

Extension Update

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How to Set Your Kids Up for Success

If we want our kids to have a shot at making it on their own, without their cell phone umbilical cord, they are going to need a set of basic life skills.

Here are some examples of practical things children need to know how to do before they go out in the real world. Crutches that hinder them from standing up on their own two feet are also noted.

An 18-year-old must be able to talk to strangers – university faculty, college advisers, landlords, human resource managers, coworkers, bank tellers, health care providers, store clerks, and mechanics.

The crutch is we teach kids not to talk to strangers, instead of teaching the more nuanced skills of how to recognize the few bad strangers from the mostly good ones. Thus, kids end up not knowing how to approach people they don't know, respectfully and with eye contact, for the help, guidance, and direction they will need.

An 18-year-old must be able to find his way around a campus, the town in which her summer internship is located, or the city where he is working or studying abroad.

The crutch here is we drive or accompany our children everywhere, even when they can drive themselves, ride their bicycle, or walk; hence kids don't know the route for getting from here to there, how to cope with transportation options, when and how to fill the car with gas, or how to make and execute transportation plans.

An 18-year-old must be able to manage her assignments, workload, and deadlines.

The crutch is we remind kids when their homework is due and when to do it. Sometimes helping them do it and even worse, sometimes doing their homework for them. Consequently kids don't know how to prioritize tasks, manage the workload, or meet deadlines without regular reminders.

An 18-year-old must be able to contribute to the running of a household.

The crutch is we don't ask them to help much around the house because they are so busy with academic work and extracurricular activities. Thus kids don't know how to look after their own needs, respect the needs of others, or do their fair share for the good of the whole.

An 18-year-old must be able to handle interpersonal problems.

The crutch is we step in to solve misunderstandings and soothe hurt feelings for them, hence kids don't know how to cope with and resolve conflicts without our intervention.

An 18-year-old must be able to cope with the ups and downs of work, college courses, bosses, tough teachers, and competition.

The crutch here is that we have the tendency to step in when things get hard, finish the task, extend the deadline, and talk to the adults. As a result, kids don't know that in the normal course of life things won't always go their way, and that they will be okay.

An 18-year-old must be able to take risks.

The crutch is we've laid out their entire path for them and avoided all pitfalls or prevented all stumbles for them. Thus kids don't develop the understanding that success comes only after trying and failing and trying again, or the thick skin that comes from coping when things have gone wrong. Grit and resiliency are important skills one needs in life.

Take the time to help your child learn the life skills that they will need to find success in our world.

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