

Parenting Tweens
Successfully Navigating the Middle School Years



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Table of Contents

Introduction	i
Chapter 1: Fostering Independence	1
What Does Independence Mean for Teenagers?	
How to Raise an Independent Teenager	
Respect Their Opinions and Feelings	
Establish Fair but Clear Rules	
Treat Your Child Appropriately For Their Age	
Helping Your Child Create the Skills to Make Decisions	
Give Them Safe Chances to Exercise Their Independence	
Handling Conflicts	
Independence for Children with Special Needs	
Focus on the Positive	
Two Types of Motivations	
When to Give Your Teen a Reward	
When Do They Deserve a Reward?	
Rewards You Can Give Your Teen	
Look After Yourself	
Chapter 2: Embrace Failure	14
Why Does Failing Seem So Scary?	
Do We Blame The Parents?	
Failure Deprivation	
How to Normalize Failure	
Ways We Need to React to Failures	
Grit Is Powerful	
Growth Mindset	
Creating a Growth Mindset	

Use Self-Compassion to Move Through Failures	
Ways You Can Teach Your Teen That Failing Is Good	
Growth Mindset	
Failures Will Happen	
Celebrate and Embrace Failures	
Explain Brain Science	
Make Sure They Know to “Fail Forward”	
Teach Them About the Mindful Approach	
Chapter 3: Grades Don’t Matter, Effort Does	28
The Exceptional Elementary Student	
Homework and The Five-Minute Rule	
Motivating for Effort	
Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences	
Chapter 4: Limit Screen Time	36
Screen Time and Bad Grades	
Screen Time and Mental Health	
Soft Skills	
Blue Light and Sleep	
How to Limit Screen Time	
Smartphone Etiquette	
Chapter 5: Adolescent Brain	46
Tween/Teen Brains	
Girls and Boys Brains Are Different	
Processing	
Chemistry	
Structural Differences	
Brain Activity and Blood Flow	
Chapter 6: Reading for Fun	52

Reading and Child Development	
Reading and Education	
Top Ten Benefits	
Reading With Your Child	
How to Raise a Child Who Reads for the Fun of It	
Chapter 7: Teaching Respect	59
How to Teach and Show Respect	
Ways You Can Show Respect	
Chapter 8: Family Dinner	64
How to Make Family Dinner Happen	
Chapter 9: Out of School Time	71
Extracurricular Activities	
Family Outings and Vacations	
Chapter 10: Final Consideration: Happiness	79
Raising Happy Kids	
Nature Deficit	
Meditation	
Gratitude Journal	
References	90
Conclusion	92

Introduction

Thank you for choosing this book. I hope you find herein ideas and concepts helpful in parenting your middle school student to become well-educated and well-rounded teen.

Middle school represents a special unique time in your child's life where students are developing their abstract thinking skills while undergoing dramatic emotional and physical changes. It is the transition from elementary school to high school, from child to teen that is the focus of this book. The pre-teenage years or tween years for short. For the past twenty years, my work has focused on those awkward middle school years. In my years of experience teaching middle school students across three different countries hundreds of students have passed through my classroom. I have watched as some succeed and others struggled. I have been party to countless parent/teacher conversations focused on helping students become the best version of themselves. The content of this book partially derived from asking the parents of successful students what was their secret to parenting successful tweens. Likewise, I have also been in numerous parent teacher conversations with parents of students who were struggling in school and often in life. Happily, I also witnessed students who were able to turn it all around with the support of their family and school. In almost all cases, a child's success in school doesn't start in the classroom but at home. The following chapters are my best effort at sharing the years of highlights and insights gathered while on the front lines of the in-between years of middle schools, where tweens grow out of their childhood and into their adult versions. The tween years can be quite challenging for parents and tween. Keep reading as I highlight what parents can do to improve your child's chances of being successful in school and in life.

This book will help you view your role in parenting a tween differently. It will provide you suggestions and insights into the tween psyche. The chapters will cover embracing failures, grades, screen time, reading, family dinner, and much more that will help guide you through the difficult years of parenting tweens.

Tweens need a gentle guiding hand. As you will find in the first chapter, though, they don't need people who do everything for them. We want to learn how to support our tween instead of just telling them to do things, making them do things they hate, or simply doing everything for them.

We'll also go over the importance of teaching your child to embrace failures. We need to make sure our preteen child has a growth mindset so that they can learn and grow despite encountering failures. That leads us to the next point of stressing the importance of effort instead of the final grade. If we teach our tween to put in the effort, the grades will come.

We will also go over things like limiting screen time and the importance of proper cell phone usage and etiquette. Screen time impacts the young way's minds more than we know, so it's important to take control of this problem before it takes hold. Speaking of minds, we'll look at how the brains of boys and girls are different.

Next, we'll talk about one of the most important secrets in helping students succeed. Getting your children interested in reading for the fun of it. They shouldn't just be reading because their teacher tells them to. We'll also look at the importance of teaching your child respect. Respect is something they will use their entire life, and it comes into play a lot in the classroom.

We'll then go over the importance of family dinner and how the simple act of eating with your children can help to improve their performance in school. Brings us to the next chapter about out of school activities. Too many children aren't getting the same amount of education and learning experiences, but this can be improved through extracurricular activities and family vacations.

Everything will be wrapped up with my final thoughts about happiness. We all want our children to grow up happy and to be a happy adult, and with some changes, you can ensure your child is happy and successful.

Chapter 1: Fostering Independence

“It is not what you do for your children, but what you have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful human beings.” – Ann Landers

People have described parenthood as being their greatest joy in life. But that same wonderful experience has been described by others as the biggest challenge that they have faced.

Many different emotions could be experienced during this journey, especially during the lovely “tween” years. The entire family is normally busy, and this can cause various reactions from children and parents.

If we can learn how to relate to all the developmental challenges that our kids face, it might help us respond in ways that will result in the greatest gains while keeping resistance at bay.

There are several mental, emotional, and physical changes that pre-teenagers will experience. Many tweens are in the middle of the developmental stage where they are finding out who they are as an individual.

The choices, values, and beliefs of most tweens have been based on what their parents have shown and taught them. As children get closer to their teen years, they will start a process to become their own person who has their own beliefs and values.

During this time, parents might look at their child’s behavior as being disobedient or rebellious. The last skill that a teen’s brain will develop is their decision-making skills. As they try to find independence, they might experience some conflict between wanting to be taken seriously and having a good time.

A tweenager’s independence could be translated into finding ways they can “fit in” outside their family. Research has shown that parents do have a lot of influence over the decisions their children make. Their peers come in second.

Social media gives them more access to their peers, and they could form closer bonds through this outlet. Parents have helped their children find this independence while keeping a healthy relationship with their children.

Responsibility and independence have to happen harmoniously. If not, the tween might feel like they are out of control and will act accordingly. As a parent, you have to give them consequences and employ discipline if necessary, to help your child make decisions that will help them without harming them.

This transition can be a bit hard for many parents. When any parent hears the words “just let them fail,” it is hard to do. But sometimes it is the best thing for them. The old saying: “A mother is only as happy as her saddest child,” rings true when we let them experience pain that could happen when they make bad decisions. The safest place for your tween to make bad decisions is within the safety net of your home. It is essential to growth to allow them this opportunity where you can provide a safety net.

It might feel like you are losing your relationship with your child as they work on their friendships more than their relationship with the family. With some dedication and work, parents might find that giving them rules and communicating effectively could result in having an enjoyable and healthy relationship with your child.

Below you will find some guidelines that you can follow if you are faced with trying to decide whether or not you should get involved with a problem that your teen might be facing. It is important to know who owns the problem before you force your involvement. Look at these questions and answer either “yes” or “no.”

- Is there a possibility of anyone getting hurt?
- Is anyone disrespecting anybody’s rights?
- Is a person’s property being threatened?
- Is this too much responsibility for your child?

If you answered “yes” to any of these, then both you and your teen own the problem. You need to make sure you have parental monitoring and joint problem-solving in place.

If the answer to these questions is “no,” then the teen owns the problem, and they need to be allowed to make the decision no matter what the potential outcome or consequence might be.

Bringing up a teenager can be chaotic and stressful. You need to remember to schedule some time to have fun with your teenager without

having a conversation about subjects that could be volatile. Keep in mind that these teen years will go faster than you realize, and you might just raise a teenager who will raise a child of their own one day.

What Does Independence Mean for Teenagers?

For a teenager to become a capable adult, they have to learn:

- How to create their own identity
- How to figure out their values in life
- How to solve their problems and make their own decisions
- How to take on responsibility while not depending on you as much

It is very common for teenagers and parents to not agree on what independence is. How much independence they should have and when they should have it. It is completely normal for a parent to worry about their child and wonder if they are giving their child too much independence at an early age. They worry about their child getting involved in behaviors that are considered to be risky. It is natural to want to keep your child safe from all the bad things in life.

But your child has to make mistakes. They have to have new experiences and explore their world. This helps them learn lessons throughout their life while shaping their brain.

How can you create a balance between what your child needs and the things you are worried about? Having a positive relationship with your teenager is the best place to start. You have to have an open mind and good family communications.

How to Raise an Independent Teenager

The first thing you have to do is to show your child a lot of support and love. This is essential for helping a child to develop a good self-esteem. Young children who have been raised to feel good about themselves usually have a lot more confidence to figure out who they are and what they want out of life.

There might be times when your child doesn't want any physical affection from you. You can still show your support and love by:

- Telling them you love them as often as you can
- Giving them privacy and space
- Giving your child opportunities to exercise control of their day-to-day routines
- Taking the time to listen to your child when they need to talk
- Being truly interested in your child's friends, hobbies, and interests
- Allow freedom within boundaries

Respect Their Opinions and Feelings

You have to be in tune with the feelings of your child. Try to keep in mind that your child might become upset and confused by their emotional, social, and physical changes during their childhood. Your child is going to need your stability and emotional guidance during this time in their life.

When you take your child's ideas and opinions seriously, it gives their self-esteem a boost. Yes, they may have opinions that vary a lot from yours and are more likely in line with their peers, but they are part of who they are. This might be a hard pill to swallow, but exploring ideas and opinions is how children figure out where they fit into the world. If a difference of opinion pops up, this is the best time for you to teach them that everybody has different points of view and that is perfectly fine.

Calmly talking about your feelings and opinions could help keep communication open, and it shows the positive ways to relate to others. Allowing your child the opportunity to express anger and frustration verbally can help them develop the important skill of using their words to solve problems later in life rather than reacting with physical violence. Sometimes this feels like a sassy teenager, but they really are learning to stand up for themselves and explore boundaries in a safe space which is an important step to developing healthy relationships later on in life.

Establish Fair but Clear Rules

Having open and clear communication about rules, socializing, and behaviors can help them know what the limits are and what they can expect from them. Rules can help you stay constant about the way you treat your child. When you have your rules in place, you have to be consistent with them. Consistency is key.

Your rules will probably change as the child gets older. As a child matures, they will contribute to the rules and face the consequences when they break them. When you involve your child in the making of the rules, it helps them understand them better. Each family will have different rules. You need to make sure that you talk to your child about this and tell them that their friends could live by different rules or have more rules they have to follow.

If your rules are too strict, your child will not have room to grow and may begin rebelling and trying new things. This time will be a learning curve for the entire family, so you have to be ready for some errors.

Treat Your Child Appropriately For Their Age

Very young teenagers may think that they are old enough to start making all of their own decisions. Still, their brain has not developed all of the decision-making tools that they need to handle a lot of responsibility without some assistance. It can help explain why younger and older children will often have different types and amounts of responsibilities.

Helping Your Child Create the Skills to Make Decisions

Anytime you allow your child to reach a decision using different types of problem-solving approaches, it can help them create their decision-making skills. This might involve:

- Figuring out various options
- Thinking about the cons and pros of a certain action
- Weighing all the cons and pros that can help them make the right decision

- Brainstorm about what they should do if something doesn't go the way they planned it
- Give them feedback about the way they handle the process.

You could include them when making decisions for the family. This is one more chance to help boost their self-esteem, and it shows them you value their input. Allowing your child to practice this skill in situations that are not emotionally charged increases the likelihood that the lesson will stick in more serious situations they will face.

Consider making a “decision guide” with your tween, to help them go step by step through a difficult decision to see if it is truly in-line with their goals and aspirations.

Anytime you have to make a decision that could have a big impact on your child, try to make that decision with them, instead of for them. Giving a child the perception of control can make all the difference. This could be decisions about staying out late, further study, school, etc.

Give Them Safe Chances to Exercise Their Independence

Any activities where you know your child will be safe are always good choices. But give your child some time away from you and the freedom they need can help your child in many ways like:

- Building resilience
- Giving them a sense of belonging
- Taking positive risks
- Testing new abilities
- Learning new skills

You might be able to find a sports club or youth group close to you that your child might like being a part of. Once they are old enough, letting them get a part-time job can help them foster independence.

Handling Conflicts

Teens are struggling to figure out their identities and figuring out where exactly they fit in their world. Your teen will probably want more control over things such as appearance, behaviors, and socializing. During this process, they are going to test their boundaries, and they will question the people they view as authority figures, like you.

This can easily become a recipe for conflict, but it doesn't have to be that way. When you have a positive way to manage these types of conflicts, it can help you strengthen the relationship with them while helping them create skills that they will need for independence.

Independence for Children with Special Needs

If your child has special needs, their growing independence may look like one more challenge to you.

For these teens, reaching complete independence may take more time than it does for other kids their age. Reaching independence might be harder if they have spent years having everything done for them without having to make any decisions by themselves. If you can learn to encourage your child to start becoming independent slowly, it will be good for both yourself and them.

If your child has chronic health needs, there will be a time when you will start sharing responsibilities with them, such as managing their medicines. Knowing the right time to do this could be a bit of a challenge. If you want to test and see if your child can handle some extra responsibilities, see if they can:

- Plan and care about their future
- Know when guidance or advice is needed while accepting this advice
- Knowing the possibility of having consequences to their actions
- Make decisions that have been planned instead of making impulsive ones

- Solve their problems

If your child is younger, you must explain all these problems very well. This will be better than just telling them: “You are too young to look after things by yourself.”

Your child, you, and their doctors need to be involved when making decisions about how and when your child should start managing their health decisions. Talk to their doctors about anything you might be concerned about.

