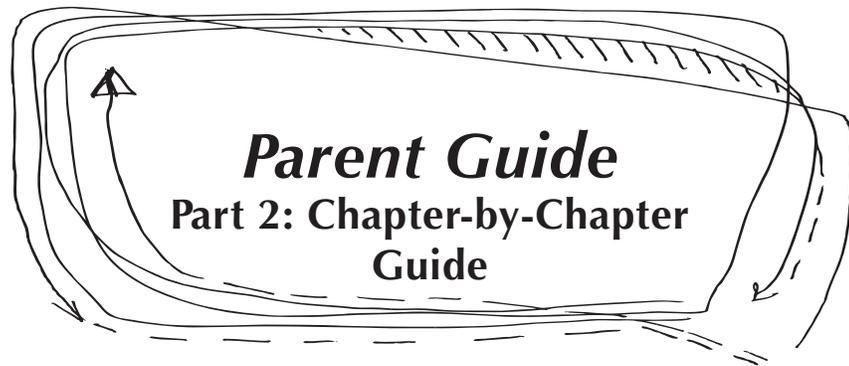


Homeschool WITH Confidence



by Suki Wessling

Introduction

I've come to realize that goal-setting is one of the most important skills we homeschoolers can give to our kids. There are two reasons.

First, once your children turn into teens, they're going to want to do things for themselves. They're going to want to have some control over what they study and how they learn. And this is great—their education is for them. But without set goals, homeschooling with teens can very quickly devolve into power struggles. The teens think their parent is imposing unreasonable demands on them, but can't explain why they're unreasonable. The parent knows that they're doing what's best for their kids, but can't explain why.

The second reason goal-setting is important is that, as I explained to your teen, homeschooling doesn't set implicit goals the way schooling does. Our students have choice over everything, which is not always the easiest thing. When they learn to set goals, they learn to narrow the field of possible choices to a more workable size. When they learn to change goals, they learn that when you eliminate a choice that doesn't fit your current goals, it's still there for you as an option if you realign your goals.

In my own homeschooling life, I have found goal-setting to be supremely important. When my older child was 13, I realized that we were spending more and more time arguing about why he had to do some task, or why he was even studying math at all, or why I cared that he could write a coherent argument. Of course, it's completely developmentally appropriate for your teen to argue—your teen is learning to define his or her own self, which is a pretty big and scary job. Arguing with parents is not only appropriate but healthy.

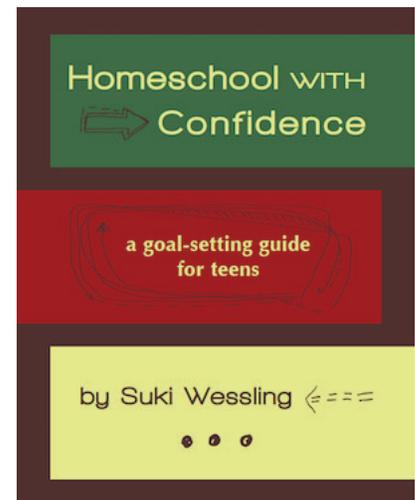


Goal-setting allowed us to focus on what our son wanted while trying to guide him in his educational choices. He and I gritted our teeth and made it through a goal-setting curriculum made for school kids. We were both relieved when it was done. But although we didn't enjoy the curriculum terribly much, the result was fantastic. Now we could talk about that task he didn't want to do, that subject he didn't want to study, or that skill he didn't want to work on in terms of his goals, not his parents' goals.

As of this writing, my older child is now 17 and preparing to apply to college. He set goals, attained a few, and changed some. He's not applying to college in exactly the same field he thought he would when he was 13, and he's also broadened his ideas of which colleges might suit his needs. We still argue about all sorts of things (he is 17, you know), but I feel that our arguments usually resolve into positive growth in our family.

My younger child is now 13, the age when I did goal-setting with my first. And boy, you couldn't find a child more different than my first. He and I also have power struggles, arguments over what he should study, and pushback about all sorts of things. But he has completely different interests from his brother.

