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In memory of my father, Marcel Baruch, who was gritty before it was  
trendy.

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# Foreword

Caren Baruch-Feldman's *Grit Guide for Teens* fills a real need. Its unique mix of research and common sense makes for an enjoyable, educational, and inviting book that I believe will help young people, parents, and educators for years to come. From the Neanderthal days to now, grit has always been an integral factor in people's success—but maybe, just maybe, it is even more important today than ever before.

After defining *grit* with the work of Angela Duckworth and other researchers, Caren puts it in down-to-earth terms and uses real-life examples that will actually resonate with teenagers. She isn't just describing the hurdles at West Point or the pain felt by marathon runners. She writes about the grit needed in gym class and writing the Harry Potter series.

I was particularly struck by the division into five distinct grit domains: academic grit, social/relationship grit, wellness/health grit, extracurricular grit, and emotional grit. In the same way that Howard Gardner recognized that we are more or less successful in different situations because we pull from distinct multiple intelligences, Caren illustrates how our grit will vary depending upon the context in which we find ourselves. Some of us will be grittier on an academic task, while others will most readily use grit in a social setting. As Caren explains, understanding how grit can vary due to situation and context is the first step in developing grit.

There has been a great deal of writing and talk about grit, and while most people seem to appreciate its power, there are also questions of how grit can be instilled and developed. This book offers good ideas and hands-on strategies. From interactive surveys that cause teens to reflect on their situations, attitudes, and behaviors to specific examples and models to overcome obstacles, the *Grit Guide for Teens* helps teens and their parents become more insightful and proactive at using grit to solve

problems in their day-to-day lives. I suspect that even the most reluctant teenager— *Who needs grit? Not me!* —will find this book interesting and helpful.

Caren's bias is clear: grit is an important part of problem-solving, and we can all develop more grit. This book is a useful tool to do just that!

—Thomas R. Hoerr, PhD Emeritus Head of School, New City School; St. Louis, MO Author of *The Formative Five: Fostering Grit, Empathy, and Other Success Skills Every Student Needs*

# Introduction

*I do not think that there is any other quality so essential to success of any kind as the quality of perseverance. It overcomes almost everything, even nature.*

—John D. Rockefeller

Welcome to the *Grit Guide for Teens*. You may be wondering, what is grit? Why is grit important? Why do I need it? How will this workbook help me get it?

Grit is the ability to stick with things that are important to you. It's viewing obstacles as challenges to overcome rather than reasons to quit. In sum, grit is the ability to accomplish, in the face of setbacks or challenges, the long-term goals that are important to *you*. Having grit will help you study for a final exam that's two weeks away or keep you from quitting a sport after a tough game. It's what forces you to face a difficult emotion or uncomfortable feeling so you can emerge feeling stronger and more resilient. In short, grit is an essential ingredient to achieving your goals, no matter what they might be.<sup>1</sup>

As a teen growing up today, you might find it difficult to have grit. You are at an age when failure can seem crushing. When you lose a game or flunk a test, it might feel like the end of the world. The pressure and stakes are high, and you have to balance the demands of school, extracurricular activities, and family obligations. You are often asked to do things you just don't want to do. And if those pressures weren't enough, there is so much to distract and discourage you—from social media to peer pressure. With all of these pressures, it can be especially hard to set long-term goals and find the strength to accomplish them—unless you have *grit*.

That's where this workbook comes in. This workbook

includes step-by-step instructions on how to develop grit and incorporate it into your life. Grit has traditionally been applied to academics and areas of elite performance like athletics or music, but this workbook will show you how grit can also help you to improve your relationships, wellness, and emotional well-being. Grit can be developed, like any other skill, when it is broken down into steps and applied to specific areas where grit is essential: academics, social relationships, health and wellness, extracurricular activities, and emotional well-being.

Through the activities in chapter 1, you will learn what grit is, determine your current level of grit, and identify the area in which you would like to become grittier (your *grit goal*). In chapter 2, you'll find out how to recognize and confront the irrational thoughts that are getting in your way and develop new ways of thinking that will promote a grittier mind-set. In chapter 3, you will turn those thoughts into action by learning strategies that have been found to strengthen stick-to-it-iveness and build gritty behavior. In chapter 4, you will find ways to overcome barriers to grit so that you can push through when the going gets tough. The strategies you will learn are based on my experience as a cognitive-behavioral psychologist as well as emerging research in the field of positive psychology. My goal for you is to see the benefit of focusing on the long term and to embrace the struggle that comes with being a teen, because in that struggle lies the possibility for real growth.

Writing this workbook required real grit on my part. I had to constantly remind myself of my long-term goal of finishing the book so that I wouldn't get sidetracked by short-term temptations like watching the *Real Housewives* on television! There were many obstacles along the way, like feeling discouraged by the many edits and rewrites and having to get up at 5 a.m. to write, but I tried to see those challenges as part of the process. I am hopeful that this workbook will be as rewarding for you as writing it was for me.

Wishing you much success on your journey.

Dr. Caren Baruch-Feldman

P.S. If you're a parent, teacher or counselor, check out the chapters I've written on what *you* can do to increase a teen's grit. They're available for you to download at <http://www.newharbinger.com/38563>.

