

The Importance of Goal Setting in High School

Goal setting is a part of self-management, and it helps your teen increase self-awareness and builds self-esteem. As your high schooler continues to grow and become more independent, their ability to set and work toward goals becomes even more important to their future success. Goals for high schoolers can be related to personal accomplishments, academics, relationships, or post-high school plans. For example, your teen might want to pass their driving test to get their license, get an A in math class, or get accepted into the college of their choice. All of those goals require work to accomplish, and the more you can support your teen's short-term and long-term goals, the better they'll be able to set and work toward goals on their own.

Talk to your high schooler about your own goals. Many people have goals even if they don't identify them as such. You might want to eat healthier, take a vacation, or build up your savings. Talk to your teen about the steps you are taking to accomplish these goals. Maybe you've decided to stop buying junk food at the store, so you're not tempted by the cookie jar, or maybe you're cutting back on eating out to help with your health and savings. Whatever you're working toward, share the experience with your teen. You can even map out your goals together and tape them to the refrigerator so you're both reminded of what you want to accomplish and how you're getting there.

Help your child map out their goals. Neurologist and teacher Judy Willis recommends writing out the steps they will take to accomplish their goal. These small reminders will be the steps they'll take along the way. Education consultant Jennifer Miller suggests brainstorming multiple ways to get to a long-range goal. For students looking to go to college, this could mean mapping out meetings with school counselors, participating in community service or taking a leadership role on the student council. You can help your child map these items out on paper as they work toward the goal. Help them figure out deadlines for applications, tests they need to take, and when they will work extracurricular activities and community service into their schedule. Let them take ownership of this process, but take time to check in with their progress and see if they need to readjust their timelines as they get started.

Support your teen's goals even if they seem out of reach or undesirable. Many high schoolers change their minds about where they want to go to school, if they want to go to school, or what they aspire to "be" when they grow up. One way to help your child through all these opportunities is to support their dreams and ambitions and try not to tell them his dreams are unlikely, out of reach, or simply not practical for your family. Some teens like to make statements about not going to college or getting a job just to get under their parents' skin, while others will simply have ambitions that seem out of touch with their skills. As your teen matures and develops their self-awareness, they will likely set more realistic goals. In the meantime, you can provide comfort and support by being open to their ambitions. Along the same lines, try to have realistic goals for your child. New York City-based teacher Anne Morrison recommends that parents help find the "best fit" for their teen, rather than just the "best." It's important to take your teen's interests and learning preferences into account when choosing a college, rather than focusing solely on a school's academic reputation. A good way to find the best fit for your teen is to consider factors like the college's academic offerings, location, size, instructor-student ratio, academic support services, and extracurricular activities available.

