



TAKE HOME SKILL: DELIBERATE PRACTICE FOR STUDENTS

"Seeds, caterpillars, and bees come before flowers, butterflies, and honey. They remind us of the beauty, transformation, and sweetness in life that follow the patience to grow, persistence in struggle, and diligent effort. Everything will be worthwhile one day."

—Doe Zantamata

OVERVIEW

A list of strategies for parents and caregivers that teach their children how to practice to help them achieve their goals

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- When your child is struggling to meet a goal
- When your child decides to learn a new skill

TIME REQUIRED

- 5-30 minutes

LEVEL

- PreK-Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School

MATERIALS

- None

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Use practical strategies that help them reach their goals
- View failure and frustration in a more positive light

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

For parents/caregivers: Take a moment to think of a skill or goal that took a lot of effort for you to master or achieve. What kept you going? What did you do when you wanted to give up? How did it feel when you mastered the skill or achieved the goal?

INSTRUCTIONS

Children practice to reach all kinds of goals—writing their names, dribbling a basketball, playing a song on the piano. Deliberate practice is a research-based technique that will make their practice sessions more effective so they can improve over time.

Teach your children these four principles of deliberate practice:

- **Work on weaknesses:** Rather than doing things that they already do well, children should focus on the things that are hard for them. For example, they might replay the part of their trumpet solo with the high notes that they've been having trouble with, rather than the parts that they know well.
- **Give full concentration:** Teach children to avoid distractions that make it hard to stay on task, like noise, social media, or people nearby. Instead of writing an essay with their phone beside them while hanging out with friends, they might go to a quiet library and tuck their phone in their backpack.
- **Get feedback:** Encourage children to find out what they got right and where they made mistakes by asking a teacher or coach or checking their work. For example, if they made mistakes on their long-division homework, they might review their work again and talk to their teacher about how they can solve those problems correctly in the future.
- **Repeat until mastery:** Encourage children to keep working on their weaknesses, stay on task, and get feedback until they master their specific goal.

Because deliberate practice is hard, you can offer a few tips to help motivate your children to engage in it:

- **Rethink failure:** Teach your children that failure is a normal part of learning by modeling comfort with mistakes. Share your experiences of failure with your children, so they learn that we all fail sometimes—and these failures teach us lessons that help us in the future.
- **Rethink frustration and confusion:** Teach your children that frustration and confusion are a natural part of practice. Encourage them to see these feelings as signs that they are in the “stretch zone,” the space that helps us develop new skills.
- **Rethink talent:** Read books, watch TV interviews, or listen to podcasts with your children that focus on how musicians, athletes, or actors work on their craft to be successful. Talk to your children about how their favorite players or actors spend many hours practicing and getting feedback from their coaches or directors. Remind your children that they too can improve by seeking feedback and taking the time to practice.
- **Share the experience:** Encourage your children to share their experiences of failure, frustration, practice, and success with friends and family. Ask them to reflect on the value of practice and how they are learning not only to expect that failure, frustration, and confusion will be part of the process, but to feel more comfortable with those experiences along the way.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Does your child make more of an effort, express less discouragement, or practice with more concentration as a result of your conversation on deliberate practice?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

In a [study](#), students participated in a program that focused on changing their beliefs about failure, frustration, practice, and talent. After one academic term, they were more motivated to engage in deliberate practice and improved their math achievement, course grades, and GPA compared to students who learned about study skills or about interests and achievement.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Children aren’t always motivated to practice, and they don’t always practice in the right way. This might be due to misconceptions about success—believing that successful people don’t experience struggles and failures—or negative experiences with practice—feeling frustrated or confused and taking it as evidence that they are not capable of learning something new.

Research shows that addressing these misconceptions and teaching children to rethink their negative emotions during practice can encourage them to stick with it.

SOURCE

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