Developing Self-Regulation, Empathy, and Resilience

Bob Sornson, Early Learning Foundation

1. Start with safety and security. Fear interferes with the development of empathy. Learn to set limits with respect and love.

2. Regular family or classroom routines build a sense of predictable security for children. Well established routines also help children practice self-regulation skills.

3. Self-regulation skills are the foundation for empathy. By learning to calm themselves, regulate emotions, delay gratification, persevere, and stay focused on the right things, children develop the skills which allow them to look beyond themselves.

4. Model empathy. Notice the lives of others. Talk about your experience of using empathy, and about the times you forgot to act with empathy.

5. Tell stories that help kids see the world from the perspective of others.

6. Read great children’s literature with your kids. Great books draw children into the lives of the characters, and help them learn to see the world differently.

7. Use specific positive noticing to reinforce positive behaviors without using excessive praise.

8. Relationships matter. Help kids build relationships which inspire them to trust and care for others.
Self-Regulation and Social Skills

Essential Skills Inventory

- Separates from parents/caregivers without excessive upset
- Plays/shares with others
- Waits his/her turn
- Perseveres to complete a task
- Respects classroom rules and procedures
- Demonstrates good listening skills
- Delays gratification when necessary
- Plays well with others
- Shows interest in learning

Preschool
- Separates from parents/caregivers without excessive upset
- Plays/shares with others
- Waits his/her turn
- Perseveres to complete a task
- Respects classroom rules and procedures
- Demonstrates good listening skills

Kindergarten
- Perseveres to achieve a task
- Respects basic rules/procedures in the classroom

Grade 1
- Delays gratification when necessary
- Plays well with others
- Shows interest in learning

Grade 2
- Demonstrates empathy for fellow students
- Shows interest in learning

Grade 3
- Shows interest in learning
- Demonstrates empathy for fellow students
Simple Ideas to Share

Dr. Bob Sornson, founder of the Early Learning Foundation

Grit Matters

Grit, resilience, persistence, stick-to-it-iveness, or character. It does not matter what you call it, but it matters.

Kids with resilience are the ones who can calm themselves down when they are upset. They don’t need immediate gratification; instead they have learned to wait.

Kids with resilience are likely to feel connected to their parents, to enjoy a basic sense of safety in the world that allows them to take risks and try new things.

Kids with resilience are more likely to be able to stand up for themselves and others. If they see someone acting badly, they might step in or speak up.

Kids with resilience are more likely to have grit. They don’t mind a little struggle; they may even like it. They recognize that good outcomes take work, and appreciate the things that they earn with their sweat or with great emotional or mental effort.

Kids with resilience are better able to deal with sadness or mistakes. They know these are roadbumps, not dead ends. Good things are ahead.

Kids with resilience are more likely to work hard, love life, and build a better world. Maybe the development of resilience should be front and center in the list of learning outcomes we want for our kids both at home and at school.

Here are some basic ideas to help your kids develop grit.

1. Develop family routines for the morning, bedtime, family meals, homework, and chores. Children may not always prefer to follow the routine, but it helps them stick to the things that matter.
2. Avoid arguing with your children. Without anger, help them learn that your words are like gold.
3. Be consistent with thinking time, or time-out. Use the same words, tone, and procedure if you need to tell your child to sit quietly for a few minutes.
4. Do chores with your kids. Model grit and have some fun at the same time.
Bob Sornson, Ph.D. was a classroom teacher and school administrator for over 30 years, and is the founder of the **Early Learning Foundation**. He is committed to the belief that practically every child can have a successful early learning experience, and works with districts across the country to develop high-quality competency based Pre-K to Grade 3 programs.

Bob is the author of many publications, including *Stand Up and Speak Up for Yourself and Others* (Ferne Press), *Stand in My Shoes: Teaching Kids about Empathy* (Love and Logic Press), *The Juice Box Bully* (Ferne Press), *Meeting the Challenge* (Love and Logic Press), *Essential Math* Skills (Shell Education), and *The Pre-K to Grade 3 Essential Skill Inventories*.

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Guiding Principles for Highly Successful Parenting

This series of five seminars will help parents in your community develop the skills, behaviors, and routines to raise calm and capable children who are far more likely to be successful in school and in life. We believe it is the most effective parent learning series to be found anywhere, with results that make participants excited about sharing what they’ve learned. It was recently selected to be the parent education curriculum for the Michigan State University Extension Service.

