Finishing the school year strong

As we slouch toward the end of the school year, I send my kids out the door each morning with the same refrain: “Finish strong!” I call to them as they head to the bus stop. They placate me with an insincere thumbs-up or grumble something I can’t quite make out, but at least I know they heard me. Here are four ways to help kids push themselves across their finish lines.

1. Remember the Ultimate Goal

We don’t start most endeavors merely for the sake of being done with them. Projects, particularly long-term ones such as school years or extracurricular seasons, have a purpose attached. Teachers and coaches encourage our kids to set and check in on goals, lest they get lost in the drama and drudgery of the day to day. Often, all it takes is a reminder of what we set out to accomplish in the first place to re-energize us. Good grades, winning seasons or successful performances often require diligence all the way through to the end. Other goals, such as simply improving or being a better person, don’t have a stopping place.

2. See It Through

When I was 15 years old, I got a summer job working at an amusement park. I hated it. I wanted to quit almost from the very start, but my dad wouldn’t let me. Even though he was the one who had to drive me to and fro, even though I came home stinking of potato salad every day for three months, even though I complained bitterly, he made me work it to Labor Day. It wasn’t because of the money. It wasn’t because I was in need of discipline. It wasn’t because he wanted me out of the house for the summer. (OK, it probably was, but still …) It was because I had committed to the job and people were

counting on me. Sometimes, “I don’t want to” isn’t a good excuse.

3. To Everything There Is a Season

The temptation to quit before the finish line is the same as the tendency to worry about the future. We call it “borrowing grief,” hauling into today what rightfully belongs to tomorrow. If your kids are like mine, their minds already may have turned to summer camps, friends or just not having to get out of bed quite so early. We are strong believers in having something to look forward to, but the anticipation can’t come at the expense of today. “Finish strong!” reminds our kids that there is an end in sight, but we’re not quite there yet.

4. Celebrate the Win

It doesn’t take much to get us to celebrate in our house: report cards, tournaments, curtain calls, fundraisers. We keep our revelries proportionate, of course. (Some victories call for a dinner out, others may deserve a gushing phone call from Grandma.) Most major accomplishments are made of lots of little accomplishments along the way. Applauding the milestones can help keep focus on the ultimate goal. Recognizing today’s successes can make the work toward tomorrow’s objective seem more worthwhile. Besides, who couldn’t use a little more joy on the journey?