

Self-Discipline

- When children demonstrate self-discipline in the classroom, they make learning easier for themselves and others. A large part of becoming self-disciplined is understanding why it is important. After children understand the importance of self-discipline, they need to learn how to exercise it. Brainstorm: “What are some ways children behave who have self-discipline?”

Children who exercise self-discipline in the classroom

- Complete their assignments.
 - Stay on task.
 - Wait to be called on.
 - Work toward personal and community goals.
 - Try again and again.
 - Ignore peer pressure.
 - Choose productive rather than destructive activities.
 - Control their tempers.
- Ask the students if any of them have ever been frightened by a barking dog. Tell the class some cities have leash laws to keep dogs under control, but in some towns, dogs are allowed to roam freely. Tell the students to listen to the story of the dog that had no self-discipline.
Once there was a dog that barked and snapped at people all the time. On one occasion, the dog actually bit a man. Many people in the neighborhood were afraid of the dog. The owner of the dog realized people were afraid to come to his house, so he had no choice but to restrain the animal by putting a collar and chain on him and tying him to a tree. For weeks, the dog strutted around the yard with his new collar and shiny chain. One day some of the kinder and gentler dogs in the neighborhood came to pay him a visit. While proudly showing off his “new duds,” one of the older dogs told him, “I hope you realize your chain and collar were not given to you as a reward, but as punishment for your lack of self-discipline.” The dog went back to his tree; finally realizing his lack of self-discipline has cost him his freedom.

Ask the students if they know someone who does not practice self-discipline. Ask if people avoid undisciplined people. Tell the students having someone avoid them because of no self-discipline is not a sign of superiority, but a type of punishment. Tell the class when they practice self-discipline others will enjoy being around them.

- Tell the class that self-discipline is defined as control of one’s emotions, desires, or actions by one’s own will. Ask the students to think about situations or times they have used self-discipline. Allow several students to share. Ask the students how they would practice self-discipline in the following situations.
 1. You hear that one of your classmates was caught cheating on a test. (The student would practice self-discipline by not telling the story to others because the story may not be true. Even if the story were true, it’s best to practice the old rule, “If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything.”)

2. Someone wants to ask you a question during a time when the teacher has said for everyone to be quiet. (The student would practice self-discipline by not answering the question. Even though it is hard not to respond to a friend, students need to realize that self-discipline is sometimes not easy.)
3. Someone in your class says something ugly about you. (The student would practice self-discipline by not responding with an equally ugly comment. This is a tough lesson for children to learn, but a wise man from Bible days said, “A kind answer turns away wrath.”)

Tell students it is hard to practice self-discipline when others around them do not. Encourage students to take a few minutes and think before they respond to someone who is mistreating them. Close the lesson by asking the following questions:

1. Does using self-discipline sometimes set you apart from the crowd?
2. What would happen if you had no self-discipline?
3. What are areas in which everyone needs to demonstrate self-discipline?
4. What would the world be like if no one had any self-discipline?

- **I can do it!**

Discuss heroes who maintained self-discipline despite others' doubts, such as Thomas Edison and Wilbur and Orville Wright. Talk about the self-discipline, time, dedication, hard work, and “thick skin” required for these heroes to make their dreams come true. Invite students to think about one of their own dreams and the benefits of maintaining self-discipline to obtain it.

- On an index card, write *You tried your best and nothing less!* Punch a hole in the card, string it with ribbon, and tie the ribbon around a stuffed animal's neck. At the beginning of the day, explain that the stuffed animal will be given for the day to a student who shows great self-discipline in class. Observe students in the morning, and present the stuffed animal to a student who shows self-discipline. Explain why you have awarded the stuffed animal when presenting it. The next day, invite the student with the animal to observe classmates and give away the stuffed animal when he or she observes someone using self-discipline. Keep track of students who have received the stuffed animal. Remind the student giving the animal away, names of those who have received it so the animal is distributed fairly.

Short Lessons

- Identify strategies for practicing self-discipline, such as: counting to 10, stopping to breathe deeply several times, going for a walk, thinking about the consequences, and trying to identify what the other person is feeling. Have students give examples of when they have used these strategies.
- Identify foods that represent healthy choices, and discuss how eating properly versus not eating well affects their behavior. Your students may not believe that it makes a difference. Ask them to track “how good they feel” and see if eating has any effect on them.
- Talk about the importance of eating breakfast. How many of your students skipped breakfast on this particular day? Stress the importance of breakfast to their mental capabilities.
- Talk about athletes and how they become good enough to get their million-dollar jobs. When top athletes have these good jobs, can they quit? What happens when athletes lose self-discipline? Point out that self-discipline is a learned skill; just as athletic training is learned.
- Discuss verbal and non-verbal communication. Role-play situations in which non-verbal conflict causes problems, and discuss possible ways to control non-verbal reactions.
- Ask students to identify situations in which peer pressure could overwhelm self-discipline. Develop a list of the kinds of pressure your students face.

- Discuss the importance of good self-esteem for self-discipline. Help students understand that when they think well of themselves, it becomes easier to ask themselves to control their anger, eat healthy foods, or resist peer pressure.
- Define the qualities of “aggressive” and “assertive.” Discuss ways to get your point across without being pushy or losing your control.
- Discuss how self-discipline is important in not submitting to peer pressure. Identify strategies for using self-discipline to overcome peer pressure. (Examples could include avoiding areas where students smoke or finding friends who have similar interests.)
- Discuss examples of persons whose lack of self-discipline have affected their lives. Ask the students how they would feel if they were in prison or confined to a bed. Help students identify the advantages of exercising self-discipline over emotions and actions.