For children with psychological issues such as anxiety, oppositional defiant disorder, ADHD, etc., giving them opportunities to control their environment or daily schedule without criticism can make all the difference in the world. For example, allowing a defiant teen to decide when he/she goes to sleep at night – given they will be up and ready to go to school in the morning – and sticking with it for a couple weeks is a chance to let them come to the realization on their own that they need to go to bed at night. This will take a great deal of patience on your part, but is a safe place to allow some control and develop decision making skills. Whenever a conflict arises with your teen, ask yourself if this is an area where you can allow them control.

Focus on the Positive

Studies suggest that if you want your teen to keep their grades up, you will have more success if you can focus on rewarding their good behavior while not always punishing their bad behaviors. “Tweens” and teens focus better on positive incentives, but they have problems remaining motivated just to stay away from penalties. In the *“Flourishing During the Teen Years: Why Not Being Bad’ Isn’t Good Enough”* study performed by Brigham Young University, they found that there are some cases where positive feedback could have a larger effect than negative feedback in young adolescents (Padilla-Walker & Memmott, 2016).

A teen can be coaxed into creating new habits such as cleaning their rooms each week if they are given a reward instead of being threatened with some form of punishment. Rewards will give them things to think about. Punishment isn’t something that they want to think about ever. If

you want to motivate your teen, you will have more success if you try to get their attention by giving them positive things to think about.

Some parents worry that this approach encourages bribing, but this isn't the case. Adults go to work each day to make money. We don't think about this as a bribe, and you are just working hard to get a reward. Most teens aren't motivated to clean their rooms. So, if your teenager cleans their room for a couple of weeks without you asking them, reward this new habit.

One method of success used with at-risk students in the school systems is "Positive Behavior Intervention Systems." It is a system of rewards that is used to teach intrinsic motivation by over rewarding positive behaviors consistently over a month-long period, then intermittently over another month, and then as needed after that. The power of this method is that it teaches you, the parent, to notice all the positive things your child is doing in a ratio of 5 positive interactions to 1 negative interaction. This trains you to focus on all the good your teen is doing which changes your relationship in a positive manner.

It would be best if you didn't take this too far, though. You don't want to have to start paying your teenager to come home at their set curfew. You need to make the rewards reasonable and occasional.

You never want to give your teen a message that the main reason for them to do anything is because they are getting paid to do it.

Two Types of Motivations

There are two different types of motivations that we all share: intrinsic and extrinsic.

Intrinsic motivation occurs when you are motivated because you believe something is important to ourselves or because you enjoy doing it.

Extrinsic motivation relies on external factors, like punishment or reward. Keep in mind, numerous studies have shown that punishment is more harmful than helpful.

It is worth noting here that students that are capable of identifying their own intrinsic motivation exert more effort, take on more challenging tasks and activities, and have better outcomes. While the ultimate goal is to help our teen develop and identify their own intrinsic motivations it is often helpful to provide extrinsic motivators, rewards to help develop strong

habits Of course allowing your teen some degree of choice in the reward and a voice in setting their own goals helps tremendously in getting their buy-in.

When to Give Your Teen a Reward

Teens are just young adults who are trying their best to figure out how the world works. Anytime they do great things at home or school or just make a good decision, it is okay to reward them.

This reward doesn't have to be in the form of money, but it would be a good way to say "I'm proud of you" or "thank you." Teens need this type of positive reinforcement since it shows them that they are doing the right things. Another great lesson for them to learn is: "good things happen to good people."

When Do They Deserve a Reward?

Teenagers could earn rewards for positive behaviors or when they change negative behavior. Even though you shouldn't feel like you have to pay for EVERYthing your teen does that is good, reinforcing good behaviors can help make sure that it continues.

It also feels good when you give your teen rewards. It can show them that you are paying attention to them and you see when they are good and not just every time they do the wrong thing.

Rewards You Can Give Your Teen

The list you will find below includes rewards that would be good for any teen. They are things that teens want and are universal. If your teen is into a certain hobby or is interested in unique things, you can cater to their rewards around that every now and then. Consider asking your teen what they would like for a reward. Below is a list of some fun suggestions.

- Pizza Night:

Just about every teen loves pizza. You can give them a treat of getting their favorite pizza for dinner one night. You could also take them shopping for their favorite ingredients and make the pizza at home together. I know my family loves when we have homemade pizza night. Let them invite their best friends and get all their favorite toppings.

- Favorite Meal

Let your teen plan out a family dinner and give them free rein to pick their favorite dessert and main meal.

- Computer Time

It isn't a bad thing to limit your teen's screen time. Anytime they do something good, give them some extra time to be on the computer without focusing on their homework.

- Car Privileges

Give them an extra hour or two with the car so that they can see a later movie, stay at their favorite coffee shop or the mall a few hours longer.

- Sleep In

Let them have a morning off and sleep in a few hours. This, of course, can't be on a school day.

- Longer Curfew

Let them stay an extra hour on the weekends so that they can hang out with their friends longer. This can help establish some trust between the two of you.

- A Subscription

If they have a favorite magazine they read weekly or monthly, give them a subscription. This will reduce their screen time. There might be a music service that they have wanted, give it to them.

- A Simple Hug

This one might surprise you, but this simple gesture can mean a lot to a teenager.

- Cell Phone

If your teen doesn't have their own cell phone, this could be a great reward for doing something special. Tell them that their phone comes with some extra responsibilities, and you expect them to continue the good work or the phone will go away.

- Time With Friends:

Allow your teen to invite their friends over for a sleepover or stay out later to watch a new movie, play some games or just hang out.

- Repaint Their Bedroom

A teen's bedroom is a sacred place. It is a nice gesture to let them move their furniture around or add some new paint or décor as they get older. If they have begged you for a change, this would be a very nice reward.

- Tickets to a Concert

If your teen has been dying to see the newest pop band coming to your town, give them a pair of tickets and invite one friend to go with them.

- **Movie Night**

You can have a family night or let your teen invite some friends over to have a movie night. You could buy them tickets to a movie theater or invite their friends over to stream the newest blockbuster. If it is a family movie night, let them choose the movie they want to watch.

- **New Clothes**

Every teenager wants the newest fashion, and giving them a gift card to their favorite shop in the mall is a great idea. You can allow them to use your car or give them a ride to the mall and let them spend the day with their friends, spending their reward.

- **New Book**

You can encourage reading while rewarding your teen by giving them a new book or a gift certificate so that they can pick their favorite book to read.

- **Hobby Tools**

If your teen is interested in a certain hobby, giving them a new tool would be a good reward.

Look After Yourself

Most parents will say that it is too hard to adjust to their child being independent. Some parents realize that their mental health is being challenged. It is fine to admit that you are having problems and to find help if you feel like you need it. Talk to your doctor or find a therapist near you. Always take the time you need to be calm when interacting with an emotional child. You are the adult, so the responsibility to remain calm is yours. Give yourself a timeout if you feel the situation is escalating and return to the conversation when you are in control of your reactions.

Chapter 2: Embrace Failure

“A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new.” Albert Einstein.

Nobody likes failing, but if you are a teenager, failing could feel devastating. Anytime your identity and ego are still being formed, the things that seem like tiny failures to you can cause a teenager’s heart to break. It might be getting rejected by somebody they have a crush on, getting a poor score on their SATs, losing a varsity football game, or losing the cheerleading championships. Every teenager will take failure hard.

But the truth is failing could give better life lessons than succeeding. But teens have to know ways to face their failures head-on.

Why Does Failing Seem So Scary?

The word atychiphobia means “fear of failure.” There aren’t that many teens who are familiar with this word, but many experience them daily. Why are teens driven to succeed and are extremely anxious about not achieving the things they want to do? There are many reasons behind this like:

- Academic pressures could begin during middle school and get more challenging when they start applying to colleges
- Wanting to show the “perfect life” on their social media pages
- Wanting to meet their parent’s extremely high expectations
- Worried that they won’t find the job they want

Do We Blame The Parents?

Parents want to protect their children from all kinds of pain and discomfort. This discomfort could come in the form of emotional or physical. But when we keep all the hardships away, we are depriving our children of creating a sense of confidence that gets created when we overcome any challenge. Helicopter parenting has created young adults who don’t have the skills to solve problems by themselves.

Because we love our children, we have a desire to protect their self-esteem. We have gotten rid of every uncomfortable obstacle and bump in the road and cleared a path that we hope will lead them to happiness and success. When we do these things, we are depriving them of important childhood lessons. All the failures, miscalculations, mistakes, and setbacks that we have pushed out of their way are the experiences that will teach them ways to be resilient, innovative, persistent, and resourceful citizens in this world.

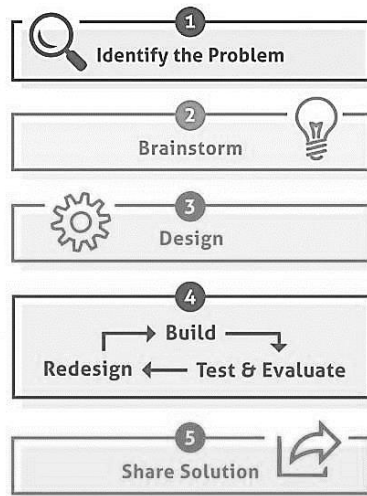
If children don't get a chance to handle the obstacles that come their way, they will grow into teenagers who have what scientists call "failure deprivation."

Failure Deprivation

The term "failure deprivation" was created more than ten years ago by the professors at Harvard and Stanford. This term was created to describe college students who had problems handling daily problems.

Failure deprivation doesn't just show up later in life. There are quite a few young adults who have experienced this. Not because they wouldn't have been able to survive a skinned knee, but because their parents didn't let them face this problem. We, as adults, know that failure is abundant in life. The only way to know how to deal with failure or deal with a problem is to face it head-on. That's why you can't let your child live in a bubble. You have to let them fail. It is harder for the parent to witness their child fail than for the child to experience it.

Keeping your child in the vacuum of failure deprivation means that they won't know how to differentiate between who they are from what they did. Middle schoolers are getting ready for high school. High school brings with it many more struggles in school and their relationships. If they aren't allowed to face their own problems now, they could find themselves struggling that first semester of freshman year.



This chart shows the process that students, or anybody, has to take when they face failure or a problem. This process helps students learn and improve their problem-solving process.

How to Normalize Failure

Could a student not cope with failing be a contributing factor to the above statistics? Colleges have been trying to reverse this trend by finding ways to normalize failing. Look at this example: “The Resilience Project” at Stanford uses academic skills coaching, programs, events, and personal stories to support and motivate students while they go through normal setbacks. Their goal was to change how people perceived failure from things to be avoided to things with value, purpose, and meaning. You can learn more about this project at sanfordmag.org or on Adina Glickman’s website, adinaglickman.com. Adina is one of the founders of “The Resilience Project.”

Smith College has a program they call “Failing Well” that tries to increase a student’s resilience by telling students that failing isn’t a problem with learning, but it is just another feature. It isn’t something that needs to be gotten rid of. This means that professors and students talk about

mistakes, taking risks, and failing, and the students who participate get a “Certificate of Failure” once they finish this course.

When you can use failure to grow, you start to catch on within the business world. In 2009, some entrepreneurs created FailCon, a conference created to share stories about the things that didn’t work. They would then study these failures, so they could create better success.

Ways We Need to React to Failures

We could find success in failing if we use it to learn from the experience and move on with more strength. The more important thing is the way we respond to what we think is a failure. This means that we as parents have to be aware of these things when we support our children through challenging experiences.

It isn’t just important for kids to fail since this is inevitable, but what is more important is the way your teenager reacts to what they perceive as failure. After a failure, the things they do let you gauge their resilience and self-esteem, and you can build up these attributes.

If you are a teacher or a parent, look at the way your student or child reacts to any kind of failure. Then you need to ask yourself these questions:

- Are they thinking about how hard it was, or what didn’t work out like they thought it would?
- Do they only do things that they know they can excel at?
- If they do have a setback, do they immediately blame it on others, or do they make themselves feel shameful?
- Do they avoid specific activities because they are afraid they will fail?
- Do they just give up instead of trying it again?

If you answered “yes” to any of the questions above, your teen might need to change the way they look at failing.

Grit Is Powerful

Anytime we work toward a goal, encounter a failure, but we keep going, we are building something called “grit.”

Grit can be defined as: “perseverance and passion for long-term goals.” People who have grit will be more successful with time. Grit can be used as a success predictor rather than talent.

The most important word in the paragraph above is “long-term.” You might have to fall and get up many times to reach your goals, but this is how we grow as humans.

People who walk through life without failing for a long time before encountering any failures don’t have any practice at falling and getting up multiple times. Many overachievers stumble through their teen years and have problems getting back up. These are known as “fragile perfects.” These people are very outstanding and bright students that know ways to succeed, but they don’t have the faintest clue as to how to fail.

Here’s an example of how grit can help a student. Let’s say your student is taking a science class that they have been enjoying and doing well in. One day in class, they are working on a lab that your child found to be more difficult than the previous ones. Instead of getting frustrated by the difficulty and giving up, they found the grit to persevere and work harder and longer to get the lab completed correctly.

Growth Mindset

Grit has been related to what is known as “growth mindset.” People who possess a growth mindset can see their intelligence and abilities as things they can develop instead of staying fixed on what they can’t. Plus, they can see their failures as ways to develop their abilities better.

This research has shown us how we praise our children during their toddler years can impact their mindset later in their life. Particularly children who were praised for how smart they are become anxious about making any mistakes. If a child is praised for their persistence and effort, they will enjoy pushing through all the difficult moments in life.

If a student has a growth mindset, they care about their learning. If they see a deficiency or make a mistake, they will fix it. They think that

effort is a positive thing. It can spark their intelligence and make them grow. When faced with failure, these students will double their efforts and find new ways to learn.

Creating a Growth Mindset

You can move from having a fixed mindset where you think your abilities and talents are limited to having a growth mindset. Here are some ways you can create a growth mindset:

- Knowing that you can decide the way you will react to setbacks. You could choose to look at the criticism and failures as ways you are lacking, or you could look at them as an opportunity to improve yourself.
- All your growth mindset's optimism takes over your fixed mindset and self-doubt. Tell yourself that successful people have experienced failure some time in their life. You have to take responsibility for your actions and keep moving forward.
- You need to take whatever action is needed according to your growth mindset. Decide to take on any challenges and learn from your failures.

Use Self-Compassion to Move Through Failures

Research has shown that people who are compassionate toward themselves are comfortable handling failures and challenges. In two different studies done with college students, researchers found that students who were more sympathetic toward themselves had better coping skills if they were confronted with academic failures.

