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January 2014
Metro Lutheran
Positive Parenting
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True Grit

In his new book, *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*, Paul Tough outlines the qualities kids need to succeed ... and they may surprise you. Most of us assume that success is the product of native intelligence; a loving, supportive, nurturing family; and the economic resources to access opportunities. Tough's research has uncovered five key qualities that build success. He sums up the single most important factor: "Dogged determinism in the face of adversity is 'grit.'"

Tough encourages parents, teachers, and coaches not to make life too easy or to set the bar too low. It is the satisfaction that comes with mastery and persistence that makes something worthwhile. Let them feel disappointed or frustrated or upset. Let them know that is not their permanent mailing address. Remind them of a time they battled through disappointment to successfully reaching a really hard goal. Catch your child having accomplished something that required true grit!

PERSEVERANCE: Encourage your child to stick with it, to keep trying, to set a goal that is worthwhile. Cheer them on. Let them express their frustration or disappointment, when it takes a long time or doesn't happen.

Resilience is the ability to recover from disappointments and defeats and still persist. Express belief in your child so that your child will believe in herself or himself.

What this does not mean: Your child does not need to play soccer or clarinet for a lifetime because they tried it out in fourth grade! Make sure that there is time and opportunity to explore new things.

CURIOSITY: Which brings us to curiosity! About what are you curious? Share a topic or an experience or a skill with your child that intrigues you. Ask your child, “What would you like to know more about?” Read a book together, visit a museum, interview a person who has had an amazing life. Feed curiosity. It keeps us mentally alive and engaged with life.

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS: Encourage your child to do the very best he or she can ... and then say, “That’s what I call being conscientious!” Don’t confuse this with being wildly successful. It is certainly linked to persevering, but also identifies the quality of effort your child puts into it.

OPTIMISM: Since attitude builds expectation, make sure that you frame a life in Christ as one that is filled with Jesus’ promised abundance, not one that is scarcity-driven. If our children look for life to be that glass that is half-full, rather than describe it as a glass half-empty, they are wide open to expecting that it will ultimately be filled to overflowing. Help your child to name what gives them hope, what makes them proud.

SELF CONTROL: We’ve all had a time when we watched our child and feared an imminent explosion. Our four-year old was on stage for a nursery school Christmas program, when a boy standing next to her simply couldn’t resist pulling her curly hair. I saw her form a fist, narrow her eyes, and miraculously step away from the boy to stand on another part of the stage. Now THAT was self control ... and we told her how proud we were of her, that we knew how hard it was not to hit or growl. We need to catch our kids about to explode and pull it back ... and then it is our turn to affirm, affirm, affirm.

Every one of us wants the children we know and love to succeed. We can help them build the character that is God’s desire for them, expressed through the prophet Jeremiah, “Surely I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “Plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11) Let us all help God’s plans for all children to be fulfilled.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. This year, set goals, not New Year’s resolutions. Goals are the things that invite us to persevere. They are lofty, worthy, and hard to reach, but worth all of the effort. Resolutions are the things we so often fail at ...



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and
then
we

simply give up. Catch your kids persevering at a task or goal and affirm, affirm, affirm.

2. When your child is disappointed, frustrated, or upset or when things are hard, tell your child that you believe in him or her, you know he or she can do it, and you are with them on this journey.
3. When your child persists, despite disappointment, label that “resilience,” the ability to bounce back from defeat. Express your belief in your child so that your child will believe in herself or himself.
4. Keep a “True Grit” journal, jotting down all of the examples of perseverance, curiosity, and character that your child demonstrates to the world. On the day when your child is tempted to give up, to declare a task “too hard,” to say, “I cannot do it,” get out the journal and read a few entries of examples of how they have previously faced the hard things in life and triumphed!
5. Pray as a family, thanking God for being present in your child’s life, during the hard times and the easy times, during the triumphs and the defeats, loving you all, picking you up again, and declaring that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13)