

Self-Control

Self-control is the ability to override impulses to achieve goals and maintain standards of behavior. Self-control is a skill that allows **you** to stay in control of how you respond to certain internal and external stimuli and temptations. Having self-control enables you to overcome many of the obstacles and temptations that stand between you and reaching your desired future or goals.

Understanding self-control:

Often we think of self-control as the ability to regulate emotions and behavior. We tend to think of things like not talking until you're called upon, or standing quietly in line and not bothering another student. These are both good examples of the need for self-control; however, often the necessity for self-control is less obvious. For example, to work hard every day to achieve a goal requires the self-control to say no to other activities that may seem like more fun at the time. Activities are always competing for our time and it takes a strong-willed person to say no to the temptations that will become obstacles between you and the goals you want to reach.

What types of temptations are you facing while trying to reach your goals?

Connection to sports:

Self-control is very important to athletes for a number of reasons. Great athletes develop the skill and ability to regulate their thoughts, their emotions and to stay focused on what's important in the moment (WIN).

- Great athletes resist distractions and listen as the coach is explaining a drill, activity or strategy for the match.
- Great players pay close attention to the details.
- Great athletes remember and follow directions.

Sports are filled with mountaintop highs and crushing lows. Players must remain calm and not get too high or too low in order to perform under pressure.

- Great athletes don't allow themselves to get too high or too low. They remain very even emotionally.
- Great athletes block out comments that opponents may say to get "inside their head".

Finally, players need to learn to take control over the temptations that are roadblocks to reaching their goals.

- Great athletes learn how to delay gratification.
- Great athletes learn to be ready with strategies to prevent temptations from getting in the way of their goals.

How to develop Self-Control:

There are a number of strategies that can be learned to help improve self-control.

1. **Set a Clear Goal.**

Having a goal helps to steer your activities toward the accomplishment of the goal. Focus on just one goal at a time. People who set multiple goals usually give up on all of them.

2. **STAR**

STAR is a behavioral strategy developed by Dr. Steve Danish of the VCU Life Skills Center. STAR stands for **Stop, Think, Anticipate, and Respond**. Stop helps you to take a couple of seconds and prevents a quick, ill-advised reaction. It also gives you the time to think. Try and **think** about all of the possible actions that you can take in this situation? Next, **anticipate** or look into the future for each possible action. What is the likely outcome of each action? Finally, **respond** in the best way. Sometimes you have a lot of time to stop, think, anticipate and respond and other times you only have a split second. In these very quick situations the most important thing is to stop! You are more likely to make a better decision, even if you only have a second to think, than if you respond without stopping and thinking at all. It takes a lot of self-control to stop before your respond.

3. **If – Then**

This is a mental strategy that can help you to identify situations that are likely to happen and have an answer or solution to the temptation or impulse already in mind. For example: **if** my friends come over to play before I finish my juggling, **then** I'll tell them to come back later when I've finished training.

4. **Out of sight, out of mind**

Out of sight, out of mind is a strategy to remove things from your immediate environment that create temptations that you want to avoid. If your PlayStation3 or iPod Touch creates a distraction, preventing you from completing your homework or practicing your soccer moves, remove the device from your room by putting it in the closet or giving it to your mom or dad until you've completed all of your work or training.

5. **Self-Rule**

Another helpful strategy is to make your own rule to follow. An example of a self-rule may be that you don't play with your video games during the school week. So the rule may be – no video games Sunday night through Friday afternoon.

Did you know?

Many studies have shown that individuals that have a high level of self-control are more successful in school and socially. In one study, a psychologist named Walter Mischel created a famous test for self-control known as the marshmallow test. Four year olds in the study were offered a marshmallow to eat. If however they could wait 15 minutes (self-control and delayed gratification) then they would receive two marshmallows. The researcher then left the room and observed the child from a two-way mirror. As you would imagine the temptation of eating

the marshmallow was too strong for some and they gave in and enjoyed one marshmallow. There were some children that were able to come up with ways to take their mind off of the marshmallow and wait the full fifteen minutes to get two marshmallows. What's most interesting about this study is that approximately twelve years later, the researchers looked at the College Board scores of all of the children and the children who had displayed self-control, scored over 200 points higher on their college boards (Tough, 2012).

Watch this link to see video of the marshmallow experiment:

<http://rockcenter.nbcnews.com/news/2012/09/26/14112172-students-tell-brian-williams-it-is-important-to-fail?lite>