These workshops change lives. The most frequent responses from participants include:

- If you work at the things that were taught in this course you not only improve your child’s outcomes, you improve your everyday family life.
- This course needs to be mandatory for all expecting parents and for anyone who advises parents.
- A true blessing.
- I came to learn how to manage my 6 year old and this has opened my eyes that it needs to start within myself.
- It is truly life changing

Guiding Principles is designed to be delivered in five 2 ½ hour sessions. Each session would ideally include a healthy snack for participants, available childcare, and follow-up learning activities for parents. The seminars are geared for those caring for children two to twelve years of age but will benefit parents, grandparents and guardians of children of all ages.

Guiding Principles includes the option to train local facilitators who can offer on-going training in your community. A facilitator guide, video training materials for facilitators, and the use of short videos during each session make it possible to develop a strong team of parent educators who can offer this series in your community for years to come. A simple survey can be used to track parent learning outcomes and changes in behavior that are occurring in the home.

Session topics focus on the five guiding principles for highly successful parenting.

- Develop a few high-quality family routines
- Help children develop emotional control
- Be the calm assertive parent
- Establish clear rules and strong relationships
- Allow children to make great mistakes
Session One: Developing Family Routines
This session will include a discussion of the goals of this program, which include helping parents/guardians enjoy the experience of being a parent, and helping our children become responsible and successful men and women. This session will focus on building the consistent patterns of routine behaviors in the home. Daily routines including morning, dinner, chores, homework, access to video time, and bedtime will be addressed. Participants will begin the process of building a network of parent partners who can help each other along the way.

Expected Outcomes:
- Parent/guardians will recognize the importance of high-value family routines.
- Parent/guardians will develop specific plans for the routines they want to develop in their homes.
- Parents will develop parent support networks with other workshop participants.

Session Two: Developing Emotional Control.
The importance of helping children feel safe and connected in their family, and to develop patterns of self-regulation and caring for others is the focus of this session. Parents/guardians will learn skills to neutralize their children’s attempts to argue with responsible adults and to establish thinking time routines in the home. Specific techniques will be shared, modeled and practiced.

Expected Outcomes:
- Increase positive parent-child interaction in the home.
- Develop family routines that allow children to practice self-calming, focusing, persisting, and delayed gratification.
- Parent/guardians will learn specific techniques to avoid being drawn into arguments with their children.
- Parent/guardians will learn specific techniques to establish a thinking time routine in the home.
- Parent/guardians will further develop a support group among workshop participants.

Session Three: The Calm Assertive Parent
This session will focus on teaching parents to be calm, assertive authority figures in their home, and to develop the five patterns which predict long-term success for their children. Techniques to deliver consequences without anger will be discussed, including delaying consequences and using more encouragements than discouragements.

Expected Outcomes:
- Parent/guardians will recognize the importance of adult authority over food choices in the home.
- Parent/guardians will recognize the importance of children contributing to the family by doing chores within the home.
- Parent/guardians will recognize the importance of parenting consistency in the home.
- Parent/guardians will recognize the importance of using routines in the home.
- Parent/guardians will develop a support group among workshop participants.
Session Four: Rules and Relationships
Parents/guardians will learn to give consequences without anger, and to be able to set firm limits while also building positive relationships with their children. We will consider the use of choices, enforceable statements, and learn to help children learn to solve their own problems.

Expected Outcomes:
- Parent/guardians will learn to use choices when appropriate.
- Parent/guardians will learn to use enforceable statements.
- Parent/guardians will recognize the importance consequences without anger.
- Increase positive parent-child interaction in the home.
- Parent/guardians will develop a support group among workshop participants.

Session Five: Great Mistakes and Resilience
This session will focus on the importance of allowing children to learn from mistakes, and encourage parents to value situations that help children learn to take responsibility for their own success.

Expected Outcomes:
- Parent/guardians will recognize the importance of struggle for their children.
- Parent/guardians will develop skills and confidence to allow their children to live with the consequences of their actions.
- Parents/guardians will understand the value of learning the hard way.
- Increase positive parent-child interaction in the home.
- Parent/guardians will develop a support group among workshop participants.

To bring high-quality parent learning to your community, or to train a corps of trainers to use *Guiding Principles for Highly Successful Parenting*, contact Dr. Bob Sornson at the Early Learning Foundation.  Bob@earlylearningfoundation.com.

Bob is an award-winning author and international consultant, and is the founder of the Early Learning Foundation.  He works internationally with parent organizations, school districts, and universities.  Dr. Sornson's workshops and keynote presentations are known for his storytelling, interactive style, and calls to action.

