

Someday I'll write the book. But in the meantime, I am officially copyrighting my intellectual property.

Give your kid a hand: The five qualities every child needs to be successful™



Ever since our son, Jacob, was a baby, my wife and I have been teaching him how to demonstrate five qualities. We taught them *in order*—there is a sequence, milk before meat.

1. **Gentle:** Don't hit, don't break things, keep your hands to yourself, etc.
2. **Quiet:** Inside voice vs outside voice, manage toy noise, don't wake the baby, etc.
3. **Happy:** No whining, be grateful for what you have, don't cry unproductively, be optimistic, etc.
4. **Curious:** Try new things, question everything, think critically, pay attention, etc.
5. **Accountable:** Every one gets to choose--and is accountable for those choices. Defend the right of others to choose even as you defend your own right. Don't blame others for your choices.

As Jacob developed one quality, we added the next.

It will take a lifetime to master this "handful" of qualities, but, although each child is different, a reasonable goal would be for each quality to be established by the age that matches the number of the quality. So a 1-year-old could certainly understand "Be gentle," and a 2-year-old could understand "Be quiet." Jacob's younger brother, Ben, quickly got caught up to Jacob's schedule and by 4 years old was reliably demonstrating all five qualities.

We find that the shorthand language of *Gentle*, *Quiet*, *Happy*, *Curious*, and *Accountable* enable teaching moments throughout the day. The five qualities are also broadly enough defined that it is easy to link them to some consequence or situation and to reinforce their benefit. The definitions become more sophisticated as the child matures: For example, *Gentle* grows from "Don't hit" to "Avoid extremes of behavior or expression."

One could argue that there are many more qualities a child needs to be successful—or that our "handful" doesn't accurately define even the basic five. But for our children, these five qualities form the base to which they could add or refine however they choose to. As long as Jacob and Ben are *Gentle*, *Quiet*, *Happy*, *Curious*, and *Accountable*, we will consider them ready to become adults.

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