

Connecting

for high potential ● ● ● ● ●



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
Gifted Children

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NAGC receives similar questions from teachers and parents; however, rarely is there an opportunity to explore how the “other side” might be facing the issue. Interestingly, both groups benefit from the same information even though they look at it from different perspectives and have different roles to play in helping gifted children reach their potential. Our ongoing goal is for teachers and parents to develop a broader understanding of children’s potential and thus create stimulating learning environments.

Topic for this issue: “Goal Setting and Achievement”

A Teacher’s View

I have just finished collecting and evaluating assignments for what I consider to be a great end-of-the-year project involving research, creativity, and oral presenting. While many of the assignments seem to be the result of a high amount of effort, equally as many seem to have been done in the few days prior to the due date. What’s going on? My “gifted and talented” students had over two months to complete the various parts of this project. I gave them a blank planning calendar to fill out. Directions for each of the pieces were extremely detailed. I even set expectations for how long it would take to go above and beyond the requirements. I was hoping for so much more from my students.

It seems that during the course of each day I am faced with a student who has forgotten to do his or her homework. Sure, things come up, but they have planners to write down daily assignments. Why is it so hard for them to follow a simple daily “to do” list.

My eighth graders just finished participating in a career day. They all signed up to hear from a professional in a variety of fields. I could see that many of them walked out of there with a look of confusion on their faces. One student exclaimed, “Wow, I’ve certainly a lot of goals ahead of me!”

A Parent’s View

Our 15-year-old son is the definition of laissez-faire. He is very laid back and goes with the flow, wherever it takes him. We’re glad that he does not suffer from stress and is doing well, but we worry because he also doesn’t seem to have any goals now or for the future. It doesn’t have to be college, as college is not the path for everyone, but we worry that he will not be prepared for anything if he doesn’t have an idea of what he would like his future to be.

Our daughter is full of ideas for the future - from where she will go to college, to the degrees she will earn, and even to the career and family she plans to have. Meanwhile, she is only twelve-years-old! We think it is great for her to have goals, but she gets extremely frustrated when things don’t go according to plan and seems locked into this one right path she has set.

My son is in the fifth grade. He has the best intentions to get his schoolwork done and participate in activities, but there is always a last minute scramble. It isn’t unusual for me to get that ‘night before’ panicked request to run out and pick up materials or frantically hunt for a form that is due tomorrow (or more often was due days ago).

Goal setting and achievement go hand-in-hand. It is important for children to know where they want to go and what it will take in order to make it happen. This understanding relates to both short-term goals of accomplishing tasks in the present, as well as long-range goals for the future. Goal setting does not simply involve stating rigid expectations. Instead, it requires a reflective, metacognitive approach that combines who we are, what we would like to do, and what it will take to succeed, all the while being resilient in the face of unexpected tests and trials. Children should be supported in setting appropriately challenging goals and provided with resources and strategies for constructively planning ways to meet them.



Please copy and share this with other parents and teachers in your community who may find this useful.

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1. Short Term Goal Success

AT SCHOOL

- Focusing on goal setting in the classroom can be quite beneficial. It can provide direction for student effort and allow educators to gauge a particular student's past success, which can lead to positive self-reflection and more constructive day-to-day planning. The moment a student realizes that he or she can embrace past decisions and outcomes as a learning experience, the more apt they are to become self-regulated learners.
- The National Research Center on The Gifted and Talented has developed an outstanding series of webpages related to setting goals, providing research-based strategies in an effort to increase student self-efficacy. <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/siegle/SelfEfficacy/section8.html> The site includes a great excerpt from Michael Jordan's memoir, and the accompanying My Accomplishment Plan form <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/siegle/SelfEfficacy/GoalForm.html> can be adapted for daily or weekly reflections on setting short term goals.
- Instilling a healthy perspective on setting and achieving short term goals, no matter how small, can carry over into effective long-term planning.

