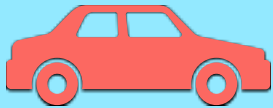


COUNSELING CORNER

Monthly school newsletter from Lutheran Counseling Services

Word of the Month: Self-Discipline



Car Conversations

Whether in the car, at the dinner table or store line, here are conversation ideas to build this quality in your child.

- Discuss the Cambridge Dictionary definition of self-discipline as a family: "the ability to make yourself do things when you should, even if you do not want to do them." Discuss things each family member knows he should do but does not want to.

Brainstorm ways to help each other stay disciplined.

- 2 Timothy 1:7: (NLT)

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

Pray as a family for God to guide each family member toward power, love & self-discipline and away from fear.

- An aspect of improving self-discipline is to be able to manage uncomfortable feelings like boredom, sadness and frustration. Talk about

When asking parents for a list of qualities they hope to foster in their children, self-discipline would make it on most any parent's list. And for good reason, because research has demonstrated that having a strong sense of self-discipline allowed students to outperform their less disciplined peers academically. In fact, self-discipline was more closely correlated with academic success than IQ (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

Defined by Merriam-Webster, *self-discipline is "correction or regulation of oneself for the sake of improvement"*. The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as *"the ability to make yourself do things when you should, even if you do not want to do them."*

As we hone in on what we would like to improve upon in our ourselves, often what comes up on the list are action items that we may not want to do. At this point in the year when New Year's resolutions are often waning, this topic catches the attention of many.

How do parents go about boosting self-discipline in their children (and themselves) when it often requires doing things we may not want to? To answer this, we can look to Shawn Achor, who wrote *The Happiness Advantage*, in which he outlines a number of principles that lead to happiness. One of these principles, (number 6) addresses self-discipline with some great ideas on how to build new habits that support success. He titles this principle "The 20-second rule: How to turn bad habits into good ones by minimizing barriers to change".

He dives in by sharing William James' notion that people are "mere bundles of habits". As parents, this makes sense as we try to instill in our children that they should develop habits to use a utensil to eat, wash their hands, make their beds, and so many other tasks throughout their development. Achor says that "we are drawn – powerfully, magnetically – to those things that are easy, convenient, and habitual, and it is



recent times each family member has felt one of these and give each other "high-fives" for getting through each situation.

- Consider that parenting with clear limits, set with empathy, is the foundation of helping your child build self-discipline. Eventually, empathetic limits become your child's own internal limits. Consider what limits you set, how you keep them, and any new limits you'd like to add. For more ideas, read [this Psychology Today article](#).

COUNSELOR CONNECTION

Reach out to your school, the LCS main office at (407) 644-4692 or lcsfl.com to connect to your school's counselor for additional support and resources on this or other topics.

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incredibly difficult to overcome this inertia." As we look to change our habits from one behavior to another more successful behavior, he goes on to say that this becomes challenging because habits are already wired and programmed for us.

What Achor offers as advice is to understand activation energy, or the time, choice or mental/physical energy necessary to complete a behavior. He advises to increase the activation energy (by adding time, choices or energy needed) for the old undesirable habit, and decrease the activation energy for the new desirable habit. The title of this principle shows up here: The 20 second rule. He found that if you make a desirable behavior easier to do, and an undesirable behavior harder to do, by even 20 seconds, you can start to impact change.

How can this be applied to parenting? If you want your children to eat more (desirable) healthy options, make them easy & quick to get to (time & energy), and give 1 or 2 choices. In contrast, put (undesirable) junk food somewhere out of the way (maybe inside a container, in a cupboard requiring extra energy to get to). Homework habits aren't what you want them to be? Make homework areas easy to get to, with a few necessary materials ready to go & unplug the game systems that lure kids away. Morning routines are a struggle? Set out clothes and make lunches the night before (reduce choice, time and energy). Achor himself shares about his desire to play more guitar and watch less TV, so he kept his guitar out in the living room and removed the batteries from the TV remote control placing them 20 seconds away. These small changes had him playing guitar nearly every day. How can you use the 20-second rule to increase self-discipline in your family?

References: Duckworth, A., & Seligman, M. (2005). Self-discipline outdoes IQ in predicting academic performance of adolescents. *Psychological Science*, 16 (12), 939-944.

Achor, S. (2010). *The happiness advantage: The seven principles of positive psychology that fuel success and performance at work*. New York: Broadway Books.

