

To Quit or Not to Quit

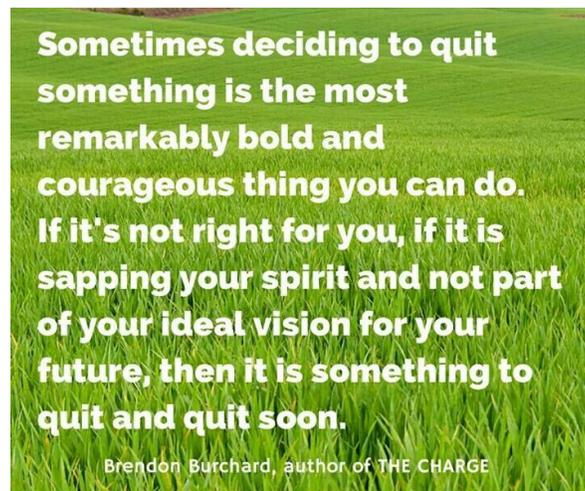
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Psst. What if I told you that it's okay for your kids to quit?

Last week failure, this week quitting?!! What is going on?!!!!

Yep, that's right. This week we're talking about when it's okay for your kids to quit.

This is a conversation Sarah and I have with parents all the time. Their kids sign up for something, try it for a while and then want to quit. Then the cycle starts again with a new activity. If this sounds like your kids, you might have a hard time figuring out when it's okay to let them quit and when it would be a good idea to encourage them to continue.



Letting your kids quit *some things* does not make them a quitter. It's okay if they dabble a little- it's how they figure out what they like. If they repeatedly commit to and stick with things they don't like doing, they go through life expecting to be unfulfilled by their activities, which is definitely not what you want them to learn.

Letting your kids quit *everything* might teach them to be a quitter. If your kids never stick with anything, they don't learn the importance of commitment and follow-through. Like Sarah



talked about last week, they may also learn that quitting is a good way to avoid failure, which means they quit before they give themselves a chance to be great.

So, how do you decide?

Your kids need to explore to find the things they are good at *and* that they like doing (yes, both are important, especially for things that require a lot of effort or time commitment). It's one thing when your kids try out something for the first time and decide they don't like it. But, here's a tough question: What do you do when your kid is really, really good at something and wants to quit? If you're like a lot of parents, your first instinct is to try to convince them to stick with it (or forbid them to quit).

But the reality is that sometimes the thing your kid is good at is not the thing they like or want to spend a ton of time doing. Your kid might be an amazing swimmer, but if she hates swim practice and truly only wants to swim for fun, does she really need to stay on the swim team?

This does not mean that your kids should get used to quitting things midstream. If they've committed to an activity or team (or you've already paid for it because they said they wanted to do it) then they have to finish out the commitment. This teaches them to honor their word, be reliable, and to be careful about what they decide to commit to. However, once they've honored their commitment, they don't have to sign up again.

Take me, for example. I decided to play softball during elementary school because a lot of my friends played. Since I was a novice, I was on a team with other inexperienced kids and needless to say, we were not good. I quickly realized that I did not like softball (hand-eye coordination is not my thing) and not even the coach's encouragement that I would be able to play for a better team the following season motivated me. I wanted out. Fortunately, this was a time my parents let me quit. I had to complete the season, but I did not have to return after that. While softball was *not* my favorite thing, the time wasn't wasted- I learned to play, got regular exercise, spent

time with friends, and learned about working hard and keeping my word. It *was* important to show up and give my best effort at practice and games, so I didn't let my teammates down. I also learned to think about what I enjoyed and what was important to me *before* committing to activities in the future.

So, how do you help your kids figure out when to quit and when to stick with something?

1. Find out why: The first thing to do when your kids say they want to quit something is to find out why they want to quit. Really listen to their answer. Sometimes they're just frustrated- maybe they lost, or something didn't turn out how they expected. In those cases, give them time to get through that disappointment and then re-evaluate things. If wanting to quit out of frustration is a repeated occurrence, let them know it's okay to re-evaluate their participation. This can give kids enough time to gain some perspective and decide whether they want to continue with the activity. If they really dislike it or have truly lost interest, then it's okay for them to quit once their current commitment is completed.
2. Consider the stakes: Is quitting going to make a huge difference, for better or worse? If they're just trying something out and they decide they don't like it, then quitting is fine. If it's something with higher stakes (e.g., something that will legitimately help them get into college/earn a scholarship, something that improves a needed skill) then talking with them about how to make it easier or more bearable may help more than letting them quit.
3. Consider who the activity is really for: Think about whether you or your kids are more invested in the activity. If you're more committed to the activity than your kids, it's helpful to take a step back. If your kids are not really interested, it's time to let that activity go.
4. Consider alternatives: If your kids are quitting an activity, do they need to replace it with something else? Many kids are overscheduled and quitting an activity can help them regain balance and much needed down time. For other kids, their extracurricular activities keep them active, learning, and engaged with peers, so quitting would be

detrimental. In that case, it could still be okay to quit the activity as long as they replace it with something else.

To quit or not to quit can be a difficult decision, but it's one that can be healthy for your kids. Kids who learn to make decisions about how they spend their free time also feel more in control of their lives and learn important skills, like time management and how to set priorities. The most important thing for you to remember is that quitting is not necessarily bad. In fact, quitting may free your kids up to find what they really love.

**Letting go
has nothing
to do with
"quitting."
Ask yourself,
"Am I sticking
it out or am I
staying stuck?"
You know
yourself best.**

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