

## **Delaying Gratification**

Have you ever thought about “Yes” and “No” being the signposts for children to help them to find their way through life? “Yes” and “No” guide children, helping them to become happy and productive adults? “Yes” is the sign given to them by significant adults to say, “You are going the right way.” “No” signals to turn back because, “You are going in the wrong direction.” “No” teaches children that they need to put on the brakes and stop, that there are rules and boundaries about what they can do, that it is important to consider the needs and rights of others, and crucial to their preparation for life, is the “No” that means they must control their impulses, cope with the inevitable frustrations and wait! Learning to delay gratification and to wait for attention and things, teaches them that to feel frustrated and impatient are a normal emotions which can be coped with.

Many of you may have heard of a longitudinal study which began in 1972 when psychologist Walter Mischel of Stanford University tested over 600 four to six year olds on their ability to wait for a second marshmallow or choose one marshmallow immediately. (Search...”youtube the marshmallow experiment” to learn more.) The children were followed up in 1988,1990 and again in 2011 and the results were stagger-ing. The children who had been able to wait the 15 minutes and receive a second marshmallow were the ones to achieve higher, end of school scores, were more popular and as older adults were described in terms of being happier and more successful than the “grabbers”. It just proves there is much wisdom in that old saying, “Good things come to those who wait!”

Not wanting to deal with a child’s/adolescent’s reaction to being told “No”, not want-ing to upset the child, not knowing how to respond to the reaction, worrying it may affect their self esteem, being embarrassed if “No” might cause a melt down in public and the wanting to be liked by our children are all reasons parents might fail to insist on certain behaviours. The longer the delay in establishing boundaries, the more resistant to change children will be. It is the job of parents to establish boundaries and the job of children to test them. Encourage your child to wait, say “No” when there is to be no negotiation, and take a softer stand when negotiation is ok with you. Not saying “No” can cause difficulties for children because they do not learn to deal with life’s inevitable disappointments and frustrations. “No” and “Wait” are the words that help children learn how to put the brakes on their wants and impulses - a critical skill for their lifelong happiness.

**Gai Bath and Andrea Maver**  
**SMC Counsellors**

[gbath@smc.tas.edu.au](mailto:gbath@smc.tas.edu.au)

[amaver@smc.tas.edu.au](mailto:amaver@smc.tas.edu.au)