

Patience

Character... It starts with me!

LOOKING AT PATIENCE THROUGH THE EYES OF TRAUMA

Vs. Impulsiveness

OCTOBER 2013

LOOKS LIKE

- Taking turns with others
- Not complaining when delays occur
- Taking your time to do tasks right
- Waiting for other others to finish before you speak
- Allowing others to work at their own pace without judging

Waiting calmly in times of stress, hardship, or suffering.

By Jodi Landers

Have you ever had a morning so full of blunders and mistakes that you decided by 6:00 a.m. it was going to be a *baaaaad* day?

Some of your students, as you know, have negative experiences in the morning before they come to school that may include yelling, threats, abuse, fear, and food deprivation, to name a few. Truthfully, you know some of them experience this *every* morning.



When teaching patience this month, keep in mind that through the eyes of a traumatized child, patience looks different than it does to you and me, and other children. Being patient involves acceptance, impulse control and surrender. Children who suffer, or have suffered trauma, have difficulty being patient and accepting a situation, because the expectation puts their lack of control on display. They may interpret patience as weakness. Being patient may cause them feelings of desperation. When asked to be patient, a child of trauma is likely to think, “If I can’t have it now, I’ll look for what else I can have.” Or, “I’d better take what I want now, before someone else gets it. Wanting it makes it mine.” The fact that they want something that belongs to

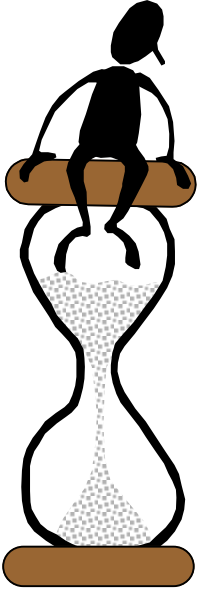
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someone else, or that they may have to earn it, is meaningless. Without intervention and direction, children of trauma rarely mature past a level of complete self-centeredness. They tend to believe that if they don't look out for themselves, no one will.

It is important that all children are shown that being able to wait for something they desire is a useful characteristic to possess. Modeling how it can be useful in real life situations like making friends, earning rewards, and gaining trust is paramount.

It starts with you, the teacher. The relationships you have established with your students are critical in teaching patience, or any concept, really. If your students believe that you have their best interests at heart, they will follow your guidance. Maybe not to a tee, but they will try, and that's all you can ask.

I strongly recommend talking with your students about what patience is and ask if they consider themselves to be patient people. You'll probably be surprised at their responses. Ask them how they get what they want and need at home, at Grandma's house or at the store. You will quickly be able to assess if behaviors you're seeing at school also take place elsewhere.

A quick scenario, let's say one of your students says, "If I want something at the store, I just take it." Before you respond, think about your priority, teaching patience. You could retort and say that their choice is incorrect and that they shouldn't "just take" things. But keep in mind children don't do what doesn't work. If "just taking" what they want works for them, why would they believe you when you say they are wrong? To some children, being right or correct equals being successful at getting what they want. Their concept of right and wrong is different than yours.

I would also recommend role play activities where students are vying for the same toy, pencil, attention from an adult, etc. Maybe allow for a couple of successful role plays with your participation before asking a "known" impatient student to participate. You want to set them up to succeed and observing a few good examples first may help them. You can do a little coaching, but let them feel their way through it. Then, the next time they are acting out of impatience in a situation, you can remind them of how well they did during the patience activity and that you know they know a better way. Their knowledge of that better way can help create accountability. Maya Angelou says, "When you know better, you do better." There's no guarantee that they will the first, second or third time. But maybe, just maybe, the fiftieth time, they'll succeed and you'll get to see it!

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