

# SUPERHERO MOTIVATION FOR KIDS

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



## WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

As parents, we want to encourage our children to develop the skills that will support their success. Perseverance is key to becoming someone whom others can count on—someone who is reliable even when the tasks they have to do are boring or hard.

Teaching our children perseverance will not only impact how reliable they become in cleaning up their toys, but may also support their overall academic success. [Research](#) shows that students who are better able to resist temptations and practice self-discipline perform better in school.

## TIME REQUIRED

Depending on how creative you want to get, this practice can take as little as five or 10 minutes.

## HOW TO DO IT

It's hard for children to stick with boring or difficult tasks. The following strategy is a fun way to teach your children perseverance, so you and others can count on them to follow through.

- **Choose a character:** Ask your children to think of a hard-working character whom they love, like a superhero or a protagonist from their favorite book series.
- **Get creative:** Find items around the house that you can use as props so that your children can really get into character. For instance, you could make superhero cuffs out of toilet paper tubes or old socks with the toes cut off. You could even reuse an old Halloween costume.
- **Get to work:** Once your children are in character, remind them to do the task at hand, such as doing their homework, making their bed, washing the car, or cleaning their room, as if they were the character they chose. Encourage them to talk to themselves as if they were that character. For instance, instead of asking themselves, “Am I working hard?,” they can ask themselves, “Is Batman working hard?”
- **Check in:** Cheer on your superhero. Reconnect with them to encourage their perseverance using the character of their choice by asking things like, “How hard is Wonder Woman working?”

## EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

White, R. E., Prager, E. O., Schaefer, C., Kross, E., Duckworth, A. L., & Carlson, C. R. (2017). [The “Batman effect”: Improving perseverance in young children](#). *Child Development*, 88(5), 1563-1571.

Children were asked to complete a boring task for 10 minutes, but they had the option to take breaks to play a fun video game. Children who were given directions to embody and speak to themselves as a favorite character, like Batman or Dora the Explorer, spent more time working on the task compared to other children.

## WHY IT WORKS

Role playing allows children to distance themselves from a situation by taking an outsider's perspective. This self-distancing tactic allows children to stop focusing on their own negative emotions and their desire to do something more interesting. By removing these distractions, role playing can help children focus on the end goal of completing the task.

The props and use of play may also lead to greater perseverance because it makes the experience more fun and gives children the opportunity to identify with the strengths of their chosen character.

## SOURCES

[Rachel E. White, Ph.D.](#), Hamilton College

[Ozlem Ayduk, Ph.D.](#), University of California, Berkeley

---

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](#).