## CHAPTER 1

# UNDERSTANDING GRIT: GRIT 101

*No grit, no pearl.*

—Anonymous

**I**n this chapter, you'll learn:

What grit is and why it's important for your success.

How gritty you are overall and within the different areas/domains of your life.

Where your grit is already strong and where it needs to grow.

The formula for grit.

How a positive approach can help you grow your grit.

Let's get started!



# what is grit?

*A river cuts through rock, not because of its power, but because of its persistence.*

—Jim Watkins

## for you to know

Imagine talented young men and women competing in the Scripps National Spelling Bee. All of the contestants were bright, but who made it to the winner's circle?

Imagine West Point Cadets, all strong and capable, but some were more successful than others at surviving the grueling summer training program known as “Beast Barracks.”

In both cases, it wasn't talent or IQ that made the difference. It was *grit*.

At the Spelling Bee, the contestants with the most grit were the ones who advanced to the finals, not because they were smarter or naturally better spellers, but because they had *studied and practiced* more than the others.<sup>2</sup>

For the cadets, grit mattered more than intelligence, leadership ability, or physical fitness. The cadets with grit *just did not quit*. They completed the challenging training at higher rates than their less gritty peers.<sup>3</sup>

## What Is Grit?

The quality of grit—as specifically described by psychologist, author, and leading expert in this field, Angela Duckworth—is “passion and perseverance for long-term and meaningful goals.”<sup>4</sup> This kind of passion is not about intense emotions or infatuation.

It's about having direction and commitment. Grit is the ability to stay focused on achieving your long-term goals. It's about sticking with the things that are important to you—like working on a project for a long period of time or pursuing a sport over many years. When you have this kind of passion, you are able to stay committed to a task that may be difficult or boring.

Grit is also about perseverance. To persevere means to stick with it; to continue working hard even after experiencing difficulty or failure. Perseverance is keeping up with your training even after you've been cut from the team—so you can try out again next year. Perseverance is bouncing back after a social encounter doesn't go your way. It means knowing every encounter (good or bad) gets you closer to your ultimate goal of having more friendships.

It is when you combine these two qualities—passion and perseverance—over the long term that you realize all the benefits associated with grit.

### **Why Is Grit Important?**

Grit is important because it allows you to use passion and perseverance to transform talent into skill. Although talent is important, without effort or grit, talent is nothing more than unmet potential. It is only with effort that talent becomes a skill that leads to success. While talent is important, effort is doubly important—as Duckworth depicts in this equation<sup>5</sup>:

$$\text{Grit} = \text{Effort}$$

$$\text{Talent} \times \text{Effort (grit)} = \text{Skill}$$

$$\text{Skill} \times \text{Effort (grit)} = \text{Achievement}$$

For example, you may have talent as a comedian, but in order to turn that talent into a skill you need to work at it consistently (grit). When you work on your routines (for example, trying out jokes, practicing in front of a mirror), you get better, which leads to success. Comedians like Jimmy Fallon, Amy Schumer, and Jerry Seinfeld don't just have talent; they continually use their talent to practice and refine their skills.

Let's hear what some teens have to say about what grit means to them and why it is important.

"In gym class, we start off each class with core work like planks and crunches. The rest of the class would complain and not participate, but I adopted an attitude that I loved core exercises and I was able to improve that way. I think what made me so gritty and able to stick with the class was that I knew doing those exercises would eventually lead to having a fit, toned, healthy body."

—Nia, high school senior

"When I was in high school, I got sick and missed a lot of school. I felt like I didn't know what was going on with my friends, and I fell behind in my classes. When I got better, I really wanted to switch schools. But I feel like I showed grit because I did go back to my old school. And, although some of my friendships had changed, I found out who my true friends were. Now I am in college and I know that whatever obstacle I might face, I will be able to bounce back."

—Lindsey, college freshman

“When I was growing up, my mom didn’t like seeing me upset. Whenever I was angry or sad, she stepped in to fix things. I know she was trying to help, but I wish she would have let me experience my feelings and problems. When I got older, I didn’t feel prepared for life’s ups and downs. I have worked hard to get grittier, and now I am able to face challenges head on and not give up. Having a grittier outlook is not always easy, but I know it will help me in the long run.”

—Maurice, college sophomore

We just heard from some teens. Now, let’s hear from *you*.

### **for you to do**

What does grit mean to you? Can you define grit in your own words?

Why is grit important to you?

Write about a time when you exhibited grit by sticking with something difficult. What do you think led to that success?

Write about a time that you weren’t so gritty and gave up on something prematurely. How did it make you feel?

When you persevered with a challenging task despite failure or difficulty, did you feel the hard work and sacrifice was worth it?

Yes    Not yet<sup>1</sup>

If you answered not yet, what might have helped you feel like it was worth it?

<sup>1</sup> Borrowing a concept from psychologist Carol Dweck,<sup>6</sup> I have purposely made the responses *yes* or *not yet* instead of *yes* or *no* to help you see that being gritty is a process and that you are on a journey of growth!