BUILDING FOUNDATIONAL HABITS:
OUR BEGINNINGS
CONSIDERING THE CASE STUDY

What steps does Mason suggest the parent follow?

What general principles should govern parents in the formation of habits?

What does Mason teach us about how habit works from this example?
MASON’S PRINCIPLES FOR HABIT TRAINING

ACKNOWLEDGE THE PROBLEM
“Why, that the actual conformation of the child's brain depends upon the habits which the parents permit or encourage; and that the habits of the child produce the character of the man, because certain mental habitudes once set up, their nature is to go on for ever unless they should be displaced by other habits. Here is an end to the easy philosophy of, 'It doesn't matter,' 'Oh, he'll grow out of it,' 'He'll know better by-and-by,' 'He's so young, what can we expect?' and so on. Every day, every hour, the parents are either passively or actively forming those habits in their children upon which, more than upon anything else, future character and conduct depend.”

Volume 1, p. 118
“Now here is a point all parents are not enough awake to—that serious mental and moral ailments require prompt, purposeful, curative treatment, to which the parents must devote themselves for a short time, just as they would to a sick child. Neither punishing him nor letting him alone—the two lines of treatment most in favour—ever cured a child of any moral evil. If parents recognised the efficacy and the immediate effect of treatment, they would never allow the spread of ill weeds. For let this be borne in mind, whatever ugly quality disfigures the child, he is but as a garden overgrown with weeds: the more prolific the weeds, the more fertile the soil; he has within him every possibility of beauty of life and character. Get rid of the weeds and foster the flowers.”

*Volume 2, p. 87*
MASON’S PRINCIPLES FOR HABIT TRAINING

ACKNOWLEDGE THE PROBLEM

SEPARATE THE HABIT FROM THE PERSON
MASON’S PRINCIPLES FOR HABIT TRAINING

ACKNOWLEDGE THE PROBLEM

SEPARATE THE HABIT FROM THE PERSON

MAKE A PLAN
“a mother whose final question is, 'What will people say? what will people think? how will it look?' and the children grow up with habits of seeming, and not of being; they are content to appear well-dressed, well-mannered, and well-intentioned to outsiders, with very little effort after beauty, order, and goodness at home, and in each other's eyes.”

Volume 1, pp. 105-106

“Why do we wish our children to form habits of punctuality, tidiness and prompt obedience? To save ourselves trouble? Yes—and we will have earned the repose when we reach it! But our real reasons lie deeper. Those habits once formed save the child from all the exhaustion of the hustled last-minute search while the family fumes in the car at the door. They save those delays in obedience which so often make the obedience worthless, and all concerned tired and irritable. The child's energies are not dissipated in futile struggles but the nervous system is fresh and free for the day's legitimate occupations. Again, those habits fit the child to live in a community, an independent and considerate member thereof.”

Shelley, “Character Training”
“Tact, watchfulness, and persistence are the qualities she must cultivate in herself; and, with these, she will be astonished at the readiness with which the child picks up the new habit.”

*Volume 1, p. 122*
MASON’S PRINCIPLES FOR HABIT TRAINING

- Acknowledge the problem
- Separate the habit from the person
- Make a plan
- Prevent rather than punish
“Are we too apt to think that sweets as a reward, whipping for a misdemeanour, meet all Peter's needs in the way of character training and that money, leisure, environment, freedom, not to say license, should meet any need voiced by the cry for reconstruction? The need must be considered, not what will stop the cry; otherwise we act like the nursemaid who stuffs an india rubber comforter into baby's mouth whenever he cries and for whatever reason.”

Elsie Kitching, “Back to the Children”
“I fear the reader may be inclined to think that I am inviting his attention for the most part to a few physiological matters—the lowest round of the educational ladder. The lowest round it may be, but yet it is the lowest round, the necessary step to all the rest. For it is not too much to say that, in our present state of being, intellectual, moral, even spiritual life and progress depend greatly upon physical conditions. That is to say, not that he who has a fine physique is necessarily a good and clever man; but that the good and clever man requires much animal substance to make up for the expenditure of tissue brought about in the exercise of his virtue and his intellect. For example, is it easier to be amiable, kindly, candid, with or without a headache or an attack of neuralgia?”

Volume 1, p. 36
“… by making the atmosphere so well stocked with suitable occupation that their attention shall be engrossed; and their bodies so suitably and regularly fed that they shall not think about their appetites.”

Mrs. Hart Davis, “Child Nature”
“Once a child is old enough to realize that in any department he is being managed, it is too late to manage him in that department. The chances are that by that time, if we have done our part wisely, he will be well able to manage himself. When the day comes that you can say to the little boy about anything, with a certainty of being understood, ‘When you feel tempted to do anything you ought not to do, just think of something else, or go and do something else,’ he has entered on the second stage of his life. He will often need help from others in his thought-turning, but as soon as possible show him how, in many instances, to do it for himself. A very young child can be taught that in the presence of a temptation to do something forbidden, the best plan is to go and do something else which is also pleasant, but allowable.”

