



Strategies for kids to maintain momentum even when they start to lose speed and want to quit

What you get from it	When you do it
Helping kids keep going when they want to stop	Varies by student.



Grow

Maintain Momentum: How To Help A Kid Keep Going, Even When They Want To Stop

Long-distance runners describe a phenomenon called “hitting the wall,” where one moment they’re flying along, feeling great, and the next, they’re zapped. With energy drained, the road ahead looks long.

You and your kids may have experienced a similar feeling, starting the year full of vigor, only to lose steam rapidly when things started getting tough and the newness wore off. Or maybe they started a project with lots of energy, but now their enthusiasm is waning. The feeling isn’t always as extreme as hitting the wall—sometimes things are just hard, and our efforts don’t match our results.

Experienced runners power through moments like these, finding different ways to overcome obstacles and doubt. Some change strategy and find a more comfortable pace. Others speed up to recalibrate what hard effort feels like. Some apply a continuous, steady effort to the finish—like the determined tortoise in the tortoise and the hare story—and others take a break and then get right back on track. And sometimes, support from spectators can carry a tired runner across the finish line.

Obviously, kids aren’t all runners, and learning is not a race, but there are strategies self-directed learners can use to push through challenges and overcome obstacles. There are five power behaviors of self-directed learners that kids can use to find their second wind.



Power Behaviors for Overcoming Obstacles

It can feel frustrating, and sometimes even intimidating, to an observer when a kid hits a wall. Is it because the kid's giving up or is it because they can't figure out how to take the next step? Instead of showing exasperation or stepping in, encourage your kid to use the power behaviors. These strategies provide a framework and language to use that isn't personal or judgemental—it shifts the conversation away from what the kid didn't do, to what strategy might be the best method for accomplishing the task.

As a parent or learning leader, you can help kids acquire skills to move past obstacles by encouraging the **five power behaviors** (and we offer you some words to use!):

- **Shift Strategy**
 - 1 Seek Challenges**
 - 2 Persistence**
 - 3 Respond to Setbacks**
 - 4 Seek Appropriate Help**
 - 5**



These behaviors take time to establish, and it can be hard for the adult to encourage the right moves when the kid doesn't say the "right" thing, or says nothing at all, and the adult needs to prompt the conversation.

When this happens, focus on **PROCESS** (finding strategies, encouraging determination, asking questions, etc.) rather than on **PRODUCT** (regardless of whether it's good or bad). This is the difficult instinct that we all have to try to overcome.



Practice the **16 Habits of Success**



Source: Summit Public Schools, as based on the Building Blocks for Learning Framework, Dr. Brooke Stafford-Brizard, Turnaround for Children, 2016.

But first, a note about losing steam.

When kids say an experience is frustrating and they want to give up, it's not necessarily because the work is too hard and certainly not because the kids are lazy. Research shows us that kids may give up learning something because they are not making progress.

“ When it feels like your kid is giving up, what is actually happening and what the research would say, is that they're just not feeling like they're making progress.

Mira Browne

Co-Founder & Executive Director,
Prepared Parents

When kids struggle to pick up a new skill, they misinterpret “this is hard” for “I’m not good at this” and give up.

Power behaviors can help kids to overcome this hurdle and reframe struggles. Learning scientists call this **desirable difficulty**, a term first coined by Dr. Robert Bjork in the 1990s. Desirable difficulty refers to learning activities that are hard to do, but because we desire to learn them, we're willing to put in the effort. And bonus! When we power through, we retain the information longer and in greater detail.



Power Behavior #1 — Shift Strategy

Why is it important? When a kid is stuck on something they're trying to learn, a step in a project, or a certain type of math problem, and they've tried the same strategy over and over again without success, it's time to try a different approach. Sometimes we all need to pause and reflect to figure out what we could do differently.

Not all strategies will work for every problem. Self-directed learners realize that when they are heading toward a dead end or getting frustrated, it is time to shift strategies—even if it means starting from scratch.

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A kid **shifting strategy** might say, “My approach isn't working, so I'll try something else.”

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To **encourage shifting strategy** you might say, “Sounds like you worked really hard, but that approach isn't working. What could we try differently?”



Power Behavior #2 — Seek challenges

Why is it important? Often when our kids are bored, or aren't motivated or engaged, they need to push themselves rather than give up. They can dig deeper into a topic. They can investigate or try to answer a more complex question. Or they can work on a project—like the one in **Learn**—for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic and engaging challenge. This is a terrific way to turn a school assignment into a real-world learning moment.

Self-directed learners are always **looking for challenges**. They know that they will not grow unless they are pushing themselves to try something they don't feel completely comfortable with.

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A kid **seeking challenges** might say, “I could set a goal that’s easy for me or I could stretch myself.”

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To **encourage seeking challenges** you might say, “It’s always good to look for challenges. How do you want to push yourself further?”



Power Behavior #3 — Persistence

Why is it important? The ability to persist through a setback, frustration, or challenge helps kids demonstrate and build **Self-Efficacy**, the belief that they are capable of doing hard things.

In her 2012 report, “**Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners**,” researcher Camille A. Farrington explained that a student’s attitudes and self-perceptions affect whether or not they’ll push through challenges to learn. Four core beliefs can make all the difference: that **they belong** in the community, that their ability and competence **grow with effort**, that the **work has value** to them, and **that they can succeed**.

Self-directed learners persevere even when a task is not completely engaging or interesting. They understand that deliberate practice leads to quicker processing and frees up mental space to solve more difficult problems and think through more interesting ideas.



A kid **showing persistence** might say, “This is difficult, but I won’t give up.”



To **celebrate a kid’s persistence**, you might say, “This doesn’t look easy, and I’m impressed by the persistence you’ve shown. Keep going!” or share examples of moments of persistence from your own life.



Power Behavior #4 — Respond to setbacks

Why is this important? Obstacles are a natural part of the learning process. Figuring out how to work through them helps kids realize what they are capable of—good for **Self-Efficacy** and a **Growth Mindset**, the idea that ability and competence can be improved through dedication and effort.

Setbacks can feel like failures. But, self-directed learners understand that they can fail, and fail as often, and usually more often, than anyone else. They don't get discouraged by these failures because they realize they are opportunities to learn and shift strategies, if necessary.



A kid **working through obstacles** might say, "I'm not going to be thrown just because my approach didn't work out."



To **encourage this response**, you might say, "I know things didn't work out the way you'd hoped, but that happens to everyone who tries to accomplish a task. What did you learn from the experience?"

Ask them to take a breath, articulate what they're struggling with, and then work through a response or new strategy together.

Better yet, anticipate obstacles in advance and plan to overcome them! **Engage** helps you do that this month, using a planning tool called **WOOP!**



Power Behavior #5 —Seek appropriate help

Why is it important? Self-directed learners feel comfortable asking for help from peers, parents, and teachers, and they do it in a way that will help sustain their learning. Self-directed learners are not satisfied with being given the answer or being told the next step in the process. They try to find answers for themselves before asking for help. And, they want to know why their current strategy isn't working and why other strategies might work better.

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A kid **seeking appropriate help** might say, “I've tried to solve this problem myself using several different methods and I'm truly stuck. It's okay to ask for help.”

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To **praise appropriate help-seeking**, you might say, “That's a great question you're asking me, because you've obviously done the work to find the answer for yourself, and you're asking me to help you figure it out, not do it for you. I appreciate that.”

This doesn't mean get mom or dad to do the work. It's about finding the resource that answers the question. It may be online or an aunt or uncle thousands of miles away who's an expert in their field. Your kid can give them a call to ask for assistance.