Here are some ways you can characterize people who are too critical about themselves versus people who show compassion toward themselves:

Self-Critical people

- Move away from finding ways they can improve themselves

- Don't have much self-confidence
- Are afraid of failing to the point that they won't even try
- Are more depressed and anxious

Self-Compassionate people

- Want to be happy and thrive in life
- Know that everybody has imperfections
- Aren't as anxious
- Knows that failing is going to happen and look at it as a teacher

Rather than criticizing and judging yourself for any shortcomings or inadequacies, showing some self-compassion means you are understanding and kind if confronted with a failure.

When talking about a teenager's mental health, there is some good news because teens can change how they handle any setbacks. It doesn't matter if they learn how to tap into the grit, the growth mindset, self-compassion, or all of them; teens can change how they look at failure, and this can make them healthier and happier.

Ways You Can Teach Your Teen That Failing Is Good

Most teens are afraid of failing. As teachers and parents, we want our children to succeed in life. What would happen if we saw failure as a critical and important step on the learning path?

Failure is necessary if we want to succeed. Our brains actually develop and grow when we encounter failure. If children can understand this, amazing things will happen in their lives.

If you take some time and think about the biggest mistakes you've made, they probably taught you more wisdom, strength, and courage than any amount of success you have in life. Rather than allowing your child to be afraid of failing, you could help them see it as a learning opportunity.

Here are some ways you can teach your child about how wonderful failing is and ways they can do it well:

Growth Mindset

You know that having a growth mindset will empower a child. It can change their reaction to their failures. If a child has a growth mindset, they can make a mistake and have a response that shows their brain is larger than a child who has a fixed mindset. They can also improve their performance because of this.

Failure will happen, but when you focus your attention on the things that went wrong and ways you can fix them, children who have growth mindsets could change their failures into a positive learning experience. A growth mindset brings about several benefits for our children.

1. They become more open-minded.

A growth mindset means that they will be more inclusive concerning the perspectives and needs of others. This helps them to get along with others better and to understand that not everybody is the same. This will also help them adapt to different situations.

2. They will be more likely to put in hard work.

When your child has a growth mindset, they will be more realistic when it comes to focusing on doing the hard work. If they have a fixed mindset, they will be less likely to put in the hard work because they don't think it is going to help.

3. They are more aware of new possibilities and opportunities.

The subconscious mind will filter out 99% of all of the input it receives because the conscious mind can't focus on several different things at once. If your child has a fixed mindset, their subconscious isn't going to pay attention to new opportunities because why should they bother? However, with a growth mindset, these opportunities are going to be more interesting to your child.

4. They will be a better problem solver.

A person has to be able to believe that they can solve a problem to solve a problem. A person with a fixed mindset isn't going to have that belief. A growth mindset allows them to believe that they can and will find a solution.

5. They become more realistic about the obstacles that they may face.

This will help your child not to get depressed or frustrated when they face their first obstacle. Instead, they are more likely to be optimistic about reaching their goal in the long run, and they will struggle on.

Keep in mind, your child learns from you. If you want your child to develop a growth mindset, show them how to. Instead of giving up when you have a problem, start showing them how you are learning from that problem. Study it, and figure out how you can come at it from a different direction. Be the person you want your children to look up to.

Failures Will Happen

Children can develop faster when they experience failures. Adults know this, but it is still hard for adults to accept this fact. Most parents think that their good parenting will keep their child from having to struggle with failures.

There are many consequences to this approach. Challenging experiences are the best way a child can learn how to solve their problems and coping mechanisms. If we constantly shield our children from the world's problems, their brain connections won't develop.

To help you face your fears about allowing your child to fail, here are some questions you have to ask yourself.

- What could they learn if I stepped back and let this situation happen?

- Will the consequences of this mistake be life-threatening or permanent?
- How would I be parenting right now if I wasn't anxious or afraid?

You have to give children the room to fail. Both you and they will be stronger for it. To quote an old saying: "Failure isn't fatal."

Celebrate and Embrace Failures

Failure is the best teacher. You need to celebrate it every time it happens because you know that a brand-new opportunity has come to you.

Here are some ways you can celebrate your mistakes:

- Talk about the acronym for the word "FAIL":
 - First
 - Attempt
 - In
 - Learning
- Every day find the best mistake that your child makes and highlight one concept about it that you think is important. Let your child discuss the things that went right when they made a mistake and then fix the thinking if they stumble.
- Give your child a "high-five" every time they make a mistake
- Adding "failure Fridays" to your schedule. Take this day and read to them about a famous person who failed but didn't let it stop them.
- Allow your child to brag to you about their mistakes and all the things they learned.

Once children realize that failure is just another stepping stone on their path to success, it will turn into something they appreciate instead of something they are afraid of.

Explain Brain Science

Children normally fear failure. What do you think would happen if they realized that mistakes grew inside their brains? The good news is there is a lot of research that proves it and can back you up.

Children worry about failing in general, such as always wanting to be perfect or to get more specific, they want to make all As on their tests and report cards. Here are some tips that have been backed by science to help you talk about some of their more common fears:

If your child is scared of making mistakes, you can tell them:

- Each time they make a mistake, they are creating electrical signals that help them learn better
- Talk about one study that can prove their brain will “grow and spark” anytime they make a mistake and what it means to fail

If your child is afraid of working on a challenging project, you can tell them:

- When they are learning hard material, they and everybody else they know will indeed make mistakes
- They can indeed retain the information a lot better. The truth is that the harder they have to work to learn something, the longer it will stay in their memory, and it will be processed deeper.

If a child knows the brain science as to why mistakes will improve their learning, it will be easy to get them excited about the project. Help your child learn about their wonderful brains.

Make Sure They Know to “Fail Forward”

Failure is inevitable, but it is also valuable. Instead of sheltering your child from it, you can use it to help them grow. You can ask them questions like: “What did you learn from this?” or “What would you do the next time

differently?” to change their focus onto all the positive aspects of their failure.

Failing forwards really just means they are learning from their mistakes. We have to teach our children to “fail forward” throughout their lives but just be there for them whenever they fail. If you are a parent to a child with special needs, mistakes are just part of life, and they need to know that it is perfectly normal to be human.

Here are some other ways that you can fail forward:

- Proudly plan for more mistakes by saying things like, “I can’t wait to see other ways you learn to do this!”
- Talk about the things they learned from their failures, like having more compassion for others, learning ways they can forgive themselves, or learning how to solve problems.
- Reading books such as *Mistakes That Worked* written by Charlotte Foltz Jones
- Do some research about “really great failures” and talk to your child about what you learned about famous people who failed a lot before they became successful.
- If your child is into sports, do some more research and find some that failed before they became successful.

“We aren’t defined by how we fail. We are measured by how we rise.”

Teach Them About the Mindful Approach

Even though you use the above strategies, failing can still be overwhelming for a child. If you can train your child to take a mindful approach, they will handle any large emotion such as anger or sadness. With some practice, children can learn how to respond to strong feelings when they fail instead of just reacting.

The link between resilience and mindfulness has been documented very well. The study “*Promoting Mental health and Psychological Thriving in University Students,*” performed by researchers at Yale University and published in *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, found that mindful college students found benefits

when faced with adversity. If they were faced with what they perceived to be a failure, they stayed confident in their academic abilities (Seppälä et al., 2020).

How can you help your child create a better attitude? By using the RAIN technique:

- R – realize what is happening: “What is happening right now? “What am I feeling?” “Where do I feel it in my body?”
- A – allow life to happen: “I can let these feelings or thoughts be here.”
- I – investigate but be kind: “Why do I feel this way?” “Is this true?”
- N – no identification: “I have an emotion or thought, but I’m not that emotion or thought.”

To practice this RAIN strategy, just write out the above steps and use your own failures as an example. Then you will ask your child if they would like to try this process with their mistakes.

When you can learn to take a mindful approach, children will learn to accept and then respond better to failures and the feelings associated with them.

Failing is just another stage of learning. It is something to be embraced instead of feared. By having a growth mindset, a child can learn ways to fail forward and benefit better from their experiences. If a child knows that every hard task or mistake can make their brain stronger, mistakes will soon be a reason to celebrate. This practice of celebrating our mistakes will eventually lead to the ability to apply what was learned from one situation to novel unrelated challenges.

What happens if your teen feels too afraid to try because they have already experienced more failure than success? One way is to scaffold tasks with built-in opportunities to succeed. Take it back to something they do understand and know how to do and build upon this knowledge step by step. For example, a child who “hates math” likely has experienced failure repeatedly. You can take your child back to something they do understand and scaffold the learning for them rewarding each step along the way that

they can do. This method builds confidence and balances out the failure to success ratio in their psyche which gives them the confidence to try.

Chapter 3: Grades Don't Matter, Effort Does

"Grades don't define your future - your character does."

Family Circle

When it comes to grades, some kids seem to achieve perfect grades without much effort. It seems as though things come easily and naturally to these students. These students are likely quite intelligent, but that intelligence does not equate to success in life. They can be successful, but their intelligence doesn't guarantee that. Then you have students who don't make such good grades, but you know they put in a lot of effort. Does this mean that they aren't intelligent? They are likely a victim of the system that focuses on memorizing facts rather than actual intelligence. But if grades don't correlate to success in life, what does?

In the article "The Secret to Raising Smart Kids," published in *Scientific American*, Carol Dweck talks about how 35 years of research has discovered that the pathway to success in work, athletics, academics, and even marriage is having a "growth mindset," which we talked about in the last chapter.

In this sense, though, when you explain to a child that their lack of effort, instead of their lack of ability, is the reason why they get wrong answers, this will give them the incentive to keep trying. The skill of continued effort, of perseverance will set them up for success.

It's very easy to teach a child helplessness. If a child is told at a young age that they are gifted, they will start to shy away from difficult things because they are worried about losing that gifted status. They are afraid that they won't get a perfect grade. So when they coast through their first few years of school with minimal effort, and then the work becomes harder, they start to lose motivation because effort, to them, is a threat to their "gift."

Dr. Dweck's research has found two basic types of learners, the helpless and the mastery-oriented. Those who are helpless are the ones with a fixed mindset. They believe intelligence is fixed, and so any mistake they make means they have a lack of ability. Since they think they can't change this, they avoid challenges. They throw in the towel before they even get started.

The mastery-oriented learner is the one with the growth mindset, and they believe they can develop their intelligence through effort and hard work. Challenges will energize these children. They seek out chances to learn. They will likely have greater academic success than their “gifted” counterparts.

This is why it is more important to focus on persistence, learning, and effort than focusing solely on the grades your child brings home. If they bring in an A, great, but don't say, “Good job, you got an A.” Instead, focus on the effort they put in. Say, “Good job, you worked hard.” You also need to be specific with this. Telling them they are smart doesn't help them. Instead, let them know specifically what they did well. This could be the way they organized their work, how they worked in the group, or how they continued to work at it even when it got tough. Let them know you are proud of them for how they learned from their mistakes.

I understand; hearing that “grades aren't important, the effort is” seems strange. We have been conditioned to believe that grades are all that matters. This is because that's how schools have been geared. They have the big tests at the end of the year to see how well a school is doing within their district, and therefore, focus on the grades the students get on that test. They don't care how much studying the student did. All they are worried about is that number or letter. But I'm here to tell you, let your child know that their effort is way more important. That effort is going to translate into good grades, but that's not the goal. If you're not completely sold on this, let's take a look at an example.

The Exceptional Elementary Student

We have been focusing on the tween age group, but hang with me for a moment. In this scenario, we have a little girl, and we'll call her Abby, who is starting kindergarten. Abby is doing great in Kindergarten. She is an excellent reader, and during her first parent-teacher conference, her teacher praises her and says she is reading on a first-grade level. She is doing pretty much everything above grade level. Her parents were very proud of her, and she was proud of herself.

She continued to excel as a student and made good grades in school all through elementary school. Once she reached middle school, things took

a turn. Instead of focusing on concrete skills, her classes focused on more abstract elements. She was facing algebra, geometry, and things that were more open-ended. The abstract nature of the work proved to be harder, and she started struggling. Abby's grades started to slip, and her teacher became concerned that she was checking out during class.

Her parents had also started to pick up on the fact that she wasn't as excited about school. After trying to figure out what was going on, she finally said, "middle school is a lot harder than elementary," and that she no longer loved it. It was obvious that she was struggling as her first year in middle school continued. Her struggles became so bad that she even started to disrupt the class. This broke her parent's heart, and they did their best to encourage her to work harder, but she had already lost that feeling of being good at school and seemed as though she had simply given up.

She was afraid of looking stupid in front of her peers and teachers. Abby needed to learn that all she needed to do was put in a little more effort. It's not that she was stupid, but the classes were harder and therefore required more work. Eventually, Abby did start to pick up on this, but she still wasn't the same student she had been in elementary school.

Her grades are still not that great. Whenever she starts struggling, she checks out and disrupts the class. That slide in grades she took when she started middle school hurt her deeply. Since she never had to work hard before, she doesn't want to now.

This is why it's important to teach our children that success isn't just about good grades. Success is about putting in the work. Let them know that it's okay to get a bad grade from time to time because struggling is also an important skill to learn. Persisting despite bad grades is more important than constantly being at the top of your class.

It is important to recognize that often times a gifted child will actually often take more time than the average student on a task. They will be adding so much new data into their brains that it takes them longer to put the pieces together. Think of this process as the average student completing a 100-piece puzzle while the gifted student is putting together a 1000-piece puzzle. It will take the gifted student longer in the beginning to get organized and begin work, but once that initial organization piece has ended, they will excel in a more rapid pace than other students. It is

extremely important to allow students time in their initial organizational period without pressuring them.

Whether your child is gifted or not it bears reminding that less than perfect grades can also be hard for parents to deal with. It is imperative that every grade our children get not be absorbed by the parents as a measure of their success as parents. This will only create a vicious negative cycle of pressure on your student, inevitably making school even more high pressure, possibly resulting in increased “test anxiety”

Homework and The Five-Minute Rule

While this should go without saying, students still need to study and do their homework. If they don't, then they would be putting in no effort. During my career as a teacher, I have graded thousands of assignments. Over the years, it became abundantly apparent to me that the difference between good work and great work seemed to be an extra five to ten minutes. That's when I came up with the five-minute rule. That's what we're going to go over, but first, let's go over why children need homework in the first place.