Webb, “Thought-Turning”
“In the first place, never let the child dawdle over copybook or sum, sit dreaming with his book before him. When a child grows stupid over a lesson, it is time to put it away. Let him do another lesson as unlike the last as possible, and then go back with freshened wits to his unfinished task.”

Volume I, p. 141
“The fact is, not that punishment is unnecessary or that it is useless, but that it is inadequate and barely touches our aim; which is, not visitation for the offence, but the correction of that fault of character of which the offence is the outcome. Jemmy tells lies and we punish him; and by so doing we mark our sense of the offence; but, probably, no punishment could be invented drastic enough to cure Jemmy of telling lies in the future; and this is the thing to be aimed at. No, we must look deeper; we must find out what weak place in character, what false habit of thinking, leads Jemmy to tell lies, and we must deal with this false habit in the only possible way, by forming the contrary habit of true thinking, which will make Jemmy grow up a true man.”

Volume 2, pp. 172-173
MASON’S PRINCIPLES FOR HABIT TRAINING

- Acknowledge the problem
- Separate the habit from the person
- Make a plan
- Prevent rather than punish
- Inspire, not just require
“It is a happy thing that the 'difficult' children who are the readiest to resist a direct command are often the quickest to respond to the stimulus of an idea.”

*Volume 3, p. 23*

“But let us not despair; every boy and girl is open to such impulse, is capable of heroic effort. Prayer and patience, and watchfulness for opportunities to convey the stimulating idea—these will not be in vain. Every boy and girl is a hero in posse. There is no worse infidelity than that which gives up the hope of mending any flaw of character, however bad, in a young creature.”

*Volume 2, p. 209*

“Of course it is only now and then that a notion catches the small boy, but when it does catch, it works wonders, and does more for his education than years of grind.”

*Volume 3, p. 163*
We entertain the idea which gives birth to the act and the act repeated again and again becomes the habit; 'Sow an act,' we are told, 'reap a habit.' 'Sow a habit, reap a character.' But we must go a step further back, we must sow the idea or notion which makes the act worth while. The lazy boy who hears of the Great Duke's narrow camp bed, preferred by him because when he wanted to turn over it was time to get up, receives the idea of prompt rising. But his nurse or his mother knows how often and how ingeniously the tale must be brought to his mind before the habit of prompt rising is formed; she knows too how the idea of self-conquest must be made at home in the boy's mind until it become a chivalric impulse which he cannot resist.

It is possible to sow a great idea lightly and casually and perhaps this sort of sowing should be rare and casual because if a child detect a definite purpose in his mentor he is apt to stiffen himself against it.”

Volume 6, p. 102
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“… supposing the parent take pains that the child shall be in a fit state to use his will, how is he to strengthen that will, so that by and by the child may employ it to control his own life by? We have spoken already of the importance of training the child in the habit of obedience. Now, obedience is valuable only in so far as it helps the child towards making himself do that which he knows he ought to do. Every effort of obedience which does not give him a sense of conquest over his own inclinations, helps to enslave him, he will resent the loss of his liberty by running into license when he can. That is the secret of the miscarrying of many strictly brought-up children. But invite his co-operation, let him heartily intend and purpose to do the thing he is bidden, and then it is his own will that is compelling him, and not yours; he has begun the greatest effort, the highest accomplishment of human life—the making, the compelling of himself.”

Volume I, pp. 328-329
“Again, when you want to tell a child to do something, remember not only that example is better than precept, but that precept may be brought wonderfully into line with example. Instead of "Willie, shut the door," say, "Willie" (be sure he looks at you and gives his attention), "we always shut the door, don't we" and so on.”

Webb, “Thought-Turning”
“Be courteous, be candid, be grateful, be considerate, be true; there are aspects of duty enough to occupy the attention of mother and child for every day of the child-life; and all the time, the idea of duty is being formed, and conscience is being educated and developed. At the same time, the mother exercises the friendly vigilance of a guardian angel, being watchful, not to catch the child tripping, but to guide him into the acting out of the duty she has already made lovely in his eyes; for it is only as we do that we learn to do, and become strong in the doing.”

Volume I, p. 340
# Mason’s Principles for Habit Training

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“there is a law by which all rewards and punishments should be regulated: they should be natural, or, at any rate, the relative consequences of conduct; should imitate, as nearly as may be without injury to the child, the treatment which such and such conduct deserves and receives in after life ... It is evident that to administer rewards and punishments on this principle requires patient consideration and steady determination on the mother's part. She must consider with herself what fault of disposition the child's misbehaviour springs from; she must aim her punishment at that fault, and must brace herself to see her child suffer present loss for his lasting gain ... In placing her child under the discipline of consequences, the mother must use much tact and discretion. In many cases, the natural consequence of the child's fault is precisely that which it is her business to avert, while, at the same time, she looks about for some consequence related to the fault which shall have an educative bearing on the child: for instance, if a boy neglects his studies, the natural consequences is that he remains ignorant; but to allow him to do so would be criminal neglect on the part of the parent.”

