

Developing Patience... Patiently

It's Sunday evening, and Little Ruhi and his brother Hadi find themselves at a friend's house with their parents. Their host warmly invites them to play with several toys in the guest room, and they quickly settle down exploring the toys that are new and exciting to them. After a few minutes, Little Ruhi looks up and sees his older brother Hadi playing with something interesting. He asks his brother if he can have a turn with the new toy. Hadi agrees, but invites Ruhi to "please wait for 10 minutes until it's your turn." After a few minutes, Ruhi asks if it's his turn yet. Hadi reminds him that 10 minutes are not up, and Ruhi begins to feel impatient. Ruhi asks again, and after the third time of being reminded by his older brother, Ruhi starts to cry. His cry reaches the adults next door, and dad enters the room to see what is going on.

On the other side of the world, Mrs. Wang is late for work. She was up late last night finishing a project, and now she needs to help Mei get ready for school. These days, it seems that every day is a struggle for Mei to get ready on time. She takes too long to put on her pants, and so mom or dad help her to put on her shirt, brush her teeth, pack her snack and tie her shoes. Mei is getting used to someone helping her every day, and today, she forgets to brush her teeth and can't find where her clean shirts are folded. Mrs. Wang is ready to close the door when she realizes that Mei is not ready and needs help again. By the time Mrs. Wang arrives at work, she is already exhausted from the morning rush.

Back at Little Ruhi and Hadi's play date, dad sits down next to his children. He sees this as an opportunity for Little Ruhi to grow his understanding of the virtue of patience, so, to take advantage of this precious 'teachable moment'¹, Dad begins by facilitating a conversation between the two boys. Each has a chance to respectfully explain what happened from their perspective. Little Ruhi says that 10 minutes just feels too long, while Hadi feels that 10 minutes is what they agreed on. When the two children have had their chance to speak, Dad helps reinforce the definition of patience by saying: "Thank you for honestly sharing your feelings with each other. One of the ways we practice patience is by waiting peacefully for something we want, without complaining. Ruhi, what will help you to wait peacefully next time?" Dad is not only identifying the virtue that Ruhi is developing; he is also modeling how to patiently encourage Ruhi to think of a solution, a skill his older brother Hadi is now old enough to emulate.

If Little Ruhi is having a hard time coming up with an answer, Dad may suggest some examples such as, "Would it be helpful for you to choose another toy to play with while you are waiting?" or "Would you like me to show you how to read a clock so that you can keep track of time yourself?" Through Dad's patient coaching, the two brothers are learning to play peacefully and share patiently.

Eight hours later, Mrs. Wang is on her way back home after a rushed day at work. She decides to take some time to reflect at the end of the day on how she can be more supportive of Mei in the morning. She realizes that their family has created a pattern of life that has become rather hectic. Mrs. Wang and her husband haven't been able to spend time with Mei to show her how to put on toothpaste on her toothbrush in the morning, and haven't given her the necessary time to practice until she feels confident to do it on her own. Mei doesn't know where her clothes are kept

anymore, and though she sometimes struggles with putting on her shirt, she could do it by herself if she had a bit more time. Mrs. Wang and her husband decide that if they want Mei to be more independent in the morning they need to patiently show her how to get ready by herself. The family also decides that they should do their best to go to bed a little bit earlier, so that everyone can wake up 15 minutes earlier. After making this small change, there is a noticeable difference in the Wang family's morning routine. Mei flourishes under her parent's patient guidance, and is now able to do more on her own.

Practicing Patience is an act of trust. It is defined as “quiet hope and trust that things will turn out right. You wait without complaining. You are tolerant and accepting of difficulties and mistakes. You picture the end in the beginning and persevere to meet your goals. Patience is a commitment to the future.”²

Children may also understand patience as simply “waiting peacefully.”

The key to practicing patience, with young children in mind, is to spend some time evaluating what is a reasonable amount of time for them to be able to do the things they need. This may depend on a variety of factors, such as their age, how they slept the night before, or their general temperament. It is helpful to spend some time observing your child, or other children doing similar activities, to see what they are capable of.

We are also the models for our children's understanding of patience. If we take the time to nurture a patient attitude towards life, it is more likely that our children will respond to our request for them to wait patiently for something. This may seem like a challenge in our busy city life, but it is important to start somewhere - whether on your morning routine like the Wang family, or through precious opportunities like the teachable moment Little Ruhi's Dad used. When we make the commitment to practice patience and see the end in the beginning, we can be more available to model this behavior for our children.

Below are some fun activities from The ‘Virtues in Us’ educational materials (www.virtuesinus.com) to reinforce the virtue of patience at home or school:

1. Sing a Song: Use a simple melody to sing the words to a Patience song with movements. *Children's Virtues Song* CDs is a wonderful resource with songs for each virtue in English and Chinese. The CD for Preschool age has the song "I am waiting patiently for my turn..." (sung to the tune of 'If you are happy and you know it'). Put your hands facing out as if serving a platter and sing "I am waiting patiently..." turn your hands over and set them on your lap when you sing the line "for my turn." Repeat for each line. You can sit down or stand up, and come up with other simple movements to demonstrate waiting patiently. This is a good song to sing with your child while waiting in line at the grocery store or when they are waiting to use the slide at the playground.

2. Share a Story: The Old Man and the Date Tree

Once, a king who was visiting the countryside came upon a ninety-year-old farmer hard at work in the field. “What are you doing,” asked the king, surprised to see the old man working so energetically.

“I am planting date trees, Your Majesty,” was his reply.

“How long will it take for each tree to bear fruit?” asked the king.

“Many, many years, Your Majesty. I will not live to see the fruits of these trees.”

“Then why are you planting them, old man?”

The old farmer paused for a moment and then with a tranquil voice he addressed the king. “Past generations planted the trees, the fruits of which I have enjoyed all my life. I, therefore, plant trees for the benefit of those who will come after me.”

The king was pleased with this answer and gave him a gold coin. The old farmer smiled.

“Why are you smiling so?” asked the king. He replied, “These trees did not take many years to bear fruit. I have hardly finished planting them and already they have brought me great reward from my king.”

3. Play a Game with several children: The Popcorn Game

The children squat, pretending they are kernels of corn, waiting patiently until they hear the number 10. You start counting 1,2,3,4...(If the children move, you may start over)

At 10 they jump up, going from a squat to a full jump and then jumping all around, forward and backward until you start a new batch of popcorn.

For 4 and 5 year olds:

Give the children different numbers to pop at. Some start popping at 4, some at 6, etc.

Remind them to listen for their numbers. If the children move you may start all over.

Conclude by acknowledging the children’s patience.

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For The Children’s Virtues Development Project

1. Recognizing Teachable Moments is one of the Five Strategies of The Virtues Project™ . Teachable moments are opportunities to develop our virtues.
2. *The Family Virtues Guide*