Five Micro Habits That Build Self Control in Kids: Stop Meltdowns Before They Start Transcript

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Self-Control Is a Brain Skill

If self-control could be taught with discipline, your child would already have it. When parents say their child has no self-control, they're not being dramatic.

They're describing a child who reacts instead of pausing, melts down instead tolerating frustration, avoids instead initiating, explodes when expectations arise.

And here's the truth that changes everything. Self- control is not willpower. It's not motivation. is a developmental brain skill. And when the nervous system and the executive functioning system are dysregulated.

or underdeveloped, that skill simply does not exist yet. And the word yet is really important because these are skills that can develop and you can make it happen.

So stay listening. Of course, if you haven't already pre-ordered my dysregulated kid book, make sure you do that because it's a much deeper dive and really is the parenting playbook for helping your child find calm in this chaotic world.

Self-control depends on two systems working together, a regulated nervous system and a functioning executive functioning system. And if either system is offline, pausing is impossible.

Frustration tolerance collapses, problem solving disappears, really goes out the window.

Why Traditional Parenting Fails

And this is not defiance. Despite what you might think, this definitely isn't laziness or low motivation, and it's not immaturity. This is a brain that cannot yet do what it is being.

And that's why you see a lot of resistant behaviors. So why did traditional parenting approaches fail? Because man, we are being inundated with all of these parent coaches who are only a parent and have no clinical experience.

Remember, I've worked with thousands of families, done over 10,000 brain maps. And I'm here giving you that information on this podcast, on the show, and of course, in my book, because we've got to shake things up.

We need to make things simpler. And that's what everything I do is about. But most parenting advice still assumes that the skill exists and you just need enforcement.

You just to need make sure it happens. And so parents are told to push harder, add consequences, remind kids to think first, increase expectations, but you can't demand a skill the brain hasn't built yet.

Pressure does not create self-control. It exposes the lack of it. What actually builds self control? Because we want our kids to be independent, thinking on their own, that all-important resilience.

Five Micro Habits That Build Self-Control

Let's talk about it, so self?control is built from the bottom up in tiny repeated experiences that teach the brain how to pause, tolerate discomfort, organize action, recover from stress.

And these habits, these five micro habits which are small actions that build the skill that does not yet exist. I like to

emphasize the word micro because we're always looking for the magic wand.

in everything related to kids, but the power is in you in those micro actions. And boy, do I dive into this in this book and make it so easy for you. I mean, you're here.

You're learning about it. But a book, this is a resource that's going to change everything for parents, for teachers, or caregivers. So here's the first micro habit.

Build the pause. Before the behavior, self-control begins with one skill. That's the ability to pause. Teach it deliberately. One slow breath, a counted pause, physical stop signal.

Not during meltdowns, not during punishment, during calm moments. The brain learns during those calm moment, I can stop before I react or act. That pause is the foundation of self-control.

Very, very big into the pause. It's great for you and it's good for your kids. Number two, regulate the body before expecting control. Disregulated body cannot produce controlled behavior.

This is super obvious with our younger kids, but yet we somehow think this doesn't apply to our teenagers or or 10 year olds, or even kids that are in their 20s, but it does.

So what are some micro supports that can help? Shoulder drops and an exhale, grounding movements, getting out in the grass and putting your feet, but just getting on your feed and just purposely grounding, visualizing that your feets are vines and your legs are tree trunks.

Really helpful. Brief sensory input. This is not calming for comfort. this is neurological preparation. Regulation allows for executive functioning to come back online and you know how important executive function is.

And if you don't make sure go back and listen to some of those episodes. Okay, number three, reduce cognitive load at the start. Self-control collapses when the task feels undefined or overwhelming.

Instead of do your homework, start with open the notebook. This builds initiation without overload and shutdown. Clarity is not lowering expectations, it's scaffolding a developing system.

That's important. Number four externalize the structure so our executive functioning is internal and until they can visualize and understand those steps.

They're not going to make that internal thing. stick, we've got to make it external for them. So we're going to use visual steps. We're gonna use physical gesturing.

Physical lists can be helpful, but that's not where we are going start. Were going make time feel real for our time blind kids by using timers. we can use different ways of color coding.