At times, it can seem as though homework is nothing more than busy-work. It may seem random or pointless. While I'm sure at times the homework may be a bit random, it is still important. The basic version of homework that we have all come to know is important because:

- Homework helps to reinforce the information, skills, and concepts learned in class.
- Homework helps prepare students for upcoming topics in class.
- Homework helps teach students how to work independently and develop self-discipline.
- Homework encourages them to be responsible and take the initiative in completing a task.
- Homework gives parents a chance to take an active role in their child's education and helps them see how their child is doing.

- Homework relates what they learn in school to their lives outside of school and helps them connect school learning to the world.

Children need homework, and while it might seem boring, as the parent, you need to encourage them to do it and do it to the best of their ability. That brings us to the five-minute rule. This is a simple rule. All your child has to do is do their homework, and once they are finished, they take five extra minutes to look over it and check it. Maybe add a sentence or two. Ask themselves, what one thing can I improve. While five minutes may not seem like a lot of time, it is often the difference between a teacher giving an A or a B. They can also use this five-minute rule when taking a test. Once they finish the test, they should take five-minutes to check things to make sure they answered everything and check their answers. The five-minute rule can be beneficial in the adult world as well. Think about any project you have worked on and how an extra five minutes can help you polish it just a bit more.

Motivating for Effort

We've learned that effort is important, but what do you do if your child lacks the motivation to put in the effort? You know they are capable of more, but they just don't try. How can we help them understand the power of their effort?

The first thing we need to take a look at is why does everything take so much effort? Why can't life be easy and effortless? It seems as though life was designed so that we have to stretch ourselves and overcome things to make greatness happen. In every game, we have an opponent, and that's true for life. In life, the opponent is a voice. This is a little voice that we have in our heads that always says we need to take the easy way, that we aren't smart enough, that we worry too much about other people, or not to share the last cookie. While it may seem as such, this voice is not our enemy. Think about shooting goals in soccer without a goalie being present. It wouldn't be challenging, and there would be no room for improvement. This is why we can learn to see opponents as allies in

becoming a better version of ourselves and to build resilience in the face of adversity.

The fact of the matter is, this voice gives us a constant supply of excuses for not reaching success. It's a saboteur who is constantly trying to bring us down. It is possible to overcome that voice. First, identify what is hard, become aware of the thing that we are afraid of, and come up with realistic goals to move through those obstacles. A great way to do this is by asking, "How can we find little ways to achieve more today than we did yesterday?"

To help your child through this process, we will work through a family exercise that you can do with your child to help them find the power of effort.

To start things off, you will need to create a three-column table with these headings:

- It's hard for me...
- My opponent's voice says...
- The steps I can take to work through this...

The key to this exercise is your willingness to work through this process openly with your child. You have to make sure that your child doesn't feel as though they are the only one that struggles. By being open and honest about struggles, you can teach them that you also face challenges each day, just like them. This will also help them learn more about self-awareness that will serve them their entire life.

Once you fill out a chart, make sure that you hang them somewhere your child can see them. This keeps them available for daily reference, reinforces their goals, and allows for tweaks if need be. Adding in a reward system can also be helpful to mark their achievement along the way.

There are a few other ways to help encourage your child to put in more effort. Try out some of the following:

- Make a point of saying something nice when you notice them putting in the effort. Too often, we tend only to speak up when they aren't putting in the effort.

- Share a personal challenge you have gone through, and show how putting effort helped you to work through the problem.
- Praise their act of effort and not simply the results that come from it.
- Give them a lot of love and plenty of patience. Your children, as well as the rest of us, are all works in progress. Your love will help them to stick with it.

By helping your child understand the importance of effort and not placing so much emphasis on the grade, you will help them in many different ways.

Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences

One last thought on grades and effort. Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner came up with the theory of multiple intelligences. His theory suggests that our traditional views of intelligence are too small. To fully understand the range of talents and abilities that people have, Gardner believes that people don't just have an intellectual capacity but have several types of bits of intelligence.

While a person may be very strong in a certain area, like musical intelligence, they likely have a range of abilities. Gardner's multiple intelligences include:

1. Visual-Spatial – These people are good at visual things and spatial judgment.
2. Linguistic-Verbal – These people are good at using words, both speaking and in writing.
3. Logical-Mathematical – These people are good at logically analyzing problems, recognizing patterns, and reasoning.
4. Bodily-Kinesthetic – These people are good at physical control, body movement, and performing actions.
5. Musical – These people are good at thinking in sounds, patterns, and rhythms
6. Interpersonal – These people are good at interacting and understanding other people.

7. Intrapersonal – These people are good at understanding their own motivations, feelings, and emotional states.
8. Naturalistic – These people are interested in nurturing and exploring the environment.

Knowing which category your child falls into can help you help them. The best way to figure out which one your child is to pay attention to the things they like or do. If they tend to doodle a lot, then their intelligence could be musical. If they prefer to see things written out as opposed to reading, then they are likely visual-spatial. With this knowledge in mind, you can help your child learn how to study better for their intelligence. This also means that your child could learn differently than you did. You could have done fine with just reading a problem off of the paper and figuring it out, but your child might prefer having it read to them.

An interpersonal learner is going to learn in a much different way than a logical-mathematical learner. As such, you can't expect your child to learn in one single way. If you have multiple children, you can't expect them all to learn in the same way. Work with your child's strength. This can make an effort they put into things have a better pay-off.

While schools are changing and great teachers are aware of and use Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences to create dynamic classes keep in mind that schools still rely heavily on academic work that focus on student's linguistic-verbal and logical-mathematical intelligence.

Chapter 4: Limit Screen Time

“Teens who spend more time than average on screen activities are more likely to be unhappy, and those who spend more time than average on nonscreen activities are more likely to be happy”

Dr. Jean Twenge.

If you have ever wondered if it's worth the fight to try and reduce the amount of screen time your child gets or not, I'm here to tell you, yes, it is worth the fight. When you reduce the amount of time with devices like computers, TVs, phones, and so on, you increase the amount of time your family can spend together, along with lots of other positive effects.

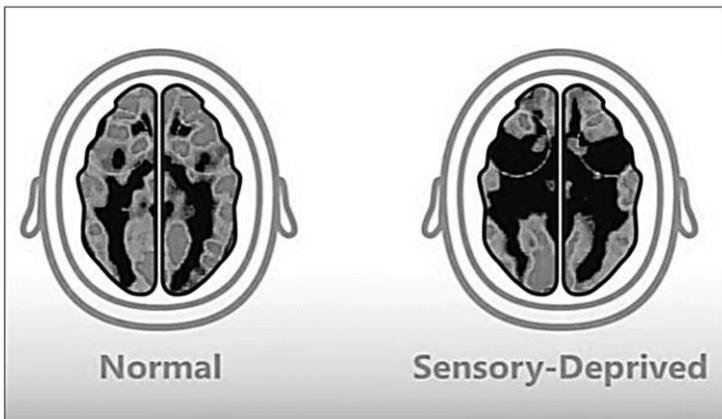
Less screen time will also give your child more time to spend playing outside, getting some exercise, reading, and pursuing their hobbies. Some studies show cutting down on screen time will have positive effects on a child's behavioral, physical, and social wellbeing, and you will likely see an improvement in their academics.

Children spend way more time using various types of electronic devices than they do any other activities. According to the AAP (American Academy of Pediatrics), this comes out to about seven hours each day. Spending a lot of time using these devices has also been linked to poor sleep, bad grades, and a higher chance of obesity. Child health experts say that parents need to limit how much screen time their child gets, preferably limiting them to only an hour a day for children aged two to five and that children should not have any screen time if they are under 18 months old. (screen time recommendations for tweens?)

Another major problem for children who have too much screen time is that as they age and they start spending more time on their screens, there is always a big drop in extracurricular activities that they take part in. The Joan Ganz Cooney Center shared the results of a survey they did of 1,577 parents of children aged two to ten in *Learning at Home: Families' Educational Media Use in America*. Their survey asked about the child's use of tablets, smartphones, e-readers, books, video games, DVDs, TV, and other mobile devices.

Children from two to four spent about an hour and 37 minutes on screens every day, with around an hour and 16 minutes that was spent viewing education materials. Children from eight to ten spent two hours and 36 minutes with their screens, with only 42 minutes of that time being educational material.

The 2014 study, *“Protective Effects of Parental Monitoring of Children’s Media Use,”* published in *JAMA Pediatrics*, linked parental monitoring of their children’s use of media helping to improve the child’s sleep, grades and decreasing their weight. This study was led by Douglas Gentile and looked at 1,323 children in third, fourth, and fifth grades over one school year. They found that if parents monitored and restricted the amount of time their children spent on devices, restricted the content, or actively discussed the themes, there were major physical, social, and academic changes (Gentile et al., 2014).



You might not notice the effects of this restriction right away, just like you don’t notice your child growing each day. However, the ripple effect will occur. You won’t see immediate change with this monitoring, but with time, you are going to see a wide range of wellness and health benefits. You can see what a normal brain looks like that has experienced interactions with people and learning tools in the image. However, the second image shows what the brain looks like when spent staring at screens or not interacting with people and things in a meaningful way.

Screen Time and Bad Grades

To drive home the point of how bad screen time can affect a child's schoolwork, let's look at one study involving 845 students. The Medical Research Council at Cambridge published their study in the *"International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity."* The students were an average of 14 years of age. It found that every hour of the day they spend watching TV, playing video games, or using the internet was linked to poorer grades.

Additionally, they found that every hour of homework and reading each day was connected to better grades ("Extra hour of screen time per day associated with poorer GCSE grades," 2015).

The screen time was, on average, four hours a day. About half of that was spent watching television. They spent about an hour and a half of their time reading or doing homework.

They found that every hour per day that a child spent in front of a screen in one school year caused a drop of 9.3 points the next year. This was equivalent to two grades in one subject. Two hours meant that there would be a drop of 18 points, and with the average screen time being four hours, that was a 36 point drop.

The main question here is, are some screens better? Comparing the effects of different screen activities found that television was worse for grades.

They also found an hour of homework each day saw a rise in points by 23.1. The benefits of focusing more time on reading and homework weren't just because they weren't spending less time staring at screens. Screen time and homework time were independently connected to academic performance.

Screen Time and Mental Health

Screen time doesn't just affect their schoolwork. It can also affect their mental health. While the actual screen may not be what's causing the problem, what they are looking at does. For instance, social media is one of the main reasons why children are glued to these screens. While it is helpful to be able to contact loved ones we may not see elsewhere, there is

a component of social media that causes harm. It is very easy to start comparing yourself with others, which is true for anybody who uses social media, not just children. When it comes to celebrities and influencers, it's easy for children to start comparing themselves to them, thinking they need to look like that. These types of comparisons can lead to low self-esteem, body image issues, and negative self-talk.

Soft Skills

During this time of their life, children need to be focused on developing their soft skills. Soft skills include every way that we interact with others and character traits that help people navigate their world and meet goals. One of the most important soft skills that kids need to develop is social skills. Constantly being on their phones or playing video games is not going to help them communicate with others.

Social skills are a group of skills that people need to get along well with others, which include respecting others, resolving conflict, expressing appreciation, and behaving by social norms. Social skills can predict the four types of workforce outcomes, and employers seek them. This takes us to communication skills. This means they know how to effectively express, transmit, understand, and interpret ideas and knowledge.

To develop these skills, they have to interact with others. They need to interact with you, their friends, family members, and others. A family gathering would be a great time for this. Make sure they don't pull out their phone so that they have to interact with others. This will help them learn to look a person in the eye when they speak and pay attention, which many adults are even lacking.

More than ever, employers lament the lack of soft skills that this current generation of students possess. Providing your tween with opportunities to develop their soft skills inevitably is giving them a huge advantage in the modern 21st century team-oriented problem solving economy.

Blue Light and Sleep

I've covered the fact that screen time affects sleep quality for kids, but why? The blue light that these devices emit can delay the release of melatonin,

the sleep-inducing hormone. It also increases alertness and resets our circadian rhythm to a later schedule. This tends to be a bigger problem for tweens and teens whose circadian rhythm is already going through a natural shift, causing them to feel more awake later in the day. This will then result in poorly rested and sleep-deprived kids who have given themselves a mini jet lag.

Blue light can be such a problem because it is made up of short wavelengths that affect melatonin levels more than other wavelengths. Light from LEDs and fluorescent bulbs can create a similar effect. Normally, the pineal gland will start to release melatonin a few hours before we are supposed to go to bed, and melatonin hits its peak midway through the night. When people use a tablet to read rather than a book, it will take them longer to get to sleep in the evening. Plus, their time in REM sleep tends to be reduced, and they wake up feeling sleepier, even if they get their full eight hours.

Sleep is essential for everybody, but especially for children. There is a lot of development that is going on during our early years, and sleep is when the body gets a chance to do its best work. As a child gets older, the amount of sleep they need will go down. For instance, newborns sleep upwards of 14 to 17 hours a day. School-age children, six to 13 years old, need nine to 11 hours of sleep each night. As they shift into full teenage years, they need between eight and ten hours of sleep.

Taking into consideration the effects of blue light on sleep, it's a good idea to set a curfew for screen use. They already need to limit how much they use their screens, but they also should stop using at least an hour before bed. Two hours would be best. This gives their body the chance to start producing more melatonin. However, if they have a project they are working on for school that requires the use of the computer and are working like mad on it, they at least have them lower the brightness of the screen. Some apps will automatically warm the colors of the screen at sunset. You should also avoid using any energy-efficient (blue) bulbs in nightlights. Go with red lights as they have higher wavelengths and don't suppress the release of melatonin. Another option is to purchase blue light glasses, that block the blue and ultraviolet waves.

How to Limit Screen Time

It can seem difficult to limit how much screen time your child gets, but there are a few strategies that we will go over that can make it easier. The main thing, though, is that you ensure your child knows the rules. You can't implement new rules and expect them to follow them without telling them what they are.

1. Set Time Limits:

They may get an hour of TV each evening after they have finished their homework, or they may only get 30 minutes to text with their friends. The important thing is to make sure that you come up with clear rules and limits for how the use screen time. While it may be tempting to give in when they bargain, whine, or beg for more time, be as consistent and firm as possible.

2. Don't Put Screens in their Room:

Make sure that you keep any type of tech devices or televisions out of their bedroom. A TV in a bedroom has been connected to an increased risk of obesity, sleep problems, and low test scores. Not only that, but it provides them with temptation. Don't let them take their phone, iPads, or any other device in their room. Have them put their cell phones and laptops to charge outside their room in a communal space where you can easily see that they no longer have their devices in their rooms.

