

# The Childhood Quality That's the Best Predictor of Health, Wealth, and Happiness

If you were presented with the opportunity to instill one, and only one, quality in your children, what would it be?

Perhaps, like [Solomon of old](#), you would be tempted to choose something like a long life, or great wealth, or even freedom from harm for your offspring. After all, what parents don't desire happiness and success for their children?

But while parents have a deep desire to see their children achieve these things, realistic parents understand the difficulty of such a task, and may even be tempted to shrug their shoulders and only hope for the best.

[However, according to](#) famed family physician and author Dr. Leonard Sax, parents don't have to resign themselves or their children to such a fate. His research shows that there is one thing parents can instill in their children to ensure a successful future. That thing is self-control:

*"What characteristic, measured in [childhood](#), best predicts [health](#), wealth, and [happiness](#) in that individual 20 years down the road, when the child is an adult? Is it [intelligence](#)? Grades in school? Ability to make friends? No. It is none of these things. Longitudinal cohort studies consistently find that [self-control in childhood best predicts health, wealth, and happiness in adulthood, far better than IQ scores, grades in school, friendliness or popularity.](#)"*

Unfortunately, self-control is something that many adults don't even have. How, then, can they instill self-control in their children? Dr. Sax suggests two ways this can be done.

The first is to “educate desire.” Dr. Sax describes this as “instill[ing] a longing for something better, more lasting, than video games or Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner on Instagram.” In other words, children who have a steady diet of fun, entertainment, and superficial niceties will turn out to be as fluff-filled as those items.

Children raised to value a standard of excellence in the books they read, the (minimal) entertainment they watch, and the activities they participate in, however, will add a far greater depth to their lives. In all likelihood, they will also gain familiarity with other tools to help them accumulate more self-control in their lives.

The second way to instill self-control in children is to establish boundaries. This means being the tough, unpopular parent who expects the chores to be done and the healthy food to be eaten. “Adolescents need structure and guidance,” Dr Sax explains. “When parents become more permissive, rates of anxiety, [depression](#) and disengagement among teens are likely to rise, as they have done.”

Dr. Sax goes on to say:

*“Do your job. Turn off the screen. Take your kid for a hike outdoors, or go sailing, or visit a museum. Don’t worry about your kid’s popularity with other kids: being popular, for young teens, is now [a major risk factor for bad outcomes](#). ...*

*If you don’t, who will?”*

Indeed. The question is, are you a parent who has the guts to instill the quality of self-control in the next generation?

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