AT HOME

- Setting goals requires us to think ahead. Help your children foster that habit by mapping out the coming months. Encourage them to think about what is important for school, sports, activities, hobbies, etc. and decide what needs to be done to make those things happen. Hang a calendar with large entries for each day in a highly visible place with folders nearby to organize papers. Periodically review the goals and the steps necessary to meet them, including taking care of any forms, gathering materials, scheduling times to accomplish small steps, etc. <http://www.scholastic.com/resources/article/5-ways-to-procrastinator-proof-your-child/>
- If something does fall through the cracks, a decision has to be made. When it is safe and appropriate to do so, allowing consequences to fit actions -or failure to act- can be an important experience. Command of cause and effect is a key component in setting goals and taking steps to reach them.

2. Looking ahead: Success in the Long Run

AT SCHOOL

- Students who work well on a day to day basis may still have difficulty planning out long term projects and setting long term goals. Helping students plan accordingly by setting intermediate goals will foster the skills necessary for setting long term goals later on, whether they are academic, personal, or professional.
- Start by having students break down the work into its smallest parts. Can each piece be done independently of another? Are there multiple parts to individual sections? What are the deadlines? How long will it take to do each of the parts? These questions can be answered during classroom discussions or through one on one consultation, with a plan of action being the result. Once the students have outlined their work and planned a day to day schedule for the completion of it, have them and their parents sign off on it. Checking in on the progress of student work, along with questions on what worked and what didn't and why should follow. Remember that a crucial element of goal setting is reflection.

AT HOME

- When looking long range, we can support our children in setting goals two ways. First, what are the essential goals for a solid foundation for life? These are the ongoing goals that bring balance: physical health, emotional well-being, security, family and friends, fulfillment, etc. Then, what are the smaller goals - sometimes referred to as objectives - that will bring them there? For gifted children, setting goals may prove daunting if talent emerges early or they demonstrate multipotentiality. Barbara Kerr investigates this from a perspective of career planning, but the considerations also apply to finding balance in general. <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/eric/archived/e492.html>
- However, sometimes our children do not have long range goals because they have not yet found what truly inspires them. Help build an understanding of the myriad of places to go, people to see, changes to effect and wonders to experience in the world through books, discussion, lectures, travel, etc. This will broaden their view of what is possible and perhaps show a pathway that is more obscure but truly inspiring.

3. Fostering Positive Goal Setting

In guiding children, we come with our own experiences, whether it is something we did and want to encourage or something we missed out on and want to guard against. We must have the wisdom to know how to foster independent goal setting even through that lens. Let us look at a few final points of interest.

- Keep in mind “age” appropriateness or readiness. For younger children, this might include which hobbies, activities, or passions they would like to pursue; for older children, this might expand to include academic or other life challenges, on through the bigger questions of what they might like to pursue in life, and what will best set the foundation for them doing so. The National Association of School Psychologists has a great informational handout entitled Goal Setting and Hope: Helping Children See the Possible. http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/39/7/pdf/V39N7_FT_GoalSettingnadHope.pdf. Older children could benefit from access to Missouri’s Department of Education personal plan of study website. There they will find guides for planning out a variety of career paths. http://dese.mo.gov/divcareered/guide_pps.htm
- To achieve a goal, there must be a plan. Much like having a road map, you want to look ahead to possible routes (experiences, education, or apprenticeships), detours (the impact of other goals and challenges), guideposts along the way (resources, experiences, and mentors to help guide the process), as well as maintaining a vehicle and keeping the driver safe (striving for balance between healthy body and mind, along with relationships and respites). The folks at Oxford Learning have posted their Top Ten Tips for helping children set goals for success. Access it here. <http://www.oxfordlearning.com/letstalk/2005/08/08/help-your-children-set-goals-for-success-top-ten-t/>
- Lastly, work to instill the awareness that a goal without a plan is just a wish.

“The reason most people never reach their goals is that they don’t define them, or ever seriously consider them as believable or achievable. Winners can tell you where they are going, what they plan to do along the way, and who will be sharing the adventure with them.”

- Denis Watley



This issue of *Connecting for High Potential* was compiled by Jeff Danielian, NAGC Teacher Resource Specialist, and Susan Dulong Langley, Parent Representative to the NAGC Board of Directors.

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