

Seven Things Mentally Strong Kids Do

Mental strength requires that we pay attention to three things: the way we think, feel and act. Thinking big, feeling good and acting brave helps us grow our mental muscles. Of course, it takes practice, patience and constant reinforcement to get to a point where we do these things naturally. Here are seven things mentally strong kids always do, and how to help your children get there if they haven't already:

1. They empower themselves: Kids who feel empowered do not depend on other people to feel good. They choose, for example, to be in a bright mood even when someone else is having a bad day or tries to take their anger out on them.

Create catchphrases: Work with your children to come up with phrases that they can repeat to themselves. Use words that show they are in charge of how they think, feel and behave — regardless of how those around them are doing. The most effective catchphrases are short and easy to remember: “All I can do is my best.” “I’m good enough.” “I choose happiness today.”

2. They adapt to change: Whether it's moving to a new school or not being able to play with friends during the pandemic, change is tough. Mentally strong kids understand that change can help them grow into an even stronger person, even though it might not feel that way at first.

Name the emotions: Change feels uncomfortable. But putting a name to feelings can lessen the sting of these emotions. Help your child find and define the right words to describe it (e.g., sad, happy, frustrated, nervous, eager).

3. They know when to say no: Kids often struggle to say no because it can feel awkward. However, by finding the courage to do it more often, they will find that it gets easier over time. It also reduces the stress of having to commit to things they don't want to do.

Try the “give up” test: When your child is faced with a decision to say yes or no, ask them what they will have to give up if they say yes. For example, saying yes to a playdate at a friend's house might mean giving up time spent with siblings.

4. They own their mistakes: Kids often are tempted to hide their mistakes because they don't want to get in trouble. Owning mistakes helps to build character. Kids who are brave enough to practice this recognize what they did wrong, and mentally prepare themselves to fully admit to what they did. They also apologize and find ways to avoid making the same mistake again.

Create an environment for success: When your child makes a mistake, remind them that they can change their environment in a way that will prevent them from making the same mistake twice.

5. They celebrate other people's success: It's normal for kids to feel jealous when their friends get a new toy for example, or when the other team wins another game. But feeling negatively towards other people only hurts them, and not the other party. Mentally strong kids are

supportive of their peers, and they focus on performing their best without worrying about how everyone else is doing.

Act like the person you want to be: Have your child come up with a list of traits they admire. Encourage them to act as if they already possess those traits. When they feel good about themselves, it's easier to celebrate other people's successes.

6. They fail and try again: Failure hurts. It can feel embarrassing, disappointing and frustrating. But the most accomplished people reach their goals by failing along the way. Kids who do well later in life have growth mindsets that help them turn failures into positive learning experiences.

Remember successful people who failed: Experts have found that kids actually perform better when they learn that many success stories began with failure. The next time your child feels down because they feel they've failed at something, educate them about people who made similar mistakes, like Thomas Edison. This will give your child confidence.

7. They persist: Mentally strong kids who persist will continue to work hard even when they don't feel like it. Often, they eventually succeed and discover that they're stronger than they initially thought.

Write a letter: Have your child write a letter filled with words of kindness and encouragement to themselves. It can be a simple one that says: "I know things are tough, but you can do this because you've achieved challenging goals before. And you can do it again." Each time they feel tempted to give up, tell them to go back to that letter. It will motivate them to push forward and persist.

Source: Amy Morin, psychotherapist and editor-in-chief of *Verywell Mind* and author of "*13 Things Strong Kids Do: Think Big, Feel Good, Act Brave.*"