

“Don’t Quit on a Bad Day”: The SKILLZ Approach to Building Grit and Growth in Kids

At SKILLZ, we sometimes hear from parents after a tough class:

"My child said they want to quit."

First, take a deep breath—this is more common than you think. But what we *do* next as parents and instructors can have a lasting impact on how children approach challenges for the rest of their lives.

Quitting after a bad day isn’t just about martial arts. It’s about shaping the brain, building character, and developing lifelong resilience. Let’s explore why.

The Brain’s Natural Response to Discomfort

The human brain is wired for safety and survival. When something feels hard or uncomfortable—like learning a new kick, facing a challenge in class, or getting corrected in front of peers—the **amygdala** (the brain’s security system) fires up.

This signals the body to resist. Cue frustration. Tears. The urge to walk away.

In kids, especially those still developing **executive functioning skills**, this reaction can feel overwhelming. Their **prefrontal cortex**—the part responsible for logic, planning, and decision-making—is still under construction, so they often lack the tools to self-regulate through big feelings.

So when your child says, "I want to quit," what they're really saying is, "This feels hard, and I don't know how to deal with it."

Why Quitting on a Bad Day Sends the Wrong Message

At SKILLZ, we believe that emotions are valid—but they don't have to dictate decisions.

If we let kids quit in moments of emotional dysregulation, we reinforce the idea that frustration means failure and discomfort is a reason to give up.

The problem with that? Life is full of hard moments. And if we don't teach children how to face those moments with courage, they'll keep looking for the exit instead of the opportunity.

We often tell our students:

"You're allowed to quit... but only on a good day."

If you still want to quit after a class where you felt proud, calm, and supported—*then* we'll have a conversation.

But quitting when you're frustrated isn't an option.

The Psychology of Grit and Growth

Psychologist Angela Duckworth's work on **grit**—the passion and perseverance to pursue long-term goals—shows that grit, more than raw talent or intelligence, predicts success.

But grit doesn't come naturally. It's built, slowly and intentionally, through repetition and challenge.

The SKILLZ curriculum is designed around this concept. Each level and lesson plan is aligned with developmental stages that challenge students just enough to stretch them—but not break them. This concept, called "**scaffolding**", allows children to face challenges in a structured, supported environment.

Add in **Teaching SKILLZ** tools like redirection, intrinsic motivation, and neurobics, and you've got a recipe for resilience.

What Parents Can Do Instead

When your child has a bad day (and they will), try these SKILLZ-informed strategies:

1. **Acknowledge their feelings:**

"I can see that today was really frustrating. It's okay to feel that way."

2. Pause the conversation:

"Let's give it a day or two and talk after your next class."

3. Reframe the challenge:

"Sometimes the hardest classes are the ones that help you grow the most."

4. Celebrate effort, not outcome:

"You kept going, even when it was hard—that's what matters most."

Final Thought: Quitting Doesn't Build Confidence—Overcoming Does

At SKILLZ, we believe that children don't build confidence by succeeding all the time.

They build confidence by facing hard things and realizing they can do it anyway.

Let's teach them that frustration is a part of growth—not a reason to give up.

So next time your child says, "I want to quit," take a breath and say:

"If you still feel that way after a great class, we'll talk. But we don't quit on a bad day."

Because on the other side of that tough moment... is a stronger, more confident child.