*Volume 1, p. 148*
CONSTRUCTIVE WORK: BUILDING FOUNDATIONS

- HEALTHY ATMOSPHERE
- HIGHER ESTIMATE OF CHILD NATURE
"the child's most fixed and dominant habits are those which the mother takes no pains about, but which the child picks up for himself through his close observation of all that is said and done, felt and thought, in his home."

Volume 1, p. 137

“A child may be well bred and yet badly brought up, for good bringing up is the result of all the words that reach the child's ear, of all the thoughts which are suggested to his mind in hourly intercourse, of all the examples which are offered to his eye and all the acts of his daily life.”

Rooper, “Bad Bringing Up”
“This healthy atmosphere, this true growing ground, is within the reach of all ... What is needed is harmony in all that rules the choice of the surroundings, in the persons, the scenes, the amusements, the occupations of the children, a single aim that they shall minister to the growth of the best part of their nature, and encourage the healthy development of that which was placed in them by God.”

Mrs. Hart Davis, “Child Nature”
“There is no need to rate the child, or threaten him, or use any manner of violence, because the parent is invested with authority which the child intuitively recognises. It is enough to say, 'Do this,' in a quiet, authoritative tone, and expect it to be done. The mother often loses her hold over children because they detect in the tone of her voice that she does not expect them to obey her behests; she does not think enough of her position; has not sufficient confidence in her own authority. The mother's great stronghold is in the habit of obedience. If she begin by requiring that her children always obey her, why, they will always do so as a matter of course; but let them once get the thin end of the wedge in, let them discover that they can do otherwise than obey, and a woeful struggle begins, which commonly ends in the children doing that which is right in their own eyes.”

Volume 1, pp. 162-163
“Now, if the parent realise that obedience is no mere accidental duty, the fulfilling of which is a matter that lies between himself and the child, but that he is the appointed agent to train the child up to the intelligent obedience of the self compelling, law-abiding human being, he will see that he has no right to forego the obedience of his child, and that every act of disobedience in the child is a direct condemnation of the parent. Also, he will see that the motive of the child's obedience is not the arbitrary one of, ‘Do this, or that, because I have said so,’ but the motive of the apostolic injunction, ‘Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.’”

Volume 1, p. 161
“Another point about his atmosphere is: let it not bristle with laws and rules and pitfalls guarded by ‘don't’ at every turn. Let the rules be few and easily obeyed, and such as command his respect. Explain them to him, and let him feel they are absolute. If you get his clear consent to them he condemns himself if he disobeys.”

Mrs. Hart Davis, “Child Nature”
“Let Children Alone.—In conclusion, let me say that the education of habit is successful in so far as it enables the mother to let her children alone, not teasing them with perpetual commands and directions—a running fire of Do and Don't; but letting them go their own way and grow, having first secured that they will go the right way, and grow to fruitful purpose. The gardener, it is true, 'digs about and dungs,' prunes and trains, his peach tree; but that occupies a small fraction of the tree's life: all the rest of the time the sweet airs and sunshine, the rains and dews, play about it and breathe upon it, get into its substance, and the result is—peaches. But let the gardener neglect his part, and the peaches will be no better than sloes.”

Volume 1, p. 134
“A little child's character is built upon the knowledge of his parents' love…”

_Kitching, “What Next”_

“If we would begin by looking carefully to the surroundings, and then go to work with faith in the **capacity for good in child nature**, we should find ourselves in a redeemed world. If we could but hold fast to one principle, that it is natural to a child to be good—hold fast to it through much tribulation, against all the evidence of what we see and hear, against the sneers of those who misunderstand him, against even what he says of himself, there is no limit to the influence for good we may exercise, no measuring the power which lies in our hand.”

_Mrs. Hart Davis, “Child Nature”_
“What I have said should be encouraging, especially to those (and they are many) who feel Home Education to be uphill work, who depreciate their power to deal with it, who distrust themselves and take the blame of everything on their own shoulders. We, who are past the steepest pitch, who have nearly done all we can for the eldest of the family, and trust to the ‘tradition of the elders’ for our younger ones, may hold out a hand of encouragement to those who are still dealing with nursery days. They under-estimate their power. We all did the same. It is only as we rise higher we breathe more freely; it is only as years advance we find out that a mother's power depends not on cleverness, ability, or gifts, but on love and faith. It matters much more to your children what you are than what you do. You fear to find your head under water, at the pace of higher education! The young ones learn so much you never learnt! It matters not. If you are in sympathy with them, if they know it, and see you to be single-minded, honest, painstaking, religious, you cannot lose your hold over them, you have all that is needed for success in your work. Only you must believe it. Believe in the power of your eye, your smile, your voice, your hand, and, above all, your heart. Let your children find in you a large haven of peace—the gates of the harbour always open—the waters within always at rest.”

Mrs. Hart Davis, “Child Nature”