

DELIBERATE PRACTICE FOR KIDS

Difficulty: **CASUAL** | Frequency: **VARIABLE** | Duration: **VARIABLE**



WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

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.

Employers overwhelmingly **believe** that reliability is an extremely important qualification for their entry-level positions. Deliberate practice is a technique that will help kids perform more reliably, setting them up for later success.

TIME REQUIRED

Deliberate practice is a technique that your children can engage in whenever they want to develop a difficult skill. You can offer some guidance on how to do it, particularly when you see them struggling and in need of encouragement. These conversations can take anywhere from five to 30 minutes.

HOW TO DO IT

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

Teach your kids 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.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Eskreis-Winkler, L., Shulman, E. P., Young, V., Tsukayama, E., Brunwasser, S. M., & Duckworth, A. L. (2016). [Using wise interventions to motivate deliberate practice](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *111*, 728–744.

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 IT WORKS

Deliberate practice takes effort. For adults and children alike, whether we engage in effortful behavior partly depends on whether we believe we can succeed.

This practice helps children rethink the ways they view success so they can be more persistent at a difficult task. For instance, when children learn that practice is a stronger determinant of success than talent, then success may seem more achievable—which can lead them to keep doing the hard work. Sharing their experiences of deliberate practice with others helps children solidify their belief in the technique, so that they are more motivated to continue engaging in it.

SOURCES

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This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

