

Life's Building Blocks, Inc.
Making Character Development Fun



Virtue of the Month – Perseverance

I know the price of success: dedication, hard work, and an unremitting devotion to the things you want to see happen.

—Frank Lloyd Wright

The heights by great men reached and kept / Were not attained by sudden flight, / But they, while their companions slept, / Were toiling upward in the night.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

You're not obligated to win. You're obligated to keep trying to do the best you can every day.

—Marian Wright Edelman

The highlighted virtue for this month is perseverance.

Perseverance is stronger than mere “persistence” or “tenacity.” People who truly embody the virtue of perseverance show extra resolve and steadfastness to overcome obstacles when an activity becomes harder, refusing to abandon a meaningful goal. We all want kids to have a healthy “can do” attitude and not to abandon a worthy effort as soon as they encounter challenges. But how do we teach our children not to be quitters? As with all character development, the key is helping them acquire virtuous habits.

Why do people lack perseverance?

It's easy to fall into a pattern of surrendering at the first sign of resistance. And it can be tough to recover from a serious disappointment. For example, children usually experience the thrill of discovery when they learn a new sport. It's exciting to be taught new skills, and many kids enjoy the success of starting out as a novice and then mastering the basics. At some point, however, the bubble bursts. Eventually, they will experience a setback. Maybe they play badly. Maybe they make a mistake that keeps them from winning. Maybe they

suddenly find themselves struggling to master the next level of skills to advance in the sport. All of a sudden, the game is just not as fun anymore.

It's no surprise that kids who reach this point can be sorely tempted to abandon that sport and try something else. If they do, however, chances are they will start a pattern. The next new activity will be pure joy for a while, and then they will hit a wall again, quit, and look for something else to try. It's critical for us as adults to break or prevent this cycle and encourage a habit of perseverance instead.

The joys of perseverance

Children naturally understand the joy of novelty. New things are always enticing to them. But it's crucial to teach them the joys of hard-won accomplishment. We need to tell them both fictional and true-life stories that celebrate the deep satisfaction that comes from seeing a difficult project through to the end.

In this month's chapter book, *To the Rescue*, Lauren Never Quits makes a pledge to help some new friends raise money to help them stay in Middlebury. At first, Lauren and the other Spruce Street Six kids have a good time preparing to sell lemonade in the park. But soon things start to go very wrong, and their fund-raising effort becomes difficult and frustrating. Giving up begins to look like an attractive option. Fortunately, with a little guidance from wise Mr. Lacey and Zaki, the "character chameleon," Lauren and her friends find the strength to carry on. When they do, they realize the tremendous satisfaction that comes from overcoming obstacles. They see that sticking with things and pushing on despite the odds feels even better than trying something new.

It can be tough to keep trying, but the good news is that the practice of perseverance can be positively addictive! If kids are not allowed to quit every time things get a little tough, they will start to experience firsthand how good it feels to see something through to the end and bask in the well-earned praise they receive. Soon, it will become second nature for them to see adversity as a chance to test and improve their abilities, rather than as a reason to bail out of an activity.

Perseverance can be a complicated virtue.

Of course, we should be careful not to push children to extremes. We must not teach our kids that they should literally *never* quit an effort. Continuing along a particular path will sometimes cause more harm than good. For example, children could suffer an injury that would make it unwise or even dangerous for them to continue to play a particular sport. Therefore, perseverance should not

be confused with excessive risk-taking or mere stubbornness. Sometimes for wisdom's and safety's sake, our efforts should be redirected.

Children must also recognize that in order for perseverance to be virtuous and a sign of good character, it must have a positive, worthwhile object. In other words, kids are not displaying the *virtue* of perseverance if they simply beg their parents over and over again for some expensive toy. Showing perseverance is also not the same as having a "win-at-all-costs" mentality. People who possess the virtue of perseverance take pride in their hard work. They do not cheat or take shortcuts. Their satisfaction comes from setting appropriate personal goals and working diligently to achieve them. Their primary aim is never just to beat or exceed others but to achieve excellent aims. Their only true competitors are themselves, since they are constantly pursuing self-improvement. They value the journey to excellence, not merely the destination.

Questions to ask your children this month:

- Have you ever quit a project or activity because it became difficult? Explain.
- How did you feel about quitting? How do you think you would have felt if you had stuck with it?
- Name some of the people you admire the most.
- What have those people accomplished? Could they have accomplished those things without the virtue of perseverance?
- When do you find it most difficult to be persistent?
- What should you do when you feel like quitting?
- How can you help your friends or siblings to persevere through a challenge?
- Are there times when it is okay to abandon an effort or activity? Give an example.
- What is the difference between being persistent and being stubborn?

