

## Teaching Children Persistence To Build Their People Safety Skills

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Kidpower is an educational charitable organization that, since 1989, has brought "People Safety" education to over 1.2 million children, teenagers, and adults, including those with special needs, from many different cultures - close to home and around the world. For publications; free articles, podcasts and e-newsletter; and information about our services and locations, please visit [www.kidpower.org](http://www.kidpower.org).

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### What Does Persistence Have To Do With Personal Safety?

Although in Kidpower we know how to make learning People Safety skills easy for children, actually using these skills out in the real world is often frustrating and difficult. For example, setting a boundary in the face of peer disapproval can be uncomfortable, and persisting in getting help when no one seems to be listening can be very hard work. In order for children to trust in their personal power, they need to know how to keep going even when they feel upset, discouraged, unhappy, embarrassed, or tired.

### What Adults Can Do

Adults can support the development of persistence in the following ways:

- Give children opportunities to take on challenges where they can be successful;
- Offer guidance rather than taking over for them when children ask for help;
- Acknowledge unhappy feelings without letting children give up on themselves;
- Break a challenge into smaller steps when children get stuck; and
- Motivate children to keep going even when they don't feel like it.



### Getting Little Kids To Hike Up Big Mountains

Physical activities can help build confidence in the ability to keep going. Some people do this through sports or dance. When my own kids were young, I would do it through hikes and camping trips with our family, our Girl Scout troop, and our Campfire Boys group. My theory was that, no matter what they said, if the children with me had energy enough to run around, yell, or splash in streams once we sat down during a

hike, they had energy enough to keep on going.

"But I'm too tired! I *can't!*" the children often complained. "It's *too far!*"

"I understand," I would say cheerfully. "Just keep putting one foot in front of the other and you'll make it to the top. I promise."

Sometimes our hikes took longer and included a bit of moaning and groaning, but we always got there.

I offered motivators to help make the hike more interesting and fun. Conversation. Undivided attention. Treats for the trail. Stories. Songs.

When children were really resistant, I upped the ante. "I love you *too much* to let you give up!" I explained to one young Girl Scout. For two miles, I held her sweaty hand firmly in my own to keep her from falling, since she insisted on staggering dramatically to show both of us (and everybody watching) how exhausted she was. When we got to the part of the trail that involved climbing over rocks with handholds, this girl got interested and excitedly joined her friends.

I encouraged the children hiking with me *not* to complain and did my best to reward cheerful perseverance.

Their sense of accomplishment at the end of the trail always made whatever struggles we had along the way worth the work.

### **Persistence Pays**

Recent research shows that children who were praised for trying hard did better on intelligence tests than children who were just told that they were smart. The reason seems to be that children who were just told that they were smart were afraid of failure. Children who understood that their brains are like muscles that need exercise were more likely to take risks and to expend effort. Expendng effort in the face of inner discomfort and outer discouragement takes work. Learning how to persist is a skill that can serve children well, not only in being safe with people, but in all areas of their lives.

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**Note:** The above article is an excerpt from *The Kidpower Book for Caring Adults: Personal Safety, Self-Protection, Confidence, and Advocacy for Young People*.