Bob is the author of *The Juice Box Bully, Stand in My Shoes: Kids Learning about Empathy, Over-Tested and Under-Prepared: Using Competency Based Learning to Transform Our Schools, Essential Math Skills, Creating Classrooms Where Teachers Love to Teach, Meeting the Challenge: Using Love and Logic to Help Children Develop Attention and Behavior Skills, The PreK-3 Essential Skill Inventories*, and many other books.
Anthony is twelve years old. His parents have had the same expectation for him since third grade. Homework is done, checked and correct before you get to use the television or watch a video. But somehow Anthony managed to get busy with other things, and now his favorite show is about to start and Anthony has not yet touched his homework.

“I’ll do my homework after the show,” he said over his shoulder as he headed toward the television.

His mom felt her blood start to boil. He knows the family rule. He’s pushing those limits again. For a moment her anger almost got the better of her.

And then she stopped and smiled and thought about her beautiful son. He’s twelve. He’s a bit goofy. Maybe he forgot to start his homework, or maybe he’s just feeling his oats and testing to see if I’ll give in. She remembered about the power of empathy and her eyes softened. She stood straight and put empathy in her voice.

“Ohhh. This is really sad.”

Anthony stopped and glanced at his mom. She looked calm, and he knew his chances were poor.

“It sure is tough when you forget to start your homework. But in our house homework is done, checked, and correct before television.”

Empathy helps us maintain relationships while setting firm limits. The practice of understanding how another person is feeling helps us build respectful connections and a strong positive emotional state. It gives us a
glimpse into the heart of another person, and is the foundation of all emotional intelligence.

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Simple Ideas to Share

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The Marshmallow Experiment

In the late 1960s Walter Mischel devised an experiment to test the ability of four-year old children to delay gratification. Working in a lab at Stanford University, Mischel’s experiment was remarkably simple. A research assistant brought a 4 year old into a room, on which there were several small marshmallow on a plate. After engaging the child in play, the researcher explained that she needed to leave the room for several minutes. While she was gone, she explained, the child could go ahead and eat one marshmallow. But if the child waited until she returned, the child could have two marshmallows.

The beauty of this experiment was in the follow-up. Mischel’s team kept track of these children for many years. And here is the pattern of their results. Kids who waited for the marshmallows were more successful at school, had better peer relationships, and were more likely to graduate.

Children who waited 15 minutes had SAT scores on average 210 points higher than those who chose to eat the marshmallow right away.

Children who can delay gratification, stay calm, and persist have an amazing advantage in school and in life. With self-regulation skills, children are more likely to persist at learning activities, achieve at higher levels, and avoid impulsive decisions that might get them in trouble. Lacking the internal capacity to be calm, focused and persistent, children become disengaged and less-successful.

While the importance of self-regulation seems like common sense to most of us, many families do not have the routines and behavior expectations that help to develop self-regulation. And many schools have stepped away from the activities which could help develop persistence, resilience and character.

Some researchers have called it grit, others self-regulation, others call it character. In a 1976 meta-analysis, Bowles and Gintis concluded that strength of character is 3 times better at predicting success in college than GPA or SAT. These traits are among the most important ingredients to learning success and life success.
The topics of self-regulation and empathy are unlikely to show up on the standardized tests we use to judge our schools. But wise parents and educators know that taking the time to help children develop these skills pays off in calmer homes and classrooms, better student engagement, kinder students, and much better learning outcomes on any test that comes along.

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Why Empathy?

Empathy is noticing how another person is feeling, for a moment standing in their shoes. Empathy opens the door to understanding others, appreciating differences, noticing and caring. It is the antithesis of self-serving, whiny, and narcissistic behaviors. Daniel Goleman calls empathy “the foundation of all emotional intelligence.”

Empathy requires a calm and caring state of mind, and is a step that precedes service to others. In our busy lives, it is sometimes difficult to let go of our own pressing worries and consider the perspective of another.

Helping our children develop the capacity for empathy is one of the great gifts we can offer them.

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4. Model empathy. Notice the lives of others. Talk about your experience of using empathy, and about the times you forgot to act with empathy.

5. Tell stories that help kids see the world from the perspective of others.
6. Read great children’s literature with your kids. Great books draw children into the lives of the characters, and help them learn to see the world differently.

7. Notice the feelings of your children. Talk about these feelings. Help children learn to use words to describe their inner experiences.

8. Relationships matter. Help kids build relationships which inspire them to trust and care for others.

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