And this is not dependence, this a developmental support system. We have to make the internal external.

Pause, Regulation, and Reducing Cognitive Load

We can't assume smart kids understand executive functioning. I always talk about we always have. Start with the end in mind, and it can really be helpful when we reduce that cognitive load by showing kids what we want.

What does a nice empty dishwasher look like? What is the dishwasher? Look like when it's loaded. Don't. Assume your kids are absorbing it because you're doing it.

How are you making that internal process that you have when you're loading or unloading the dishwasher? How were you make that explicit for your kid? Because that's a separate skill from intelligence.

Number five, catch regulation and reinforce it. The S in comms is support and reinforcement. Our kids need a lot of it, way more than we realize. Self-control grows when the brain experiences successful regulation, not just when we fix mistakes, but after a hard moment.

Don't focus on what went wrong. Look for the moment regulation returned and then really get in there and talk to your kid about it because that will help them.

Name it. Tell them, oh, you took a breath before reacting or you stopped yourself and reset. You calmed your body and try it again. This tells the brain that worked.

And that's really important because our brain is so focused on negative that when we tell it the positive, it's going to alert more to that. And it breaks these cycles that you have where maybe you're nagging your kid or your kids is a catastrophize or maybe your catastrophizer.

I mean, so many parents are raised to be negative. You know, in my book, The Disregulated Kid, I just can't wait for you to read it. power, can't even explain it, the level of power she was like.

So all my pre-readers got very emotional about Philomena in this book.

External Supports and Reinforcing Regulation

And you're just going to love some of the stories in there. You're going be able to borrow her power too, which is pretty amazing when you get to do it.

And I think what I realize is just so many parents have parents who are negative and told them they couldn't do things and it just eats at you and you don't even realize it.

And usually people, especially women, don' t realize that impact of don t do this and fear-based parenting and pointing out, oh, you should lose five pounds or your kids are so rude and all those ways that they think they're helping you, but they' re negative.

I didn't realize how impacted people were until I got older because I don't have that. Again, I say this all the time. Tony and Philomena were not perfect.

Trust me. But they always were super positive and I did not realize the world tried to limit women. Didn't know that until I went to college. And boy, I didn't let that stop me.

Get a lot of educating of other women. I don't think it's exclusive to women, and I think men and women have parents in general that operate out of fear.

We want to break that cycle. So reinforcement of the skills we want to see builds a lot of regulation. It builds actually neural pathways that are going to the positive.

And when you consistently catch regulation and you're catching all those micro moments, the brain learns how to return to calm. on its own without you constantly telling it to do that or the kid to that.

And the ability to recover is one of the most important building blocks of self-control. We really want our kids to find that way and build it intuitively and naturally over time and it's going to happen when you reinforce behaviors you want.

So what does it look like over-time, right? Self- control. As a system strengthen, this is what you're going to see. Longer pauses, shorter meltdowns, decreased frustration tolerance.

We're gonna see that you'll be able to. You're not going see annoying, I can't do it. Better problem solving, not because the child is trying harder, but because skill is being built.

That's important. Your child does not lack self-control. They lack the brain capacity that creates it.

Self-Control Grows Over Time

Bam! I hope that hit you hard, okay? Because we're teaching our kids so many good things, but they're just so dysregulated. They can't access it." People say this to me all the time.

This should happen to our Facebook group. And as capacity is built, not forced, a lot can happen. So choose one micro habit and practice it daily for one week.

Do not rotate, do not stack. It's that consistency that builds the system. And I hope you know that. Self-control isn't taught in discipline moments, it's built in regulated moments.

When the nervous system and executive functioning systems come online together, self-control starts to emerge gradually. So if you want to understand what's blocking your child's self controlled or nervous system or executive functioning or all these things, the solution matcher helps you identify exactly on what to focus on next by looking at dysregulation patterns.

And you can go to drrosanne.com forward slash help to fill out the solution matcher. I know self-control is a topic you always want to talk about and learn more.

But I hope you really get that it's built over time. Of course, we're going to regulate first. Want more insights and solutions? Well, subscribe to our dys-regulations insider and it will show up in your inbox every week.