And now I'm faced with putting my money where my mouth is, so to speak. I wrote this book intentionally to jump-start our fall goal-setting. Because of the sort of person my younger child is, I decided to



hold my goal-setting seminar at [Athena's Advanced Academy](#), where I teach. I think having a community of kids to work on goal-setting with will be a more positive experience than sitting at the kitchen table and butting heads.

By the way, I highly recommend that if you butt heads with your teen a lot, you put together a goal-setting group to work through this book together. Group work takes the pressure off of your relationship with your child.

I hope that in four years I will be able to rewrite this note with the news that goal-setting served my second child as well as my first. But right now all I can do is assure you that from within the rather insane task of homeschooling teenagers, I feel that goal-setting has offered us a healthy, positive way to confront the choices we're faced with.

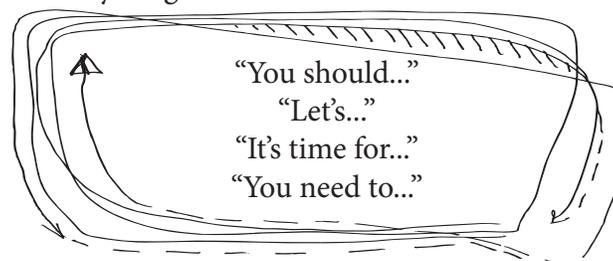
I hope that it will help you as well.

Most importantly as you use this guide, remember that when it comes to goal-setting, you're the backup, the support person, and perhaps the schedule-keeper and chauffeur.

But only your student can drive the vehicle that is their education.

Goal-setting Language—why informal goal-setting is important

I am first going to ask you to consider the language you use with your teen. Parents often find themselves using these phrases with their younger children:



This language (rightly) positions the adult as the one who knows the answers and has the experiences that young children need for guidance.

Goal-setting language that we use with teens requires us to use phrases that offer decision-making power back to our students:

“What do you think about...?”

“Why don't you like...?”

“What would you like better than...?”

“If you do [insert topic], what do you hope the result will be?”

By changing our language even before we start formal goal-setting, we are indicating to our teens that it is time for them to step up to making decisions and considering the consequences of their decisions.

This is a deceptively difficult change to make in our interactions with our children!

Instead of:

“I think it's a terrible idea for you to drop that math class.”

You might say:

“If you drop that math class, how does that affect your goal of applying to college in the fall?”

or:

“That’s an interesting proposal. So what’s your plan if you drop the class?”

Chapter 1: What are goals and why do we make them?

The first thing I do in this chapter is to ask the student to fill out a questionnaire about their life and preferences. Please make sure that your teen does this. You can find a pretty version to download at sukiwessling.com/goal/. You might do this as well. I find that a lot of us parents (yup, I’m including myself here) forget that our kids are more willing to do things when we take part. When you’re done with the questionnaire(s), put them aside somewhere until you finish the book.

The most important thing I’m going to ask you to do before you start on this curriculum is to look at the language you use with your teen.

We make goals all the time



One of the most important first steps is to make sure that your teen doesn’t think of goal-setting as some weird new system that you are imposing from above. In this first section, I point out that life is a series of small goals. I find that asking teens to celebrate small achievements helps them see how much they do in a day without too much advance planning.

We change goals all the time

Terribly important! Flexibility is a key attribute we need to cultivate in our teens. They are going through years of their lives that (hopefully) will have more change than ever before.

Rock Brain

Especially if your teen is on the autism spectrum, you might be dealing with a special type of inflexibility. Some teens seem to dig in their heels and refuse to believe there is any other point of view in the world but their own. Therapists find that addressing this issue head-on can be very helpful. Teens are often frustrated with themselves about their own behaviors, but they don’t know how to verbalize their frustration. As I will always suggest throughout this guide, use yourself as an example rather than pointing out shortcomings in your teen. “Oh, I have such rock brain!” you might point out. “I was so focused on getting my work done that I forgot we were going to go get ice cream.”

Most teens will recognise their own tendencies and become more willing to talk about them when a parent has shown their own self-understanding and willingness to analyze their own behavior.

