

Westlake Boys High School



Being in 'Quaranteen' – what have we learnt about supporting your son in a lockdown?

Our potential is one thing, what we do with it is quite another

As we move towards another week of lockdown and online learning, it feels like it is the right time to talk about grit. Grit has been described as the ability to remain passionate about, and persevere, working towards long-term goals.

Your son may be questioning how much grit he has right now, and this will likely be having a bigger impact on his current motivation than his intelligence, ability or aptitude towards any particular subject.

Why should we be gritty?

Gritty people maintain effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. Those of us who are less gritty give up when things get hard.

The good news is that grit can be grown, and it isn't something you are born with a finite amount of. Every human trait is influenced by both genes and experience.

What are the golden rules of grit?

- We consistently overestimate talent, but ignore the reality that effort counts twice. Skill requires talent and effort, and achievement requires skill and effort.
- The grittiest high achievers tend to have a top-level goal (or 'ultimate concern') to which all their lower-level and middle-level goals coherently work.
- The grittiest people embrace long-term deliberate practice. They work on weaknesses and develop a depth of interest in their specialism beyond the ordinary.
- The gritty are optimistic self-improvers. They get up time and time again in the face of adversity.
- Grit can be cultivated in our external environment, via parents and role models, extra-curricular activities, and teams and cultures.

How can this be translated into your home?

Being gritty is a whole lot easier in the pursuit of something which matters to you. Work with your son on what it is that matters to him the most and plan from there; charting the tasks that will need to be completed to achieve highly.

Discuss the notion of consistency with your son (leveraging off your greater experience), this can become known to them as a 'steady intensity' over time.

Do the hard things and hit them head-on, making this a visible feature of your daily routine.

Set a tone that is intentional around pursuing deliberate practice. In other words, have an aspirant goal, focus seriously on performance, seek feedback, and then enter a cycle of responsiveness, adjustment and repetition.

How much impact can you have on your son's level of grit?

The short answer is, **a lot** and more than almost any other figure in his life.

Children of supportive parents fare far better than children with parents on any other spectrum of supportiveness and demandingness in areas of education, health, behaviour and other future outcomes.

Studies suggest that grit is grown in children who have parents that engage with them in pursuits designed to cultivate passion and perseverance. As an aside, research also suggests extracurricular follow-through at school is a useful predictor of future grades, mental health, and behaviour.

The effect of engaging with your son in areas of passion and perseverance appears to be self-reinforcing. The situations to which we gravitate tend to enhance the characteristics that brought us there in the first place. In a kind of learned industriousness, doing hard things teaches us to do other hard things. This is a phenomenon known as the “corresponsive principle” in psychology.

Ultimately, grit is about working on something you care about so much that you're willing to stay loyal to it...it's doing what you love, but not just falling in love—staying in love.

Andrew McBride
Deputy Principal