

Our Top Ten Parenting Goals for the School Year

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As we at LifeSmart evaluate the trends among today's teens and young adults—the success stories and the struggles—we can often correlate the results to parenting effectiveness. No, we are *not* in control of our children's success, but we *can* foster a supportive and empowering environment to give them the best chances. And, when we do, it's a "win win" for all.

Based on feedback from students, educators, employers, and mentors, we crafted our top ten goals for parents this year. We're sure you're already modeling many very well, and, that's great! But, as you reflect on this (and next week's) blog, we hope you'll find some areas to sharpen that will accrue to the benefit of your children.

In no particular order, here goes:

- 1. Equip and empower for independence:** Many teens are struggling with their transitions into adulthood. Although well intentioned, parents are often contributing by helicoptering, overprotecting, doing versus guiding, and treating their children as friends. Instead, let's focus on raising self confident and well prepared *future adults* who are resilient and independent problem solvers. Let's move emotionally and practically from the driver seat to the passenger seat by giving them greater responsibility and accountability and treating them like adults. Sure they may underachieve or make mistakes, but those lessons are vital to their personal growth and success.
- 2. Develop soft skills and professionalism:** Book smarts don't always translate into life smarts. Ask any employer of young people. The lack of work experience and character education, as well as our casual culture and communication, are taking a toll. So, use every opportunity to build these vital skills for the workplace and life: high standards, integrity, dependability, positivity, motivation, teamwork/relationship building, communication, resilience, respect, and professional manners. It'll help them build a great brand and gain admirers.
- 3. Invest in your relationship:** As teens exert their independence, it can feel like they're pushing their parents away. But, no matter how discouraging this can be, continue to invest in your relationship—it will pay off. Keep those lines of communication wide open and put your listening skills to good use! Think "share with" more than "talk to." Affirm their uniqueness and value, and demonstrate how much you believe in them. Find the time and place they open up most and make it happen. And, go tech free during meals.
- 4. Build a strong work ethic:** What happens when we do our children's work because of their busy schedules or our desire to see them happy? It hampers their motivation and work ethic, and employers are indicating that this is a BIG issue. As teens mature, so should their responsibilities around the home. That means doing chores that will not

only help your household, but will also prepare them for life on their own. Part-time jobs and volunteering for the community or neighborhood contribute too.

- 5. *Quash any sense of entitlement:*** Over the past few decades, our culture has become child centric. So, it's not surprising that many young people see the world as revolving around them. (Many universities are playing into this too and delaying their students' maturation.) Consequently, young adults are in for a rude awakening when they enter the competitive workforce. Be on the lookout for signs of an entitlement mentality brewing in your children, and take corrective measures if needed. A volunteer trip to the soup kitchen can do wonders. Teach yours that privileges and success are *earned*, often the hard way.
- 6. *Help them build their network:*** Parenting is a team sport. And, during the teen years, we need all the help we can get! Research shows that every child needs at least five caring adult role models who offer wisdom, love, encouragement, friendship, and connections. In addition, workforce recruiting is changing so much that having an inside advantage is almost a must. The time for your teen to build his/her network is NOW, and parents, you can give them a big head start by introducing them to great people you know. It's one of the most valuable gifts you can give to your children.
- 7. *Promote effective time management:*** Today's teens and young adults are bombarded by attention grabbers and distractions. Whether it's technology, social media, or video games, their ability to focus, problem solve, and spend time on what really matters is being compromised. It's vital to teach our children that time is a precious asset that needs to be managed wisely. Among other things, that means: 1) developing daily "to do" lists organized by priority and urgency, 2) understanding that work comes before play, and 3) limiting the time they spend on low value activities like social media. It's all part of the "adulthood" process, and one day they'll thank you for it.
- 8. *Cultivate self awareness:*** In our conversations with high school (and even college!) students, we're struck by how little they really know themselves. And yet, many schools and parents are pressuring them to know exactly what career or major to pursue. That's one reason why we encourage students to build their self awareness. Among other things, this involves: 1) inventorying their strengths (assets) and challenges (constraints), 2) identifying their interests and passions, and 3) understanding their personality style and personal preferences. Tools such as the DISC personality test and LifeSmart's [Personal Balance Sheet](#) help students to understand who they are, what they have to offer, and what opportunities will help them thrive. Let's help them make these long-term decisions with some clarity!
- 9. *Avoid overcommitting/respect balance:*** You've all heard about the rise in mental health issues among teens and young adults, including anxiety and depression. We're stressing out our kids in a major way, and some of this is the result of overscheduling and committing our kids to build their resumes. Their lack of down time to decompress is

clearly taking a toll. Parents, we need to be mindful of how much free time our kids have to reflect, chill, enjoy nature, and pray if they're so inclined. Let's be more vigilant about the time requirements for activities *before* they sign up. Proper balance is a key ingredient to good mental health, and *you* can help make that happen.

10. *Have fun:* College prep exams. Resume building. College applications. Career planning. Financial aid forms. Yes, the upper high school years are fraught with pressure—all the while our students have to be... students! And, as parents, it's easy to be so consumed by our children's success that we get stressed out too. When that happens, we can forget about one of the most important things for a family's well being—having fun! What do your kids enjoy doing *together* the most? Camping? Hiking? Playing sports? Watching movies? Playing games? Building things? Cooking a meal? Attending concerts? Enjoying a campfire? Whatever it is, be sure to make room for it. The years really do fly by, and these moments will build relationship capital for a lifetime. #enjoyyourkids

So, these are our top ten. How about yours? We hope you enjoyed them and that they serve you in the years ahead. We'd love to hear your thoughts and encourage you to share with your friends, too.