviors to encourage and reinforce.
3. Making a plan for how to respond with self-control, simulating possible situations. When people consider the challenges they confront and devise detailed strategies for when, where, and how they will take action, they are more likely to succeed. (Duckworth et al., 2018) We must *Partner with educators, leaders, students, and families to foster a culture of respectful online interactions and a healthy balance in their use of technology* (ISTE standards 7b).

References

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