3. Know What They View:

Research has found that watching things with your child and talking about them, critically thinking about them, and talking about their effects is the best type of monitoring you can do. Start to get used to knowing what they are hearing and seeing when online, watching television, or playing video games. Make sure that you limit how much violent content they see as well. Dr. Gentile's research found that violent content can affect the behavior of children.

4. Stick To Your Rules:

Keep reminding yourself that any arguments you may have are going to be worth it in the end. Your child might be unhappy for a moment after you limit and monitor their screen time, but there are many benefits in the long run. Also, as your child ages, the limits should change as well.

Smartphone Etiquette

While you're working with your children on their screen use, you should also teach them some basic cell phone etiquette. Much of what your children learn about cell phone etiquette they learn by modeling the behaviors of their parents. In fact, interviews with Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Sundar Pichai, and other tech power players reveal that Silicon Valley parents are strict about their kid's technology use. Maybe you should be too.

With the creation of the smartphone, it has never been easier to connect with others. Technology gives us the ability to reach out to the ones we care about from a distance and connect us to information through the internet. Children are much more comfortable using digital communication than any generation before. Neilson reported, in 2017, that 4000 parents said 45% of their children had a smartphone and service plan between ten and 12 years of age (*Mobile Kids: The Parent, the Child and the Smartphone*, 2017).

Having access to smartphones isn't entirely negative. A lot of parents choose to give their kids a phone for safety reasons and knowing where they are at all times. Some teachers have been known to incorporate their use into lessons. However, kids with this much access to technology can overuse it or get into something they shouldn't.

Children who are new to smartphones won't fully understand where they need to draw the line when it comes to using their devices. It is up to the parents to teach their children how to use their phones correctly and encourage healthy usage. Let's look at some basic lessons that parents should teach their children.

1. Attentiveness:

Anybody, adult or child, can easily get sucked into what they are focused on at the moment. If somebody gets too focused on what they are doing on their phone rather than what is going on around them, it can cause a problem. Feeling ignored by a person you are trying to talk to because they are focused on their phone can be hurtful.

You need to help your child develop attentive listening skills and be aware of what is going on around them. This means that if they are on their phone, but somebody else needs to speak to them, encourage them to look away from the phone and pay full attention to the one speaking to them.

2. Encourage Polite Texting:

Written communication has gone through many changes over the years, transforming from long-hand to abbreviated texts with emojis. Sending a person with a thumbs up in place of “thank you” may work at times, but it isn’t always the right choice.

Help your child learn how to texting politely by helping them understand how to converse in written form. Texts aren’t like emails, but you can still have polite etiquette even if you are sending a short message. For example, it might not always be right to send an emoji, so they should learn to send phrases like “I’m sorry,” “thank you,” and “please.”

3. Use Parental Controls:

Parental controls on phones give parents a way to monitor what their children do on their devices and restrict their access to material that is not suitable. Both Android and iPhone devices have built-in parental controls to help with content and privacy restrictions. Plus, there are plenty of other apps that offer additional parental controls, such as FamilyTime and Norton Family Premier. While the apps won’t teach your child a direct lesson, they do give them a chance to use their phones more healthily and safely.

Teaching your children some basic lessons about smartphone etiquette is a process that is going to take some time, and there may be some setbacks. Don't forget, though, and kids learn a lot by observing the closest people. Make sure you are the model of healthy smartphone use for them to follow.

Chapter 5: Adolescent Brain

“The human brain, then, is the most complicated organization of matter that we know.”

Isaac Asimov

Tween/Teen Brains

Children between the ages of 11 and 14 are a unique bunch. They are moving out of the “child” phase and getting closer to becoming adults. They are growing tall, and it seems as if they are changing every day. As a parent, this can be a scary time. They are reaching puberty, and they are becoming their own person. But we can’t forget about everything that is happening in the brain. During the first three to five years of life, the brain develops very rapidly. By age nine, all of the important structures and building blocks are present. The different parts of the brain will continue to grow and connect with time. The last area of the brain to mature is the prefrontal lobe. This area matures during the teenage years. There are things like environmental, individual, and genetic factors that will affect this development.

Humans babies are born helpless. If we had adult-sized brains already at birth our heads wouldn’t fit through our mother’s hips. Hence our brains keep developing and growing for years. This continual brain development is what helped humans adapt and conquer every corner of the earth.

There was a time that we believed that once a child had made it through puberty that the growth and development of the brain were finished. Once MRIs were invented, they found that the brain continues to change for many years after puberty has been reached, and it could continue to grow until at least 30.

So what makes the tween and teen brain so unique from a child’s and adults? Experiments have discovered that they “think with their feelings.” In brain scans, different parts of the brain light up when they are being used. Using this technology, scientists have found that the teen and adult brain’s different areas will light up when they are shown faces with different

emotions. Adults will use the prefrontal cortex to study the face and to figure out what the emotion is. Teens, however, use the amygdala most of the time. This means that they use how they feel to help them understand emotions.

To help you remember how this feels, because we all went through this stage in life, imagine that you have lost where you placed your keys and will be late if you don't leave soon. Think about the number of times that you have checked a place for your keys, five, ten, maybe 20 times. You begin panicking. The cortex is no longer being used. You have started to think about your emotions. Think about how it feels when a person says, "calm down and think about this sensibly." This is the way teens feel while running off of their emotions because they haven't developed a certain link in the brain.

Teens tend to misinterpret the emotions of others. Most commonly, they will often see anger when in reality, it is anxiety or fear. This is what causes those frustrating times of miscommunication. When talking to your tween or teen, make sure that you, the adult, check the emotion they can see you using, and you should always acknowledge their emotions. Then you can help them to understand how they feel.

Brain development can be helped simply by talking to children as they are growing up. Having a loving, supportive, and consistent environment is vital for healthy brain development. Young people need to have adults who encourage them. Teens also respond better when rewarded for their efforts instead of being punished for what they did wrong. While they need to have consistent, clear boundaries, they most importantly need the chance to do things independently.

There is also the principle that when connections are used together, they will become stronger, so this is the best time to develop good habits around certain things, such as thinking positively, exercising, and eating. This will set them up for success in adulthood. While the brain can be changed at any point in our life, it is a lot easier to make sure that the wiring is done correctly from the very start. A lot more effort has to be used to change it later on in life.

It has been well proven that if a child experiences any abuse, whether it be neglect, sexual, physical, emotional, or verbal, especially during their earlier life, it creates lasting effects on their brain's wiring. Children who

experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) are more likely to suffer from depression, develop risky health behaviors and often suffer socioeconomically. If your child or a friend's child has suffered from an adverse experience there are ways to help them. For starters you can visit - <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/aces> to learn more and find resources that may help. Suffering from an ACE can have long term impacts on the hardwiring in a child's brain which is why it is so important to protect them during this developmental period. Our brain development peaks during the first five years of life and then during puberty.

Girls and Boys Brains Are Different

Neuroscientists have known for a long time that girls' and boys' brains aren't the same. Boy's brains tend to be more lateralized. This means that the brain's two hemispheres operate independently of each other during certain tasks such as moving around within their environment or speaking in front of a crowd. But females will use both hemispheres of their brain for the same tasks. One more difference is the size of their brains.

Scientists have looked at the four main areas of differences in the female and male brains: activity, structure, chemistry, processing. The differences in these spaces of the brain can be seen worldwide, but there have been some exceptions to this "gender rule." You've likely met some boys who seem to like talking about their feelings and are sensitive. They just don't seem to fit how boys are supposed to do things. Just like with every gender difference, there isn't just one way to do things, and there isn't one way that is better than others.

Processing

Males use nearly seven times the amount of grey matter to do an activity than females do. That said, females use ten times the amount of white matter when working on the same activity. What does this mean for them ("Intelligence in Men and Women" 2005)?

Grey matter is located in various areas of the brain. These are the action and information processing centers in certain areas of the brain. This can be seen as a type of tunnel vision a child will have when they are focusing

on a specific activity. When a child is engaged in a game or task, they might not show any sensitivity toward their surroundings or other people.

What matters is what helps to connect all of the grey matter with other areas of the brain. These huge differences in how the brain processes things are the biggest reason why you have likely seen that girls transition between tasks quicker than boys do. The differences in grey and white matter might explain why females are better at multitasking when they are older, whereas men do better in tasks where they have to focus more.

Chemistry

The female and male brains do process the same types of neurochemicals, but there are slight variations due to gender-specific connections. The most dominant neurochemicals are:

- Serotonin: this helps us sit still
- Testosterone: this is the aggression and sex chemical
- Estrogen: this is the female reproductive and growth chemical
- Oxytocin: This is the relationship bonding chemical

Because of the different ways we process these chemicals, males can't remain still for as long as females can, and males tend to act more physically aggressive and impulsive. Plus, males don't process as much oxytocin as females.

Structural Differences

Structural, in this sense, refers to the areas of the brain and how they are built. This includes mass and size. The word structural here refers to parts of the brain and how they were built, and this includes their mass and size.

A female's hippocampus is usually larger. The hippocampus is our memory center. Females tend to have denser connections in this region. Thus, girls tend to experience more input or take in more emotive and sensorial information than boys can. When we talk about "sensorial," we are talking about information into and out of our five senses. If you were to observe a group of males and females over a few months, you might see

that females have a tendency to realize what is happening around them during the day, and they will retain all this information better than men.

Before babies are born, their brains will develop with various divisions of labor in each hemisphere. The left and right hemispheres in the female and male brains aren't set up the same way. Females will have verbal centers that sit on both sides of their brains, whereas men only have one verbal center located on the left side. This creates big differences. This is why females tend to use more words when talking about a place, feeling, object, person, story, or incident. Males will have fewer verbal centers overall but will have less connectivity between their feelings, memories, and word centers. When talking about senses, emotions, and feelings simultaneously, girls will have the advantage, and they are typically more interested in talking about these different things.

Brain Activity and Blood Flow

Since we are talking about processing emotions, we need to look at the different activities between the female and male brains. In the female brain, thanks to more blood flow in the brain at all times, and since there is more blood flowing in the part of the brain that governs concentration, they will revisit emotional memories and ruminate on more than males do.

Males have been designed differently. After they have briefly reflected on memory, Males will somewhat analyze it and then move on to another task. Throughout this process, they could decide to change their course and do something active and not related to how they feel instead of analyzing their feelings. Thus, it makes others think that boys avoid their feelings or move to try to solve the problem too fast when compared to girls.

These four design differences that have been listed above are only a few examples of ways females and males think differently. Scientists have found around 100 genders variations within the brain, and the importance of these differences can't be stated enough (Price, 2017). Knowing the differences in genders from a neurological standpoint will open doors to more appreciation of each gender. It can also help us figure out the best way to parent, support, and educate our children from a young age.

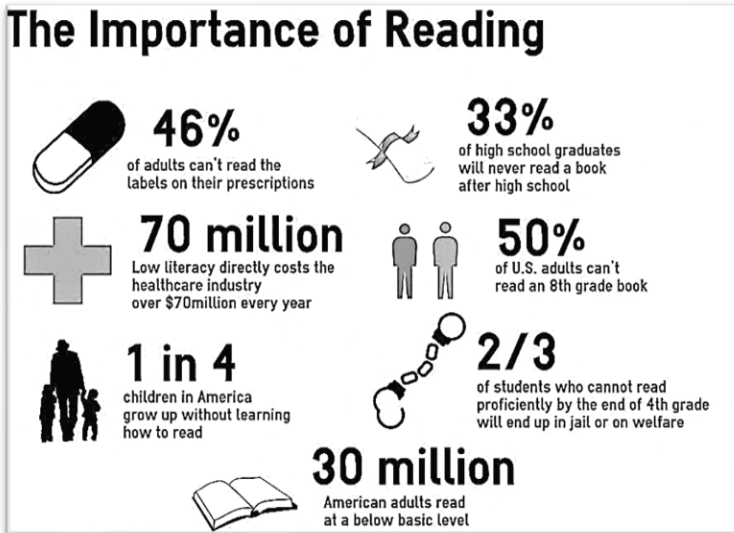
Chapter 6: Reading for Fun

"All I have learned, I learned from books."

Abraham Lincoln

When we read, we get transported from our normal world into a totally different world. Within the pages of a book, we can get immersed in fictional characters' lives and learn about cultures that are completely different from ours. We could learn new phrases and words, acquire new knowledge and skills, and experience all kinds of emotions.

Since there is such a learning potential, how reading affects a child's development can be vast, and many different studies have highlighted all the benefits. Because of this, parents and teachers are in the best position to make sure that reading is the main part of their child's routine each day. Above you will find information that tells you why this is important, along with some tips that you can use in the classroom.



Reading and Child Development

Reading just for its fun can help a child's cognitive and social development, education, mental health, and well-being.

A study published by Mark Johnson and Saloni Krishnan in *"A Review of Behavioural and Brain Development in The Early Years"* shows the effects of reading and encouraging the child to engage with their world, facilitating social interactions between children and adults, and their later literacy skills. It shows the way reading can be a good source of information during the child's life. This kind of stability gives them access to text constantly and could be beneficial for children who are growing up in very challenging circumstances (Kirshnan & Johnson, 2014).

There are many benefits that reading can have on a child. A few of them are listed below:

- **Developing Empathy:**

Any time we read a book, we are putting ourselves into whatever story we have in front of us. This helps us develop empathy while we experience the lives of the characters, and we can identify with the way they are feeling. Children will be able to use this to know how to empathize with others. Plus, children will have a better understanding of emotions, and this could help them understand other peoples and their own emotions better. This can drastically help their social development.

- **Cognitive Development:**

This is the way we think about and perceive the world around us. It is our information processing, language development, reasoning, and intelligence. When we read to a child, we are giving them a deeper understanding of their world. We are filling their little brains with knowledge. They will then be able to use this new knowledge to make sense of everything they read, hear, and see. This, in turn, helps their cognitive development.

- **Creating Better Relationships:**

When parents read to their children regularly, they will develop a stronger bond with them. Reading allows parents to have a regular, shared event that you both can look forward to. Plus, it shows the child that you are paying attention to them, you love them, and it reassures them that you are looking out for their wellbeing.

- **Understanding Your Child Better:**

Books can take us wherever we want to go. We can go into a different world, a new country, or a different city. When you read a book to your child, they learn about events, places, and people. This will give a child a better understanding of the world and cultures that are different from theirs.