Why having a goal is important

One of the things I’ve found most surprising about teens is how often they simply don’t see something that adults see as obvious. Sometimes all they need is for an idea to be suggested so that they actually pay attention to it. Our kids who might have encyclopedia-size knowledge of their favorite video games or who may be able to keep track of every little event in their friends’ lives might not even notice the obvi-

ous things that adults find important.

That's why I start with the basics here. If you don't have a goal, you wander. And sometimes wandering is great. But wandering your whole life will probably result in your being an unhappy person. Most people seek out happiness, so this can be a great motivator for goal-setting.

What are short-term and long-term goals?

Again, it's important to be clear: We're not going to ask kids to verbalize long-term goals when they don't see any difference between "What are you going to study in college?" and "What do you want for lunch?" For some teens, this is already obvious. Others need to do some maturing before they can really understand it. (Refer to the "Developmental Readiness" section in Part 1 of my Parent Guide.)

How to use the exercises in this book

I'll just quote my book here: There aren't very many chapters in this book. At the end of each chapter you'll find only a few exercises. So there aren't very many exercises in this book. It's not really a big deal to do all of them, but some of them may not speak to you. Feel free to adjust them to work better with the way you look at your life.

Some of them are called "exercises" and some are called "stretchercizes."

The exercises are things you can do just by looking into your own mind and living your own life. Some of you are going to be very comfortable with this, and others will find it harder. We'll discuss that in the next section.

The stretchercizes are going to ask you to stretch outside of your own life. Some of you are going to love this. Talking to adults? Interviewing strangers? Cool!

Others of you are going to find this a really big, uncomfortable stretch. That doesn't mean you shouldn't do it, but don't stretch so far that you're really uncomfortable. It's OK to choose adults you know well for the stretchercizes, if that makes you more comfortable. I believe that we all benefit from stretching some, but you don't have to make yourself really unhappy in the process.

What is introspection and why are some people uncomfortable with it?

I'm going to encourage you not to push too hard on your kids who don't like introspection. Allow them to stay on the surface if that's where they're comfortable. But watch for openings. I notice that one of my kids is much more willing to be introspective in the car while I'm driving and music is blasting. Other kids might be more willing to talk to a different adult, write in a private notebook, or chat in a group.

Doing the exercises in this book

Refer to my notes in the book for your student. Although it's not necessary that your student complete all the exercises as written, it's really helpful for them to do something formal to cement the ideas in each chapter.

I very highly recommend group work if you can put it together. Having a group takes the pressure off

that one-on-one relationship that homeschooling families have a lot of. Also, although I say that homeschooling kids don't have a "herd" at the beginning of the book, that doesn't mean you can't capitalize on the usefulness of herd mentality!

Chapter 2: Short-term (or one-step) goals

Remember when your child was a baby and you walked them on your shoes, holding onto their hands? That's what we're going to do in this chapter. None of the "goals" your student will set in this chapter are likely to be ones that they really need to set formally, but it will give them the sense of how to do it.

Also, checking off items on a to do list can be very satisfying—I particularly like that my digital to-do list has a chime sound that plays when I check one off!

The value of practice

This is one area that I found very difficult for my kids to understand in a deep way. If you have a child who is accomplished in an art that requires practice, such as a sport or instrument, be sure to draw on this to help them see how this value can be extended to everything in their lives. Kids who believe that they are "bad at" something can often reset their attitude by working on something very specific and seeing success.

Ways to document short-term goals

I visit the idea of documenting twice in this book, because I feel it's so important and it can be so hard to instill this habit. This is one place where you can "walk the baby on your shoes" very effectively. Keep your own calendar and checklist, and make sure your student sees you use it. Involve them, but don't expect them to do it right away. It literally took years from when I started suggesting that my kids put things on our calendar until the day it actually happened without their being asked. But it did happen!

I am a huge proponent of encouraging teens to use the best technology available, but this might bump up against your family's own values about devices and screens. Of course, I am not asking you to change your family's values. (We were a largely screen-free family until our kids were 8 and 4!) However, I do ask that you evaluate whether responsible screen use could help your student become more organized and focused. Yes, indiscriminate screen use is associated with disorganization and lack of focus; however, responsible screen use can improve your lives immensely.

However, if you want to stick with paper, there are paper versions of all the tools I describe. Also, although I love how my digital tools beep at me to tell me when something needs to be done, I find that having a whiteboard in a public area of the house is indispensable!

The importance of being present

This leads directly into another area that parents in these times are feeling desperate. Our kids seem to be checked out so much of the time. First of all, be assured the "I dunno" is a time-honored teen phrase that predated the Internet and the television. It can be hard to get their attention.

Don't feel that you are a slave to your devices or to your homeschool schedule. Sometimes it's good

just to have a time when you are talking, one-on-one or as a family, about what's going on in your lives. For this reason, I highly recommend family meetings if at all possible. My family hated them, but they were useful! After a while, when we had the hang of them, we could get rid of the formalized part of it, which made all of us happier.



Chapter 3: Two-step goals

Advancing to two-step goals is probably the most important step for your very disorganized or procrastinating students. They don't get around to doing things that they actually do mean to do (really, they aren't making that up!) because something gets in their way. When they say, "Mom, I forgot to take out the garbage because when I was about to go I got email about the paper that's due and I just forgot"—they might actually be telling the truth.

My advice as a parent is just to take it at face value. Instead of questioning whether they are lying or trying to find some ulterior motive (being lazy, for example), just jump into problem-solving mode.

"OK, so you have a job to take the garbage out every week. This is sort of a two-step goal because step 1 is remembering to do it. So how can we make sure that it gets done?"

Chances are, your teen will have some ideas. Sticky note on the garage door? Special chime played by the calendar app? Being required to text the parent once the task is done? You can brainstorm all sorts of ways to make sure tasks like this get done quickly and painlessly.

What are habits?

I highly recommend the book *The Power of Habit* by Charles Duhigg. <http://amzn.to/2qHyA3v> It's unlikely you'll get a teen to read this book (we were unsuccessful!), but reading it will help you identify habits in your family's life and learn how to modify them.

Goals as building-blocks

The important takeaway for parents here is that goal-setting is always a process of building. Some things get built more quickly than others! We need to be supportive of our avid goal-setters, and also supportive of our kids who would rather be playing video games.

I think it's extremely helpful to talk out loud about what you're doing in your daily life so that they can see how you build slowly on your own goals. You probably do this without thinking by now, but our teens benefit from being led through it verbally. Lest they think that parenting (and homeschooling) happens effortlessly, a little daily narrative can set them straight:

"OK, let's look at the calendar for today. I realize you want to get to Games Group at 2, but in order to make that happen, here's what needs to get done."

To a teen, getting to Games Group, from their single-purpose point of view, is as easy as getting in the car and going. But perhaps you have your own work that needs to get done, your teen needs to finish homework for a class, and your household is out of important ingredients you need for dinner. All of these are "building blocks" for the goal of getting to Games Group.

Homeschooling and the ease of procrastination

Wouldn't it be lovely if procrastination were only your teen's problem? We adults are almost all somewhere on the spectrum between focused and goal-oriented to outright serial procrastinators. And we're supposed to be setting examples for our teens?

I want to remind you that understanding the ongoing struggle to improve oneself is a key thing that homeschoolers can learn from their parents. We don't have to present ourselves as "teachers," who traditionally try to make the classroom look as if it just magically appeared, learning ready for the student's taking. We are people first, parents second, and homeschoolers third.

Again, talking out loud about your challenges and processes can be so helpful.

"Mom, you didn't sign me up for that class I wanted and now it's full!"

"Oh, you're right. I can't believe I procrastinated on that. It looks like we have two tasks: first, can we find another class that will work for you? And second, can you help me set up some systems so that we both support each other in making sure things get done?"

If you're not a procrastinator and your child is, try to avoid being preachy about it. Focus on supporting your teen to devise solutions to specific problems that come up, the move into supporting them to predict problems that might come up and set up a system to avert disaster.

