



Wellness News

True Grit

by Nancy King

There is an old word being tossed around to describe the kids who have character: grit. Grit immediately brings to mind sandpaper and the different sizes of pebbles they use to rate it, or that sound you hear when you set your jaw and your teeth clench together. But the kind of grit being used to describe young people is more like the John-Wayne-kind, that classic combination of courage and determination that helps young people succeed.

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True grit is born out of frustration and failure. The most rewarding accomplishments in life are those that we struggle to achieve. As a parent, it’s hard to watch your child fail. We instinctively want to swoop in and help. It takes patience and persistence to watch your children pick themselves up again and again until they succeed on their own. The euphoria that comes from winning is the seed of the next challenge’s success. There are a few rules you can

implement in your family that will encourage your children to develop grit:

1) Never quit something when you are having a bad day. Teaching children to think through what they are experiencing will help them develop perseverance. Allowing them to quit when they are feeling emotional about a situation is the easy way out. Helping them to understand why it’s hard, and why they need to fight through the hard part, helps make them winners.

2) Don’t give a child easy answers. When I was growing up, there was no such thing as an easy answer. If I wanted to know how a word was spelled, I was told, “Go look it up in the dictionary.” If I wanted to know the difference between a kangaroo rat and a pack rat, I was told, “Go look it up in the encyclopedia.” My parents encouraged my curiosity by directing me to find my own answers in life.

3) Focus on the future, not on the failures. Feeling optimistic about the future is a key component of grit. Acknowledge failure, but move quickly to the next step toward success. “So you only made 50 cents on your lemonade stand



today.... I’ll bet if you set up on a busier street tomorrow you’ll double your money!” Keeping kids future-focused helps them want to try again.

4) Reward self-control. Self-control can be built up like a muscle through regular use. Ask your child to commit to something--like walking the dog when they get home from school, rather than plopping down in front of the TV--and then praise them when they do. Praise should be specific. Instead of just saying “good job”, go for something more impactful. “Sarah, I noticed that you have taken Spot for a walk every day this week, and I’m so proud of you! You didn’t miss a single day.”

By encouraging perseverance, curiosity, optimism, and self-control, your child will be well on his way to developing the kind of grit that would make Rooster Cogburn proud. In fact, it’s what we loved about all of John Wayne’s characters—that strength and toughness that comes from experiencing failure and trying again and again until we succeed.