Reading and Education

Various studies have found a connection between reading for pleasures and achieving better in school in all subjects and not just in English. There are many benefits to a child's education that come from reading:

- **Extensive Vocabulary:**

Reading exposes students to a huge range of new phrases and vocabulary that they might not have heard. They will learn new words daily from reading.

- **Better Literacy Skills:**

Reading helps with acquiring language skills because it stimulates the part of the brain that works on processing language.

- **Better Concentration:**

Regular reading could help improve how well a child concentrates.

- High Levels of Imagination and Creativity:

Reading a book makes us use our imagination when we picture the characters. We imagine the new environment and settings while guessing what will happen next. We have to use our imagination if we want to learn about other times, events, places, and people. Plus, this new level of imagination will lead to better creativity as they use their heads' ideas to help them.

- Know Your Child Better:

Parents can learn a lot more about their children by paying attention to what they like to read for fun. It gives you valuable insight into what makes them tick and what they would be most interested in talking about.

The more a child reads, the better their social skills such as empathy and academic achievement will be.

Top Ten Benefits

Based on what you have read above, here are the main benefits of encouraging your tween to read:

1. Interaction and social skill improve
2. Supports their cognitive development
3. Improves their concentration
4. Better understands their world
5. Create empathy
6. Develops better creativity
7. Imaginations run wild
8. Performs better academically
9. Creates a more extensive vocabulary
10. Helps you identify more about what your child likes and dislikes.

Reading With Your Child



A great way to get your children into the habit of reading for fun is to create a family book club of sorts. Set aside some time each day for you and your child to read together. You can choose to take turns reading aloud, or you can both sit and read quietly and enjoy the silence and the book. You don't even have to be reading the same books when you do this. The goal is to lead by example. Once the reading time is over, talk about what you have read. This gives you a chance to learn more about your child and how they interpret their book, and it will give your child some insight into you. Invite them into your book just as you would like them to invite you into their book.

This daily practice has numerous benefits, and the main one being that you are teaching them to love books.

How to Raise a Child Who Reads for the Fun of It

I love to read. I will take a book with me everywhere I go. I am the kind of reader that I hope my child will grow into. Reading isn't just easy for me, but it is also my refuge. It helps feed my curiosity, it allows me to escape, and it's a way you can connect to others. Below you will find things that you can do to help your child love reading:

- Fill Your Home With Reading:

Reference materials, comics, magazines, and books - have them all readily available. You can watch movies that were based on books, buy toys that represent characters from books. Tell your child stories that use your favorite characters.

- Make It An Event:

Go to a bookstore, go to a library, make the trip as exciting as you possibly can. Make it a huge event and not just something that you do in between other errands. You need to make it fun.

- Allow Them To Pick the Book:

This is probably the hardest one for most parents. This isn't a "get out of homework" pass. This is all about allowing them to choose what they want to read for fun. Each family is going to have different books that will and won't be acceptable for them but within certain boundaries. Allow them to choose what they want to read.

- Allow Your Child to Read What They Like:

There are many books out there that I don't like, but if my child loves what they are reading, I am going to suck it up and let them read. You have to be careful if you criticize your child's reading materials since what you think is coming out as criticism of what your child is reading, your child could interpret it as criticizing them as a person.

- Let Them See You Reading:

You have to practice what you preach around your child. Make reading time fun. You don't always have to read something educational. There isn't anything wrong with reading fluff. The most important thing is that your child sees your reading and enjoying it. Model the behavior you wish to see in your children.

- Bend The Rules When Reading:

Most voracious readers get created after dark. Allowing bedtime to slide as long as they are reading is the best motivator when children can read independently. If children are younger, reading just one more chapter to them or letting them look through another picture book sends a big message.

- Don't Force Reading:

NEVER use reading as a punishment. This could make a child who loves to read into one who associates it with getting into trouble.

- If They Find A Book They Love, Find More Like It:

If your child gets into a book series, you can reserve the next book at your local library before they finish the first one. Having the next one right there is a wonderful tool to keep the momentum flowing.

- If Your Child Is Having a Hard Time, Notice It

Learning disabilities such as behavioral problems, dyslexia, and emotional problems can cause a reluctance in struggling readers. If you think your child might have some time more than just a lack of interest, talk to their teacher or pediatrician. They can help you find the right intervention that will get your child the help they need. Once you find the problem, you can get back on track with reading.

Every child won't turn into an adult who just reads because they love to. Parents can follow all of these steps and still raise a child who loves being outside better, likes music better than reading, or just doesn't like reading. As a parent, I would love to create the best foundation for my children to love reading as much as I do.

Chapter 7: Teaching Respect

“Respect for ourselves guides our morals respect for others guides our manners”

Laurence Sterne

Respect, such a simple word, yet not many people truly understand what the word means. You are eating out with your family and the woman at the table next to you snaps her fingers and screams at the waiter, “Hey, you gave me the wrong dish. Why aren’t you listening? Go get me the right dish, NOW!” What would you think about that person?

For me, I would think she was being disrespectful and extremely rude. What gives her the right to talk down to the waiter? The majority of people I know wouldn’t do something like that. However, they are willing to talk to their children in that way. A mother would snap and yell at her son, “Hey, I told you not to do that. Why are you not listening? Now go and take a time-out, NOW!”

Do you see the irony with this? Why is there this difference between how we treat strangers versus how we treat our children?

Respect is defined as, “a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements,” as well as “due regard for the feelings, wishes, rights, or traditions of others.”

There is a lot more to respect than simply saying “Yes, ma’am,” “Yes, sir,” or being compliant. Respect has to come from within, and you can’t make a person respect you. It’s also impossible to teach respect by being disrespectful to our children.

When you teach your child how to respect others, it will ensure that they develop healthy relationships with their communities, family, and friends throughout their life. Your child will be interacting with numerous people during their life, and most of those people will be met in school. They will have to work on projects with classmates, and they are going to meet people that they may not like that much, but respect will ensure that they can tolerate them and be respectful.

Traits Respect Teach

Respect doesn't just teach respect, though. There are many other traits that your child will learn when you teach your child respect.

1. Tolerance:

Your child is going to face conflict at some point in their life. While they may not always understand or agree with what is being done or said, teaching them respect will also help address this conflict more productively. When you teach them respect, it will allow them to communicate in a way that is effective and it will help them to take responsibility for the mistakes they make, and to tolerate the mistakes of others.

2. Listening:

Listening is the biggest component of a positive and productive conversation. To communicate effectively, you have to know how to listen, and this can be learned by understanding respect. Show your child the proper way of listening, not interrupting, and taking their turn to help them engage in a conversation. Listen to the people, and listen to your child.

3. Open Minded:

When you teach your child respect, they will take the time to get to know a person, and they won't make a snap judgment about them. This is going to help them all through their life. It also ensures that they will treat people with kindness. Also, for some children, diversity is a difficult concept to understand. When they learn about respect at an early age, they will accept everybody for who they are.

4. Good Manners

Teaching a child manners might seem a bit on the hard side, especially when they are younger. However, good manners come from learning respect. Saying "please" and "thank you" can do a lot, and with some practice, these things will become second nature. Through the practice of

manners, it will teach your child that all relationships benefit from giving and taking.

It will take your child some time to learn respect, but it is never too early to start modeling that behavior for them. Ultimately, teaching them to be respectful will help them in the long run.

How to Teach and Show Respect

The most important thing you can teach your child is to respect. **Remember that respect isn't the same as obedience.** Your child might obey you because they are scared of you. If they truly respect you, they are going to obey you because they know you just want the best things for them.

The best way you can teach respect to your child is to show it. Anytime a child experiences respect, they will know what it feels like and they realize how important it is. Remember that old saying, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Respecting others is an attitude. When your child is respectful, it can help them succeed in life. If your child doesn't have respect for authority, peers, or themselves, it will be impossible for them to succeed. A respectful child will take care of their responsibilities and belonging. A respectful child will play well with his peers.

Schools do their best to teach the children about respect, but parents have the biggest influence on the amount of respect their child has. Until a child is shown respect in their homes, it isn't likely that they will show it to anyone else or anywhere else.

Model a key skill in showing respect even when disagreeing with your teen by using "I" statements rather than "you" statements. This is an easy yet powerful tool you can impart on your tween to communicate their feelings respectfully.

Ways You Can Show Respect

The best way to teach your child to be respectful is to model the behavior in front of them. To teach your child respect, try doing the following.

- Listen to your child: give them your complete attention
- Make “I” statements rather than “you” statements
- Show them you are reliable: keep your promises; show them that you mean everything you say
- Show them politeness: use the phrases “thank you” and “please.” Stop barging into their room; knock first
- You have to show fairness: listen to their side of the story before you jump to any conclusions
- Show your child they can trust you: allow them to make some choices and take on some responsibilities
- Stay positive: never make fun, insult, or embarrass your child. Give them compliments and often
- Be honest: if you know you did something wrong, admit it, and then apologize for it.

Children learn from all the things we do and say. Be sure that you are modeling respectful behavior. Here are some things that you can do:

- Stay away from bad role models: if you see any examples of disrespectfulness, talk about them with your child in a calm manner
- Be caring: you have to show you are concerned about the environment, animals, and people
- Obey all the laws: be a good example and follow all the rules

Anytime you set a rule in your house, explain to them the reasons why this rule is important. Look at this example. Let’s say you set a rule that they can’t watch television between the hours of four and six. You aren’t being mean. This is the time they need to do their homework and homework is important for their learning.

Show your child how to respect themselves. Self-respect is an important type of respect. When we respect ourselves, it will be easier to show respect for others. Your child needs your opinion. If they know that you think they can succeed, they will believe it too. Create their independence by giving them responsibilities when they are old enough to handle them.

Help them set some goals and then help them reach their goals. You will see their self-respect skyrocket when they realize they have reached a goal. Encourage them to be honest. Let them know that they might be able to fool some, but they won't be able to fool themselves. There isn't any pride in lying, cheating, or stealing.

Above all... show them love! Tell them that you love them at least once per day, but more would be better. Give them lots of kisses and hugs. If your child does make a mistake, tell them you still love them but explain what they did wrong.

Chapter 8: Family Dinner

“All great change in America begins at the dinner table.”
President Ronald Reagan

Family dinner and school success don't seem to go together, at least not on the surface. But let me start this chapter out with a short story. At the school where I used to teach, the valedictorian one year was asked what the secret was to his success. His reply was, “We very often had family dinner during which we would discuss the news of the day and share our opinions.”

For many, family dinner has been lost in their overscheduled lives. Extracurricular activities, work, and school can make it hard to find time to eat together. Some families go weeks or days without sitting down and having a meal together. We've all been there. Your day is running longer than it should. You're too tired to cook, your spouse is late, you finally get the meal on the table, and you all spend about five minutes together before running off to other things.

This can make it feel pointless to spend the time cooking the meal and trying to have family dinner. We question all of the work we put into this and wonder if it's worth it. However, these family dinners are extremely important and should be a part of your daily requirements. Family dinners are worth it.

The chart on the next page shows you the biggest benefits of family dinner.

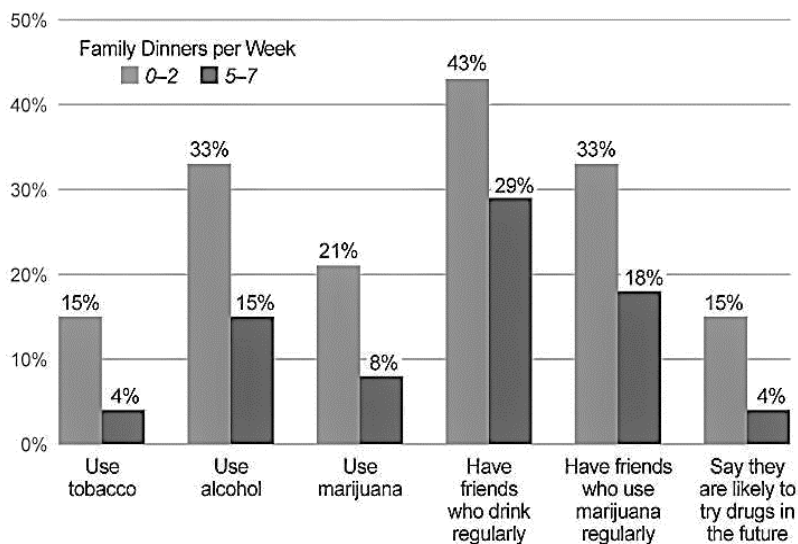
Researchers have discovered that families who have a meal together regularly, whether dinner, breakfast, or lunch, reap several benefits. A balanced and healthy meal is important for your child, but it is also important to take the time to share a meal. Your mealtime is way more than just the food you are eating. It is about providing an atmosphere of conversation, tradition, love, and connection.

1. Developmental Boosts

For the smallest members of your family, sharing a meal with their parents can do some awesome things for them. First, it will promote their language skills as you talk with everybody around the table. It also boosts their dexterity and patience. It will also help them to develop their social skills that include taking turns and manners.

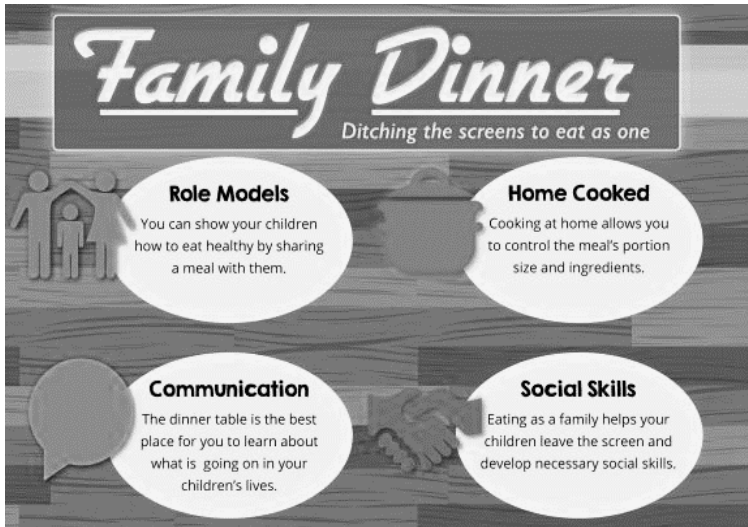
Have you ever had to sit through a meal with children, or some adults for that matter, who can't make conversation? Meaningful conversation is a skill your children have to learn and family dinners can help teach this skill. Spending time together without distractions gives you a chance to ask them about each other's day, talk about what is going on, get opinions

FAMILY DINNERS AND TEEN SUBSTANCE USE, 2011



about important topics, and to share how they feel. Oftentimes, family dinners are the best way to hear about what is going on in your child's life.

