

Supporting Young Adult Goal-Setting and Self-Management

Self-management, or the ability to recognize your emotions and control the behaviors sparked by those emotions, is a skill that makes a difference in all of our relationships – work, home, school, and community. It’s knowing how to manage stress, cope with adversity, and overcome obstacles to reach goals. For many families, using the term “self-management” may not be a regular thing. But many can recognize when it is – or isn’t—practiced.

Teens leaving high school for college, career, the military, or any other endeavor must take their self-management with them – not their parents’! In many cases, they face changes in rules, or situations where the rules are not so clear. The ability to overcome obstacles, reach their goals, and make wise, non-impulsive decisions are crucial to not only their personal growth, but their opportunities for a successful life. Even though you may no longer be living in the same household as your young adult, there are still ways you can support their self-management from afar.

Talk About Steps to Reach Goals

While saying “what are your goals” may not be something you regularly talk about with your kids, you’re likely already doing this in your own way.

Has your teen declared a major? Do they know what field they want to go in? Are they on a career path with an ultimate position in mind? Those are all ways they are working toward goals. While you can’t set your young adult’s goals for them, you can help them think through the steps it will take to achieve their goals.

Ask questions like; “I know you want to get a job at that company, what do you think you could do now to increase your chances of getting hired?” or “You said that program is competitive to get into, are there classes you’re taking to better set you up for admission?” or “I know you want to get a job in [advertising, media, healthcare, etc.] Are there internships you’re looking into to gain more experience?”

Goals don’t just have to be college or career focused. Maybe your kid is passionate about a social issue or their health. The same strategies can apply. Be curious, ask them how they’re going to do their part to create change.

Highlight Learning from Setbacks

“Failure,” or setbacks, can be scary for many teens, especially those who have been high achievers for most of high school.

But setbacks are a part of life that offers a unique opportunity depending on how each of us handles it. Did someone in the family lose a job? Did they have to work even harder to get back into the workforce? Share those stories you may not have told your kid when they were younger because you thought they were too young. Knowing that other friends and family have “turned lemons into lemonade” or carried on despite adversity can be inspirational for your young adult and help them put their current situation into perspective. Director of Rutgers University’s Social-Emotional Learning Lab Maurice J. Elias likes to highlight that even people we deem extremely successful have faced adversity. For example, Steve Jobs, Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan, Walt Disney, Albert Einstein, and Maya Angelou all had careers that didn’t start smoothly at all.



Also, remind them of their own resilience. Did they overcome a learning disability to be a better student? Did they get back into sports after working hard to repair an injury? Did they get a better grade after studying more or asking for homework help? Sharing stories of failure—and how they were overcome – can help your young adult see failure as an opportunity to grow, rather than be a dead end.

Be Their Coach

While a young adult is just that – an adult—they are still your child. Even though your relationship has changed, that doesn't mean you can't still be a supportive and secure influence in their lives.

Education consultant Jennifer Miller recommends parents take on a coaching approach, by helping kids find their own solutions, rather than stepping in.

Tom Hoerr, Emeritus Head of School at New City School in St. Louis, Missouri, says actually using the term “coach” with your young adults can be extremely helpful, particularly at this age when they may be trying to figure out exactly what their new relationship with you is. Are they still children? Are they your friend? Are they both? It's possible your teen has experienced a coach before, so it's a relationship they understand.

“Talking about coaching, explaining how a coach wants to help you do your best, and how that means identifying and applauding successes, but also observing and correcting flaws may resonate with kids,” Hoerr says. “They've certainly all seen a coach so they understand the relationship and the communication. Hearing that may help them understand the actions of their parents.”

A big part of being a coach is to cheer on your team. While you might not always be aware of their hard work, asking your young adult about it – and then complimenting them on that effort – is a great way to continue to support them. Tell them that you're proud of them, for overcoming an obstacle, for getting that internship or job they wanted, or for taking a different path that might not have been popular but was the right thing to do. No matter their age, most “kids” still like to hear that they've made their parents proud. Even if they don't admit it!

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS