

Promoting Social and Emotional Learning at Home

This Week's Focus – Goal-Directed Behavior

What is Goal-Directed Behavior?

To be successful, productive, and happy, each of us needs to learn how to set and achieve goals. Achieving meaningful goals is what keeps us moving forward in our lives. Without goals, our lives can become a hodge-podge of random activities that fill the day, but not our hearts and minds. As American businessperson, Jim Rohn said, "Success is steady progress towards one's personal goals." Like all social-emotional skills, goal-directed behavior can be taught.

Here are some suggestions to help your child build these critical skills. Unlike previous SEL at Home editions in which we recommended separate strategies for elementary, middle, and high school students, this week we are going to recommend two strategies that can be used with students (and adults!) of all ages.

Off to a Good Start – Making SMART Goals

George Doran developed the SMART goals approach in 1981. Forty years later, the SMART goals approach is used everywhere. The acronym SMART identifies the key characteristics of a good goal; they are:

Specific – good goals identify a clear, specific goal. Rather than a vague statement like "I will work harder in school," a specific goal might be "I will complete my homework assignments."

Measurable – We need to know when we have achieved our goal, so we need the goal to be measurable. Rather than, "I'll exercise more," it is better to state, "I will exercise for at least 30 minutes three times a week." Then, we need to measure and track our progress.

Achievable – We need to be realistic and set goals that we can actually achieve. It is better to have a series of small achievable goals that builds your child's confidence than one giant goal that increases the chances of failure and builds pessimism.

Relevant – Is the goal important to your child? If it is not relevant to them, they are less likely to achieve it.

Time Limited – It is important to set a time frame for completing the goal. Set a realistic time frame for meeting your goal. Having a specific time frame makes it harder to procrastinate.

Helping your child (or yourself) develop a habit of making SMART goals will help them be more successful. It is one of the most important skills we can teach our children and will benefit them for decades to come.

Keep Making Progress Towards Your Goals – the Hemingway Effect

No matter how SMART our goals, we can still get tired, bored, or hit roadblocks that could keep us from reaching our goals. The famous author, Ernest Hemingway, developed a great and simple



tool for helping us keep going until we achieve our goals. This technique has become known as The Hemingway Effect. Think of your student working on a term paper. Often your child will continue to work on the paper until they are tired, bored, or run out of ideas (writer's block). When they can't go any farther, they stop. This can leave them frustrated and makes it hard to return and finish the paper. Ernest Hemingway's great solution was to 1) stop writing while things are going well, and 2) write down the next step, or the next idea you want to discuss when you return. Your student will feel better and when they return, they will already know the next step and can get right back to being productive. Always knowing the next step to take when we return helps us keep going until we achieve our goal.

These two strategies can help our students with their schoolwork, their chores and will become lifelong habits that will help them be successful, productive, and happy.

Preschool Children - Young children learn best through play which allows them to use their creativity and imagination. Goal setting skills can be incorporated into a child's play activities, providing support for them to develop new competencies. As children are successful in their play activities, their confidence will grow, resulting in their increased motivation to try different and more challenging activities. Parents can support this process by actively participating in a child's play, following the child's lead and interests. Parents can ask questions like, "Tell me about what you are doing?" "How does that work?" "I wonder what would happen if.....?". Listen as your child explains their play activities. Parents who are actively listening and engaged will find natural opportunities to support and suggest new ideas to extend a child's learning.

Infants/Toddlers - Babies learn from listening and observing the behaviors and actions of their parents. Parents who embrace SMART goals are modeling the behaviors and habits that are necessary for children to grow up in environments where goal setting is just a part of the day lifestyle. Talking and explaining your own SMART goals to your infant may also help you stay accountable as you hear yourself state your intentions and commitments.

A Note to Parents

Using SMART goals and the Hemingway Effect can help parents with our goals and challenges as well. Two common themes we have stressed in previous editions apply here as well. First, model these skills for your children. Second, make it a family tradition to use these skills. You can set SMART goals as a family for your next vacation, holiday, or family project.

Promoting Social and Emotional Learning at Home is brought to you by Aperture Education (www.Apertureed.com) and The Devereux Center for Resilient Children (www.CenterforResilientChildren.org). Feel free to visit our websites for additional ideas.

Next Week's topic - Personal Responsibility