

THE SCIENCE OF SELF-CONTROL

that you would have been the kind of kid who couldn't resist eating the marshmallow? Does that mean that you are doomed? No. All it means is that kids for whom self-control comes easily are lucky and have an advantage, but these kids are not the majority and studies have shown that the ability to delay gratification can increase with age and more importantly, with practice.

(9) Better habits can be formed by people for whom self-control does not come naturally. A habit is any behavior that when performed repeatedly enough, becomes a routine that no longer requires as much energy or self-control to maintain. For example, the habit of always

doing your homework when you get home from school. For the first couple of weeks it will be difficult to maintain this behavior, but after a month of repeating this behavior, a habit will develop. Many behaviors require around 30 days to become habit, after which time, there is less need to exert self-control as an automatic routine develops. Indeed, more studies are indicating that the lack of self-control around things like eating junk food or excessive cell phone use aren't just simple cases of a lack of self-control, they are cases of bad habit formation. The good news is that research around habit formation indicates that bad habits can be replaced by good ones.

Article Questions

1) If you were 5 years old, how do you think you would have performed in the marshmallow test?
Answers will vary.

2) In the follow up studies to the marshmallow test, the children who could delay gratification the longest had more success as adults. List the types of successes they had.

- better SAT scores
- better educational achievements
- better marriages
- better responses to stress
- more career satisfaction
- better decision making skills
- better social skills
- lower levels of obesity (6)

3) If you want to become a professional basketball player one day you will need to delay gratification in many ways to be successful. Describe three ways you will need to exercise self-control/delayed gratification and why these would be necessary to achieve your goals.

Answers will vary but you can expect the following:

- 1) Practicing hard to gain more skills even when you are tired or feel tempted to hang out with your friends who don't play ball.
- 2) Doing your homework when you would rather do something else to keep up your grades so that you can stay on the team or get a scholarship.
- 3) Eat healthier foods versus junk food to maintain peak physical condition.
- 4) Sleeping properly instead of staying up late so that you can have enough energy to practice and compete the next day.

4) a) Imagine that someone you know (it could be yourself) has a difficult time giving their full attention to a lesson because they are checking their cell phone during class. They have tried to exert self-control but find themselves giving into instant gratification most of the time. Why do you think it's difficult to resist this temptation?

Answers will vary but you can expect the following: They have developed a bad habit that is hard to break. Cell phones are designed to be addictive. Everyone else is doing it. etc. (9)

b) If someone wanted to develop a good habit that would prevent them from checking their cell phone, what do you propose they could do and how long should they do it for and why?

Answers will vary but you can expect the following: They can leave their cell phone in their locker, keep it in their bag instead of their pocket or on the table, or give it to the teacher before class. They should do this for at least 30 days because it takes that long to develop a habit. (9)