From article written by [**Jessica Smock**](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jessica-smock/)

# 6 Ways for Parents to Teach Kids About Grit

The idea of "grit" was popularized by University of Pennsylvania psychologist Angela Duckworth. She defines "grit" as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals." It involves "working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failures, adversity, and plateaus in progress." It's one of a set of "noncognitive" skills -- such as curiosity, resilience, self-control -- that researchers now realize impact students' long-term success just as much -- or possibly more --than academic skills or IQ.

But can "grit" be taught? Can tenacity and self-discipline be part of the curriculum? How can parents instill these "character"-based qualities in their children?

This is one of the fundamental questions that American education now faces. It's clear that our education system's relentless focus on skills, on test preparation, on acquiring knowledge disconnected from the reality of facing adversity and thriving when faced with real world challenges is not enough.

Grit is partially the subject of my dissertation, in which I examined the experiences of a group of urban girls who are prepared for boarding school by a nonprofit in Boston called Beacon Academy. This amazing organization spent hundreds of hours instilling these qualities in their students so that they could succeed at some of the most rigorous and elite boarding schools in the country.

Now that I'm a new mom I can understand how confused parents might be about how to help their children become more resilient, more tenacious, and more self-disciplined. If grit is so important, what can parents do to instill it, without nagging their children endlessly or creating even more work and anxiety into their days?

 1. **Ask about whether your school includes the development of these qualities -- perserverance, conscientousness, self-control, curiosity -- in their curriculum.**(There are many schools that are trying innovative approaches to creating a school culture that focuses on noncognitive skills. One of the members of my dissertation committee, Scott Seider, wrote a recent book describing three charter schools' in Boston and their approaches to character development.)

2. **Learn more about grit.** At Angela Duckworth's [UPenn site](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~duckwort/" \t "_hplink), you can take a test to figure out your own or your child's "grit" score.

3.  **Instead of praising your kid for his grades or for being "smart," praise him for being tenacious and determined.** Focusing on those qualities of "stick-to-it-ness" may help kids succeed more than praise for particular achievements. If your child falls down when learning to ride a bike, praise his efforts at getting back up and trying again and again, rather than only praising when he learns to ride fast on his own.

4.  **Allow your child to get frustrated.**Parents hate to see their kids struggle. But learning from challenges (as well as failure) is the key to making the connection for kids that true achievement doesn't come easily.

5.  **Focus family discussions on effort rather than grades or innate skill.**Be a role model for your child of "grittiness." Try new things and talk about how difficult they are and how they don't come easily to you. Talk about your own goals -- running a half-marathon, cleaning out the basement -- and explain how you set smaller goals to achieve them. Share your own struggles and how you got past them.

6. **Most of all, remind your kids every day that failure is not something to be afraid of**.

If you're interested in "grit" and the theory of how it impacts kids' educational and lifetime achievement, listen to a phenomenonal [podcast](http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/474/back-to-school" \t "_hplink) of NPR's This American Life. Paul Tough is interviewed about How Children Succeed, as well as some of the kids who are featured in his book.

You can also check out Angela Duckworth's TED Talk, "[The Key to Success? Grit](http://www.ted.com/talks/angela_lee_duckworth_the_key_to_success_grit.html" \t "_hplink)"

*A version of this post first appeared at Jessica's blog [School of Smock](http://www.schoolofsmock.com/" \t "_hplink)*

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