The graph above shows the results of a study done in 2011 to see how regular family dinner affect teens and their chances of abusing substances. It clearly depicts that teens are much less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol and associates with peers who do as the frequency of family dinners increases.



If the conversation doesn't come easy, try out a couple of different tactics. You can try sharing highs and lows. This is where you go around the table and share one high, which is a positive thing, about your day, and then one low, which is a negative thing that happened. This will help you share the details of your day and can lead to deeper conversations. The point of mealtime is to enjoy the company and get to know something more about each other.

2. Improved Mental health

One study found that children who regularly took part in family meals were less likely to experience depression and less likely to end up getting hooked on drugs.

3. Bonded Families

Family life has become increasingly busy. Most families will have school, work, and other activities scheduled each day. Time won't magically come to a stop at five in the evening so that families can stop and have a meal together. Some families say they don't have two free hours to make and eat dinner, but they find two hours to stare at their phone.

Family dinners give you the chance to stop all of the other activities and simply connect for a moment. Research has also found that when a family eats their meals together, they develop a stronger bond with each other. Everybody leads a disconnected life at school and work, and this time gives you all a chance to reconnect. You will also find that you can keep better tabs on what is going on in your child's life.

Family dinners could be the only time you have where your entire family is together. Studies have found that only around half of all families eat together more than three times each week. They also found that the majority of meals that last 20 minutes or less are in front of the television. Use this chance to connect with your children face to face. Turn off all distractions, put the phones away, and focus on one another.

4. Better Grades

At Columbia University, their National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse center has done several studies on how important family meals are. In the study *Family Meals and Child Academic Behavioral Outcome*, they found that children who had family meals less than three times each week were twice as likely to make Cs or worse. Children who have family meals five to seven times each week did a lot better, reporting mainly Bs and As (Miller et al., 2012).

5. Physical Health

Families that eat their meals together tend to make better food choices. There was one study from Stanford University that found children who had family dinners were less likely to eat saturated fats and fried food, and sought out foods like vegetables and fruits.

The American Society for Nutrition found that young children who had meals with their families had lower BMI levels than children who didn't. This is likely because home-cooked meals tend to be healthier than restaurant meals, which come with a higher calorie count and larger portions.

You as the parent have control over what your child eats when you cook meals at home. Taking the time to plan and cook a balanced meal is a great

service to your family. Teens who regularly eat family dinners are less likely to start smoking or trying drugs. Plus, family dinners allow you to introduce new foods, try healthy foods, and see eating as something that should be enjoyed instead of rushed through.

Statistics have found that one in five meals are eaten in the car. When you eat quickly or on the go, it causes you to mindlessly eat, instead of being mindful and enjoying your foods.

6. Increased Savings

While this doesn't directly affect your child, families who eat family meals more often tend to save money. Home-cooked meals are often cheaper. A family of four could save almost \$40 each week, per person, by cooking at home versus eating out. You will be saving your money while helping your kids do better in school and keeping them away from drugs.

7. Good Traditions

Traditions are extremely important. For adults and children, traditions help to ground us and provide us with a sense of being. When family dinners have become a regular habit, everybody in the family knows that they are going to get time to connect. All families are going to have their own unique rituals that help to make meals special. An example could be to share the highs and lows of the day, where everyone gets to share. Some families will have traditions concerning what foods they eat, like taco Tuesday. The family meal will turn into a habit that will help to bind the family by showing everybody that family matters and this ritual will become something to be counted on.

8. The Company, Not the Food

There is no need to be an amazing cook or have a degree in cooking to have family dinners. The good that comes from having dinner together is due to the company and not from the food you eat. There is an endless number of resources out there for easy family dinner recipes. The important thing is that you serve something nutritious to eat and sit down

and be together. Some nights can end up being a favorite recipe or you could try something new, and sometimes it is okay to get takeout; just don't make it a habit. It's also important to remain flexible. When it's your family's busy season, you may have to eat earlier or later than you normally would accommodate work, games, or practice schedules. The goal is to make sure you eat together.

The best thing about family dinners is that it will become ingrained in your family's tradition if you start this early on. While it may seem tough to ensure family meals are spent together, it is very beneficial. Remember that every dinner you have at a table with your family brings your family closer together and helps your child succeed in school and life.

How to Make Family Dinner Happen

We've already talked about how it can be difficult to bring the family together for regular meals together, so let's see how we can remedy this problem.

1. Work together to come up with a family meal plan.

One of the biggest deterrents to having a family dinner is not having a plan. Sit down together and come up with a basic meal plan for the week ahead. This does not need to be something elaborate. You could also include a leftover night or a "breakfast night," where you heat leftovers or have quick breakfast foods on a particularly busy evening.

2. Block out some time each evening when you would like to have dinner

After you have planned out the meals for the week, you will want to plan for the ideal time to have your meals. Mark this time in your calendars, both the family and personal calendars. Kids and parents might have to set a few boundaries to make this time work. It's a lot harder to make it work when you don't have it marked on your calendar, though.

3. Pick out some games or conversation starters.

You want to make this time together fun. Make it more interesting than just asking, “How was your day?” Make sure that your family anticipates this time as a time when you will make some memories together.

This can be helpful when you are trying to start family dinners with older children. If you have a tween or teen, it can feel awkward to try and force conversations. Once you have all talked about your day, what are you supposed to talk about? Try breaking the ice with some silly games, a gratitude practice, or dinnertime jokes. Throw out formality and keep this laid-back and fun.

4. Have some snacks ready while you are fixing dinner.

Some evenings it can seem like you don't have time to cook, but all you need is 15 to 20 minutes to cook some pasta for a quick meal. When you are dealing with hangry kids, that time can seem a lot longer. An easy solution is to have some veggies for them to munch on before dinner is ready.

Having veggies only rule during the hour leading up to dinner is a good rule to have. If your kids aren't too keen on veggies, make a game out of it. Fill up a plate with some raw veggies and challenge your children to see who can make the loudest crunch when they eat them.

5. Make the prep and clean-up time a family affair.

If you want to make sure family dinners work, you need to make sure that it is manageable for everybody. If one person has to plan, prep, cook, and clean, then that person is going to end up getting tired of that job, and family dinners will soon end. Assign a certain task to a person, no matter their age, and then everybody can work together to make family dinners come together.

A final word about family dinners. Family dinner is a great opportunity to model appropriate cell phone usage. Family dinner should be a cell phone free zone, for parents too. This is a great opportunity for the adults to model appropriate soft skills of cell phone usage.

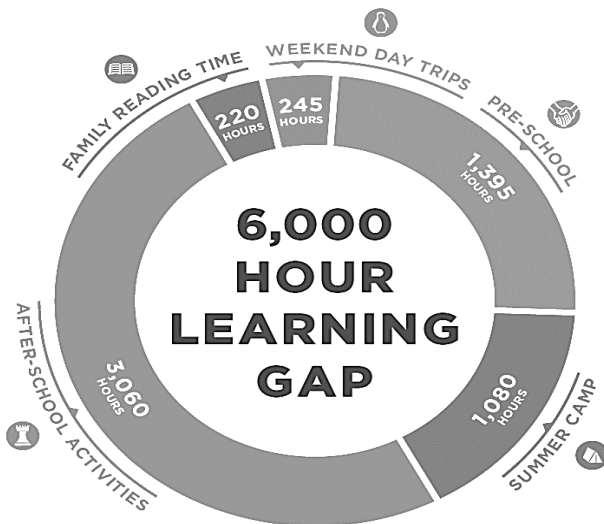
Chapter 9: Out of School Time

“Unless you open yourself up to trying new things, you can’t find what you love.” – Anonymous

Middle-class kids, by sixth grade, will have likely spent around 6,000 more hours learning than children born into poverty. Learning time is a resource that is not equally distributed. Students are going to learn how to problem-solve, persist, create, and read at home and through after-school activities. Parents stressed by poverty are far less likely to help make sure their children have the same experiences.

This gap isn’t just missed leisure and fun time. It shows a large inequity in exposure to informal learning settings and opportunities. Each summer, teachers warn about the “summer slide,” where the low-income students end up losing around two months of ground when it comes to their learning. On the other hand, their middle-income peers have likely spent that summer taking part in informal learning opportunities, like camping, reading at the library, sports camp, museum trips, and so on, and this helps them to soar ahead.

This chart gives you a breakdown of what can affect this learning gap.



This is why expanded learning opportunities or ELOs are so important. High-quality summer or afterschool educational experiences that happen outside of the regular school day are critical to combat learning loss. These are meant to build upon what students are learning during the school day, and give them a new and exciting way to interact with a subject. This can help solve the problem of lost work productivity, poor academic achievement, and unsupervised kids for parents.

Extracurricular Activities

While classroom learning is an important part of your child's education, it shouldn't be the only part of their education. There is a lot that your child will learn in the traditional classroom, but if you want to make sure that they have a well-rounded education, you want to make sure that you provide them with extracurricular and after-school activities.

Extracurricular activities aren't just as good for their overall development. Students experience a lot of pressure during their tests, and there is the pressure of doing well in their classes. With conditions like these, they must have some other activities. You can't expect them to only read books and become smart.

Sometimes parents choose not to let their child take part in extracurricular or sports that their child's school has to offer. Sometimes the student doesn't feel like they need to take part in these things. All they feel they need to do is concentrate on their books. I'm here to tell you that you need to let and encourage your child to take part in extracurricular activities. These activities won't distract your child from their studies, in fact it makes them better more well rounded individuals.

Studies have found that students who take part in extracurricular activities enjoy numerous benefits. They are growing, learning, and more importantly, having some fun. To understand why you should make sure your child takes part in extracurricular activities, let's go over some of the biggest benefits.

1. Academics

Studies have found that students who take part in after-school activities are more likely to get better grades and will have a better work ethic. Most of the skills that are found in extracurricular activities are used in core academic subjects. Education requires critical thinking, creativity, memory, and problem-solving skills. To different degrees, you are going to find extracurricular activities that affect these things.

2. Learn New Skills

Fundamentally, extracurricular activities give children a chance to learn something new that will stay with them for the rest of their life. This skill could be the basis for a hobby or a passion that helps to enrich their lives for many years to come. Everything from learning an instrument or playing sports could lead to several hours spent doing things that they enjoy. Besides that, these activities can instill personality traits and skills that can help them in all walks of life.

3. Time Management

Having more priorities besides family and school can help your child learn how to best manage their time to make sure that they get all of their work done. They will learn how to balance school life with their after school club. This is going to create the foundation of skills they need and will benefit them later on in their education and life.

4. Social Skills and Friendships

In the traditional classroom, there is only so much socializing that can go on, but extracurricular activities provide more chances for them to bond and form lasting friendships. Extracurricular activities provide your child with a chance to engage with other children in a social setting. Away from the classroom, kids have a good chance to mix with other like-minded children while doing something they all like. This helps them to develop social skills, become confident with communicating in groups, and to meet new friends. The activities can also help them develop confidence and self-esteem.

5. Teamwork

From getting ready for a spelling bee to playing chess, several activities can help students learn how to properly work in groups to achieve a common goal while also having fun.

6. Exploring Interests

There is a lot more to life than math, reading, and writing. Extracurricular activities give your children a chance to explore the world and find out what they are into.

7. Physical Fitness

Students who take part in a sport, whether club or school team, dance, or other physical extracurricular are more likely to maintain a healthy weight and lead an active life.

8. Service

Several extracurricular activities give students the chance to learn more about those who are less fortunate than them and to give back.

9. College

College admissions boards don't just look at their grades, but also at the extracurricular activities they took part in to help them learn more about themselves. Oftentimes, having extracurricular activities on their students' resumes can set them apart from other applicants. Universities love to see that prospective students are willing to go above and beyond to learn something new.

10. Safety

An article published in *SEDL Letter* said that a study found that students who took part in after-school activities are less likely to engage in criminal activities, do drugs, or drop out of school.

11. Parental Productivity

The average workday is a lot longer than the average school day. Parents who know that their child is somewhere safe and is supervised while taking part in their extracurricular activities are likely to be more productive while at work.

There are quite a few options out there for extracurricular activities that you can help your child get involved in. If you aren't sure as to what they have to choose from, here are the most popular choices. Remember, these aren't the only ones, but they are a place to start.

1. Sports

The most obvious choice is sports. Whether your child's school offers sports or not, there are usually community teams that your child can get involved in. There are numerous benefits to joining a sports team. First is the physical aspect. Sports will help to encourage a healthy lifestyle and will develop healthy life long habits. Mentally, sport help to develop teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills. There are lots of sports to choose from as well. Also consider athletic activities that are not focused on competition between winners or losers such as paddling, hiking, geocaching, rock climbing, and many more.

2. Volunteering

Letting your child volunteer in your community is a way to help them get a feel for working and exposes them to different industries they might have an interest in. These volunteer roles also look great on a resume. As they get older, those volunteer jobs could become part-time jobs.

3. Student Body

Besides sports, student bodies like school government, union, or debate team are great ways to experience responsibility, leadership, and a desire to

face a difficult subject. These are also great ways for them to develop communication and problem-solving skills.

4. Journalism

Working for the school newspaper or yearbook is another popular choice. Journalists have to have great written communication skills. They also learn how to be great problem solvers and investigators.

5. Culture-based Clubs

Culture-based clubs can be things like music, film, games, or language. Whatever your child finds interesting, getting them involved in a relevant club provides them with the chance to socialize with like-minded kids.

6. Arts

Creativity is an important asset for education and beyond. People who get involved in visual arts, drama, or music tend to be more creative thinkers and learn how to approach problems from a different point of view.

It doesn't matter what your child is interested in. The important thing is to make sure that you get them involved in some type of extracurricular activity.

Family Outings and Vacations

Family vacations may not seem like it belongs in this, but hear me out. When it comes to family vacations, what likely comes to mind is the cost and stress. After all, taking your children on a trip can end up being quite an expense, more than \$4,000 on average. But research has found that vacations aren't only good for adults but are also great for your children. They provide much-needed family time and help make kids smarter. Getting your family ready for a trip is worth the cost and time. Let's chat about some of the biggest benefits of regular family trips.

