

Are Your Kids Tempted By Marshmallows?

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The Marshmallow Test is designed to test preschoolers' ability to prolong gratification.

The gist is this: A researcher places a marshmallow in front of a child and leaves the room. The child is told that if he can wait for the researcher to return to eat the marshmallow, he can have two.

As you can imagine, this is quite the challenge for preschoolers. And it makes for some very amusing video footage.

The study is not new, having been initially given at Stanford University in the 60s and 70s, but it is certainly very relevant, perhaps more so in today's society where instant gratification is only a mouse click or play button away.

According to the researchers, the ability to delay gratification can predict how a child will succeed in life better than reading or math scores.

The study re-tested the same children a decade or so later, and found that the children who waited for the second marshmallow were performing better in school, and according to the New Yorker, even getting significantly higher college entrance exam scores.

And you thought that marshmallows were only good for rice krispie treats!

Children who can delay gratification are more than patient; they have self-regulation skills such as planning, prioritizing, strategizing, and inhibiting impulses. These are learned skills, which means that every child can develop these skills.

The problem is, that too often, these important skills are rarely taught in school.

So what happens when children are not taught self-regulation skills? They eat the first marshmallow. They also have difficulty staying focused, and demonstrate typical classroom behaviors such as hyperactivity, which impedes learning.

Luckily, self-regulation and other higher-level skills can be taught. For over 25 years, Oxford Learning has been using teaching techniques that help students of all ages become aware of their learning processes, so that they can recognize when they are losing focus, and self-check when they are getting off track.

Young children can learn to plan and prioritize, so that when it comes school and homework, they can put aside those things that give instant pleasure, be it video games, Facebook, or marshmallows, and focus on the task at hand.