

# Helping Kids to Keep Going when the Going Gets Tough

## Stick-to-itiveness

By Patti Teel  
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I get a number of e-mails from parents whose children have become discouraged—and give up easily, or don't try at all when they encounter difficult situations or tasks. These parents are likely to be told that their children are not working up to their potential, that they are unmotivated, or even lazy. But I don't like it when children are considered unmotivated or lazy. These words imply that a person enjoys being sluggish and unproductive. But in truth, children or adults who don't take steps to reach their goals are usually being stopped by underlying feelings of self-doubt or unworthiness.

And though some children and adults become discouraged and give up when things get tough, there are those who have an incredible stick-to-itiveness and passionately put themselves on the line, throwing everything they have into their pursuits. Whether you call it stick-to-itiveness, tenacity, or perseverance, it's a trait that we might wish to emulate because it can positively change the course of our lives. It keeps us stepping towards our dreams in spite of difficulties and the opposition or discouragement of others. It goes hand in hand with the virtues of faith and patience, because when you have complete faith that you will attain your desire, you're free to enjoy the steps along the way without becoming impatient about how long it will take.

It's important to differentiate between stick-to-itiveness and obstinacy. If something isn't working and you feel as if you're banging your head against a wall—keep your goal or dream in mind, but try another approach. For while perseverance comes from a strong *will*, obstinacy often comes from a strong *won't*. We are much more effective when we 'go with the flow,' are flexible, and realize that there is more than one way to attain our goal or desire. For example, if you're driving from one state to another, there are probably several routes that you could take to get there. And as long as you keep heading in the right direction, you will eventually arrive. But if one road is full of pot holes, you might be wise to change your route, rather than stubbornly continuing down the same difficult road. With stick-to-itiveness and flexibility, you won't just turn around and go home if a road is blocked or full of pot holes. You'll simply find and take another route.

Some call this concept, *choosing the path of least resistance*. As a teacher or a parent, it can mean adapting our approach in order to reach our students and children through their strengths and interests. For example, my goal of teaching a child to read doesn't change when he or she is having difficulty—only the approach that I take. When our children are struggling, we can encourage them not to give up on their goal, while helping them to find an approach that's easier and more effective for them.

None of us want our children to give up on their goals at the first sign of difficulty. But *how* do we help them to dig deep—and stick it out—especially when no one is cheering them on? Does it have to do with the way they are raised, is it inborn, or is it a combination of both nature and nurture? I certainly don't have all the answers, but I believe we'd be wise to nurture the qualities that people with stick-to-itiveness share. They include the following:

- They passionately focus on the task at hand.
- They finish what they start.
- They have a positive attitude that reflects their faith and patience.
- They take action.

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DREAM THE DREAM AND STEP INTO IT

- They go with the flow.
- They take responsibility and don't blame others for their problems.
- They are self reliant.
- They are not overly sensitive to the reactions of others.
- They don't worry about failing and don't take setbacks personally.

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Dubbed "The Dream Maker" by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the creator of an award winning relaxation audio series for children. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress and fall asleep. She is a popular speaker and presents innovative workshops for parents, children, and health professionals. Get R&R tips and sign up for her newsletter at [www.pattiteel.com](http://www.pattiteel.com). You can listen to her online radio show at [www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com](http://www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com).