1. Vacation Lowers Family Stress

In a survey from the US Travel Association, 75% of the children that they surveyed said that their parents would bring their work home with them. Then, six out of seven said that their parents also brought home their work stress. A parent who can't set aside their work will create huge repercussions for their children. The *Journal of Family Psychology* published a study that found that when parents are under a lot of stress, the less supportive they are when dealing with their child's negative emotions. Children also have stress that they have to deal with.

When you make a point of taking time off from work, it is going to help lower your child's stress as well. In the same survey, 77% of children said that they felt no stress when their parents took time for family outings. Even one day off is helpful. Add to this the fact that when you make family vacations and time off from work a priority, you are teaching your children what is valuable in life. You are creating the new norm of it being okay to take time for yourself.

2. Vacations Promote Bonding

Our overscheduled life cuts into important family time. A lot of parents spend their off-hours taking their children to different events. Worse even, is spending your downtimes at home staring at screens. While the family might physically be together, they aren't spending any time together.

By contrast, sharing experiences outside of what is your normal life can help to bring your family together. It doesn't matter how much time you spend with your kid. The most important thing is what you do with them. If you are spending a lot of time with your children, but you are staring at screens, it's not going to matter much. Travel provides your family time to spend together, whether you're hiking, riding a rollercoaster, or swimming with the dolphins.

3. Travel Makes Kids Smarter

Travel provides your children with real-world experiences that they can't have in a classroom, and children learn best when they do things. Nothing

can beat hands-on experiences. When children get to travel, they can learn all types of things. They get to taste different foods, encounter different languages, and immerse themselves in a new culture.

Dr. Margot Sunderland, a child psychotherapist, said that family vacations help kids experience learning that provides them with sensory, physical, cognitive, and social experiences that they won't get anywhere else. These act as brain fertilizers, which helps to enhance executive functions like concentration, planning, and focus.

4. Expands Social Awareness

When a child leaves their own state, country, or city, they will get a better understanding of the world. They will get to see how other people live in various communities, which can be pretty difficult to understand when they don't experience it firsthand. Travel helps teach children compassion and empathy.

I'll leave you with this one last thought. If a family vacation is too expensive to undertake, you can get the same benefits that we have covered by simply going on a weekend outing with your family. You can take a hike, go to the local museum, or do something around your town that you have never experienced before. The point is to make sure you spend stress-free time with your children.

Chapter 10: Final Consideration: Happiness

“Resolve to keep happy, and your joy and you shall form an invincible host against difficulties.” Helen Keller

What do you want most for your children? There’s a good chance you answered with happiness, or something similar. It’s the most common answer parents give when asked those questions. Parents want to ensure that their children are happy more than anything else. There is a lot of information on how to raise successful and smart kids, but how on earth to raise happy kids.

Brain scans can actually show the differences between a person who was taught how to be happy and the brain of a person who didn’t learn ways to be happy.

Yale professor Dr. Laurie Santos has looked into this. She has an undergrad class called Psychology and the Good Life, which discusses the science of happiness. Due to the popularity of the class, she has turned it into a podcast that everybody can listen to and learn from. The podcast can be found at the happinesslab.fm. She started her class because of what she was seeing on campus. It all started when she became head of Silliman College at Yale. This means that she lived on campus with the students and got to see what they were experiencing on a more personal level. She found that this generation of students was more anxious, lonely, depressed, and stressed than other generations. She decided she wanted to do something to help. She wanted to teach them about the latest insights into positive psychology and behavioral economics to help them feel better and create better habits.

The first thing she explains is how to be “happy in your life” and “happy with your life.” Dr. Santos explained that within psychology there aren’t any perfect self-report measures of wellbeing. However, there are two that seem to track a person’s behavior well, and those are their affective evaluations of their own wellbeing, which is being happy in your life, and then their cognitive evaluations of their happiness, which is being happy with your life. Various scales track these different parts of wellbeing. One

type is not better than the other, and she explained that it is best to try to maximize both the best you can.

The good news is, Dr. Santos explains that you can change and improve your wellbeing if the right things are done. One thing, she explains, that she has heard a lot is people believe that they can't do this. People think that their happiness levels are built-in, or their happiness is created by their circumstances that they can't do anything about. This is wrong. We can do better. It takes a lot of hard work to do so, but we can all be happier. As parents, we can teach our children how to do the same. Plus, happiness doesn't come from big things like money, jobs, house, or so on.

We have been led to believe that, but Dr. Santos explains that is false as well. We can find happiness in simpler things, like being more social, being mindful, and being grateful. The biggest piece of advice Dr. Santos gives parents on raising happy kids is to not suppress emotions. Suppressing our emotions is not only bad for us, but it also negatively affects our children. It is better if we cultivate a sense of acceptance instead of avoidance to make the family happier.

With that in mind, let's look at some science-backed tips for raising happy children.

Raising Happy Kids

The first thing you are going to have to do to raise happier kids is to be happy yourself. How happy you are is going to affect how successful and happy your children are. Research has found that there is a strong link between mothers who have feelings of "negative outcomes" in their children and negative behaviors in their children. So how can you make sure you're happier? Take time every week to have some fun with your friends.

Laughter is contagious, so hanging out with family and friends who make you laugh can help you be happier. Neuroscientists have even found that hearing the laughter of a person can trigger mirror neurons in your brain that will make you feel as though you are laughing. Once you are happier, you can start teaching your children to be happier.

1. Help Them Build Relationships

We all know learning about relationships is important, but how many parents take the time to teach their children how to relate to others? You can't just tell your kids to "knock it off" when they aren't getting along with somebody.

The great thing is, it doesn't take a lot of work to help your kids build relationships. You can start out by encouraging them to perform small acts of kindness to help build empathy. This will not only help them develop important skills and helps them be better people, but it will also make them happier.

2. Look for Effort, Not perfection

Perfectionist helicopter parents have to calm down. Constantly banging on that achievement drum hurts your children in the long run. This is going to leave your child anxious, depressed, and more likely to turn to substances to find happiness. All you need to do is refer back to chapter three to learn why this is so important. Praising your kids for their effort will go a long way to making them happier. Here is a phrase that can be very helpful.

3. Teach Optimism

Want to avoid having a surly teen that everybody warns you about? Then teach your pre-teens how to look on the bright side. 10-year-olds who were taught how to interpret and think about the world optimistically were less likely to become depressed after they went through puberty. Optimists are more likely to be successful in school, athletics, and work. They also live longer and are healthier. They end up being more satisfied in their marriages. They are less likely to deal with anxiety and depression.

4. Teach Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a skill that is taught and is not something they are born with. Kids aren't just going to "naturally" understand their emotions or others. The first step towards this is to empathize, label, and validate their emotions, especially when they are upset. You have to relate to them

and help them to identify what they are feeling, and then let them know that it is okay to feel that way.

5. Form Happiness Habits

We've already covered a lot about happiness, and it can seem difficult to remember. Thinking through these things is hard, but acting out of habit is not, at least once the habit has been established. You can help your child build happiness habits.

6. Teach Self-Discipline

Self-discipline in children is a strong indicator of future success, more so than intelligence. The best way to teach self-discipline is to help your kids learn how to distract themselves from temptation.

7. More Playtime

Mindfulness and meditation are important, and we will discuss them in a moment, but they can be difficult to get your kids to do. The good news is, playtime works almost as well. When kids get to play, they get lost in the moment, which is similar to mindfulness. Playtime isn't just about goofing off. It is an important part of helping children learn and grow.

8. Set Their Environment Up for Happiness

We are heavily influenced by our environment. One sure-fire way to control your child's surroundings and bring them more happiness is to watch less television.

9. Eat Dinner Together

We talked about this already, but the importance of family dinners can't be overstated. They strengthen familial bonds, provide a chance for everyone to be heard and often lead to lots of laughter.

Nature Deficit

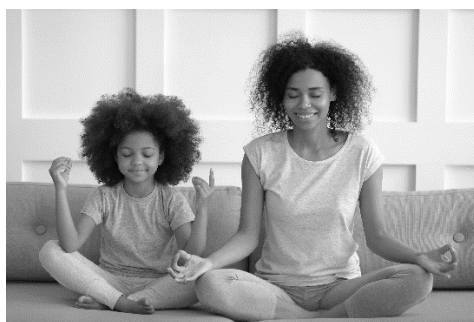
Richard Louv coined the phrase nature deficit to describe the human costs of alienation from nature. While it may not be a medical diagnosis, it is an urgent problem that needs to be discussed. Kids are spending less and less time outdoors, and it is affecting their health and wellbeing. Research has found that children are better emotionally and physically when they get to spend time in green spaces. It helps them to relieve stress, feel more positive, and restore their attention.

Nature deficit can lead to vitamin D deficiency, obesity, myopia, emotional illnesses, physical illnesses, attention difficulties, diminished use of senses, and other maladies. Plus, children aren't being taught the importance of nature, so they are more likely to do things that harm nature in their future.

Studies have found that direct exposure to nature can help to relieve symptoms of ADHD. By comparison, activities that are indoor only, like watching TV, or activities outdoors that take place in non-green areas, leave children functioning worse. Children and adults work and learn in a mainly digital world, so we all tend to struggle through an energy block. This means we need to make sure we take the time to get our kids and ourselves outside more. That leads me to my next point.

Meditation

Meditation and mindfulness is an important skill to teach children, and the sooner they learn about it, the better. One of the biggest benefits of this is that it reduces anxiety and depression. It creates a 48% reduction in these



symptoms than the non-meditating control group. This will then help reduce their chances of turning to drugs and alcohol, will reduce school stress, and make them happier. Let's go over some ways to help your child learn how to meditate.

Meditation for children and tweens is going to look a bit different than what meditation for adults looks like. You can read the following meditation to your child to help them relax, or record it for them so that they can listen to it whenever they want. To help them relax, set up the environment so that it is calm and distraction-free.

BENEFITS OF MEDITATION

<h3>Mental</h3>  <p>It reduces anxiety and lifts depression. Can also help insomnia.</p>	<h3>Physical</h3>  <p>It reduces stress and reduces high blood pressure.</p>
<h3>Emotional</h3>  <p>Enhances kindness and increases positivity. Also promotes self love.</p>	<h3>Spiritual</h3>  <p>Spiritual meditation releases and settles our thoughts and emotions.</p>

Relax your body and start to take deep breaths in and breathe out slowly through your nose. Take a slow, deep breath in and fill your belly completely with air, as if you are getting ready to blow up a big balloon. Try to expand your belly as much as you can. Slowly release the air through your nose. Notice how your body relaxes each time that you breathe out.

Have your child do this breathing exercise for several minutes.

Gratitude Journal

The last thing I'm going to discuss happiness is gratitude journaling. Gratitude can help a child build resilience, improve social skills, improve their self-esteem, and encourage positive emotions, helping them feel happier with only ten minutes each day. Studies have even found that expressing gratitude can leave us feeling happier for around a month after. As a parent, you can help your children learn to notice and express thanks for all of the good things in their life. This will build a skill that will last them their entire life. All you have to do is help them start a gratitude journal.

A gratitude journal is an effective and simple way to build resilience and provide your children with important coping skills. Plus, journaling allows them to improve their writing skills. Here are some steps you can take to help them start their journal.

1. Pick An Age Appropriate Gratitude Journal

Help your child pick out a gratitude journal that they will want to use each day. You want this to be fun and functional. Journals that have space for drawing and writing is a great idea so that your child has lots of space for creative expression.

2. Make It Fun

There is no need for gratitude journaling to look the same for your kids as it does for you. As adults, we are fine with jotting down our thoughts or creating a bullet point list of things we are grateful for. This might not be all that fun for a child, and that is perfectly fine.

A gratitude journal doesn't have to just be journaling. You could always write down a bunch of gratitude prompts and put them in a jar for your child to draw out one each night. You can even pull this out at dinner, where everybody in the family draws out a paper and has a gratitude

discussion. You can even go on a gratitude scavenger hunt, draw a picture about what you are grateful for, or make a gratitude tree. There are several ways to have fun with gratitude.

3. Give Them Prompts

Gratitude can sometimes be tricky for kids, depending on their age, and when you ask, “What are you grateful for today?” You could be met with blank stares. Instead, you could try asking, “What made you happy today?” This is an easier question to answer. Some other questions you can ask them are:

- What activity were you glad you got to do today?
- What is your favorite place to visit?
- Which friend did you play with today?
- What is your favorite toy?
- Who made you feel loved today?
- Who did something kind for you today?
- What was something pretty you saw today?
- What yummy food did you have today?
- What did you have fun playing with today?
- What made you laugh today?
- What was the best part of your day?

4. Journal Together

To help encourage your child to journal and to set a positive example, you can journal with them. If you make more of working your daily journaling into your daily routine, it will become second nature. Make sure you set aside time every day, perhaps after dinner or right before bed, to sit down and journal together. Once you’re done, have a discussion with them about what you feel grateful for and vice versa. This is going to help your child out immensely.

5. Release Expectations

There will be times when your child won't want to express gratitude, and that is fine. We adults don't always feel like expressing gratitude at times, right? If they aren't feeling up to journaling one evening, don't push them. You don't want this to feel like a chore. You want your child to willingly and joyfully do this. If they tell you they need a break, then let them take a break.

It's also important to remember that what your child feels grateful for may not be what you are grateful for. You can expect them to have the same answers as you. Try to release any expectations you have about what they "should" be grateful for, and just be grateful that they feel grateful.

The important thing is to make sure your child is happy and knows how to be happy. This will set them up for great things and will make their life more fulfilling in the long run.

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Conclusion

Thank you for making it through to the end of the book; let's hope it was informative and able to provide you with new tools and ideas to help you achieve your goals, whatever they may be.

The next step is to start using the information you have learned and help your child foster independence and grow as a human. Keep in mind, childhood isn't as easy as it may seem. Think back to when you were their age. Children experience stress just like adults do, but sometimes we adults tend to forget that. Help guide your child. Teach them about meditation and gratitude. Start having those family dinners if you don't have them already. Encourage your children to read more and to find an activity that they would like to do after school. They don't have to join a sports team if that's not their thing, but there are plenty of other extracurricular activities that children can join. At the end of the day, make sure you listen to your child and help them when they need it. Remember, they need to learn to be independent, so don't dictate what they do, but give them a gentle push if need be.

Finally, if you found this book useful in any way, a review on Amazon is always appreciated!