

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Tapping the Power of Patience

MY FRIEND BEGAN NOTICING how irritated she was becoming when she had to wait in any kind of line. Over time, she realized that it was her impatience, not the people, she felt annoyed with, causing her unhappiness, and this awareness helped her acquire the ability to stay calm. She went on to write a book called *The Power of Patience*, hoping to help others to experience more relaxation rather than restlessness and tolerance rather than irritation.

The dictionary defines this quality as the willingness to “bear” delay and even misfortune without complaining or losing our temper. At one time, people named their girls “Patience,” an attribute they hoped their children would develop. Today, we tend to view the ability to delay gratification and maintain equilibrium when things go wrong as a developmental trait. It seems normal for a two-year-old to erupt in an upsetting tantrum that makes it hard to move on when she can’t get what she wants. However, we expect an eight-year-old to be able to wait in line or to express frustration without falling apart.

Unfortunately, that learning doesn’t happen automatically. Some older children, and even adults, experience rage when situations don’t go their way. We need to start when children are two and coach them through disappointments and transitions, in order to build their ability to maintain an inner equilibrium. Often that requires us to slow down and offer children encouragement for handling a difficult situation calmly, for expressing their feelings in words, or for trying another alternative. In the book *How Children Fail*, John Holt noted that the students successful at solving complex math problems were those with the patience to try another strategy when their first attempts don’t work.

We teach children the value of patience by noting its importance in different situations. Last week fifth graders at The Meher Schools hosted younger children on Halloween, helping them to walk through a maze and handing out trinkets and treats (shown in the photo at right). These activities required lots of waiting.

It took time for each class to arrive, and for little ones to make their way from one Halloween activity to the next. Had they gotten bored or distracted, the whole structure would have fallen apart. It was because the fifth graders could see how their younger peers benefitted from their help that kept them concentrating on their tasks with so much compassion.

In this age of instant messaging and instant everything, let’s resurrect our appreciation for qualities like being able to wait and to put aside our frustrations in order to achieve worthwhile results.



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