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Striving

Striving is a good thing. We would not have become the people we are if it had not been for our ability to set goals, buckle down, work hard, stay focused and persevere. After all, if striving is at one end of the spectrum, what is at the other end? The image of a person (younger or older) who is not good at striving is one of laziness. No one respects a slacker. How will a non-striving person ever become successful? If children are not working hard with this year's academic demands, how will they ever be able to deal with next year's demands? If they aren't taking their music lessons seriously or practicing for their sport, how will their skills continue to develop?

But how can we help our children select healthy goals? A goal that is not realistic based on an objective assessment of ability or talent is just as much of a problem as a goal that is too easily reached. Even though it is not easy for parents to admit it to themselves, not all children will be well-served by setting a goal to be admitted to extremely competitive colleges or to be one of the starters on their high school team. Coaches can usually be more objective than parents. Ask them to be truthful with you. Students usually score about the same on the ACT and SAT as they score on the standardized tests they took throughout their school career. If you see 70th percentile scores year after year, do not encourage them to apply to colleges that are bombarded with applicants who score at the 90th percentile.

Ability does not completely determine outcome, but to pretend that ability does not at least somewhat influence outcome will not serve our children well. Hard work will help children achieve to the limits of their ability and a lack of hard work will certainly make it impossible for goals to be met. But parents have to teach their children to live comfortably in their own skin, set

their goals wisely, and *to feel a sense of self-acceptance when they meet their goals and even when they do not.*

But how can children feel comfortable with themselves when they do not meet a goal? There are two scenarios (striving and not striving) that can lead to a goal not being met. If children work hard, give it their best effort and do not meet their goal, they have every right to feel proud of themselves. Perhaps the goal was a “reach goal” given their abilities. Good for them for stretching! With their parents’ expressions of support and wise words of encouragement, they will learn that there are other colleges to apply to and no shame in playing on junior varsity.

And when the goal is not met because the striving was not adequate, parents emphasize this as a needed, life-changing disappointment. Better that they not meet their goals if they do not deserve them! How else will they learn the importance of bearing down and the advantages that come from scraped knuckles and sweat? It is by not meeting goals that children learn about the importance of striving. That is why it is so important for parents not to do the striving for them.

After all, it is not the “meeting of the goal” or the “not meeting of the goal” that causes the child’s sense of self-acceptance. Many students (and adults) experience something of a letdown feeling after a long-sought goal has been met. “Is that all there is? I thought if I met this goal everything would be different and it really isn’t.”

We can teach our children to feel that important sense of self-acceptance if they did what they could, showed up, worked hard, put forth good effort, whether they met their goal or not. And we capitalize on their moments of disappointments to teach about striving. There is really no better time to teach the importance of effort and attitude than at a time of an unmet goal.

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