



OF MARSHMALLOWS THAT DON'T GET EATEN

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Many years back, I read about what I have called the Marshmallow test. In more technical terms, the Marshmallow test is referred to as a deferred gratification test or the Stanford marshmallow experiment. The experiment is performed with children as test subjects. Each test subject was offered one marshmallow, with the assurance that those who did not eat that single marshmallow will be given a second one later on. Only a small number of those kids managed to defer their desire to eat the first marshmallow; many of the test subjects ate the first marshmallows immediately. Those who had deferred their gratification were proven later on to be more competent in adolescence, with great school exams performance and more mature development.

I had been impressed by that experiment, and have tried the same approach but in different forms on my own children. My kids are not perfect, but they have their moments.

For instance, when my eldest daughter had once asked for money to treat her friends to lunch on her birthday, I asked her to make a choice between that and hosting her closest chums to a four-course snack which I would prepare for them on the weekend. She chose the latter. It's only been four years since that had happened. She has shown signs of maturity in her college years, although I do not claim she has been superior in any way. She has somehow been more helpful and more caring towards her siblings despite the fact that her late father had made her live like a princess before he died. We still fight; in fact, like most mother-and-teenage-daughter relationships, we have a love-hate relationship. But she still manages to pull through when needed.

It can be difficult to curb children's personality quirks.

I have one daughter who, in similar fashion to me, gets rattled when there's so much to do at so little time. She loses her cool easily. But she's very responsible and never goes to bed without completing her studies, no matter how sleepy she is. So many times since she entered the 7th grade, I have seen her face down on the book she reads. When I try to wake her up, she would growl at me like a tiger, a rather still respectful growl that's a cross between "Don't bother me" and "I'm doing fine". Is that possible? In her case, yes!

All in all, our children's personality reflects what they have gotten from us: our behavior in life, our mental aptitude, and our skills. We can not totally change those without changing our kids in the process. It is therefore up to us to help them develop good character to help them survive as adults.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How would you teach your own child to develop good character?
2. Can you change you child's personality? How?
3. Why is personality an important aspect of life?
4. Can personality and character be learned in school? How?
5. What responsibility does a teacher have in forming her student's character?