Homeschooling organizational methods that help with goal-setting

Here's another situation where, unless you are already hyper-organized, you can enlist your child's help and support. The teen homeschooling years can get a lot more complex than early homeschooling years. If your student is college-bound, you're probably looking at more academic classes, keeping track of requirements they'll need in order to apply, looking at colleges, prepping for standardized tests, etc. It's a lot more work!

If you are starting goal-setting before high school has started, enlist your teen's help in setting up a shared organizational method. In my book, I describe our methods. But yours has to suit you and your family's lifestyle. Don't try to impose something that doesn't relate to the way your family already functions. If you are a generally disorganized household, start small and simple.

On the other hand, once again, if you are ahead of the curve organizationally, your main task will be not to make your teen feel stigmatized by their lack of organization and planning abilities. Remember: it's completely normal for teens to be disorganized and forgetful (even if they were organized and mindful younger kids). Remember that your job is to be supportive and to help your teen develop skills. Instituting any sort of punishment/reward system will usually backfire horribly.

Your main emphasis in any case is to instill new habits, and habits take a while to form. (Bad habits, as we all know, take much longer to break!)

A note about family conflict

I hope that you and your teen get along fabulously. I genuinely enjoy my kids and think they're really cool people. However, having teens in your household is likely to lead to some conflict. This is the age

where they start to strike out on their own. They might seem to form opinions that are designed to annoy you. They might seem to disagree with everything you say simply on principle.

This is normal. Your choice is how you respond to it.

One thing I tell your teen, and I will tell you as well, is that it's OK that they are different people. But to get along in a household, sometimes there simply needs to be compromise on all sides. You might feel that you're compromising a lot, but if you have a frank talk with your teen and allow them to speak their mind freely, you might find that they don't share your point of view.

I highly recommend [Dr. Ross Greene's Collaborative Problem-Solving](#) method. Even if you can't institute all of his recommendations in your family (I certainly haven't been that successful!), just using part of his approach can help you approach conflicts in ways that result in positive growth for everyone.

A short note on parenting differences: The teen years might expose parenting differences that you hadn't had before with your spouse. Your teen will now be old enough to notice them and question them.

"No, I won't ask Dad if I can go to the amusement park because I know he'll just say no! He'll say I have to get all my homework done, but I have another full day to do it before my math class."

Suddenly, your teen may be pitting you against your spouse more often. It's a great idea at this point to discuss these differences with your spouse and how you plan to negotiate them. If you have a more complex household (divorce, step-parents, etc.), you'll have more complex problems. Don't hesitate to go to a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist to get support—even if your family won't go with you. You can use all the support you can get!

Chapter 4: Multi-Step Goals

Welcome to a new level of complexity! At this point you're going to start pushing a bit harder into the realm of long-term planning. This is where your less-organized kids are going to start to lose it and will need your modeling and support. If you aren't doing this in a group with other teens, I recommend that you set some multi-step goals for yourself and work alongside your teen.

In this chapter I start to introduce fictionalized students who follow different paths. One thing you can do to support this is to talk about people that your teen knows IRL ("in real life") who have taken unusual paths. A lot of times it's surprising what kids don't know about the adults around them. They think that adults got where they are in a straight line, but few of us did.

Some advice I give your student:

Set goals that actually are attainable

Dreams are not goals. Dreams are great; we all have them. They're actually important to our happiness. But they're not goals.

Keep focused on the building blocks

People who are always looking ahead have a hard time appreciating what's going on around them. They might experience stress because they feel like they are never "there" yet.

Goal-setting accountability

Make sure you're still keeping each other accountable at this point. It's easy to set up a system and then not use it!

Celebrating achievements of the building blocks

Remember that we don't actually attain all our long-term goals. That doesn't mean that our time was wasted—some of the most enjoyable parts of life can be working towards something we end up not achieving.

Hone your homeschool organizational method

It's always a good idea to revisit any new system a month or so later. What is working well? What have you been forgetting to do? Why do you think you're forgetting? Can you devise a new support to make it happen?

Critique your goal-setting system

Time for a little accountability. Do you need to tweak anything at this point? Have a meeting and do a little check-up. Perhaps the digital checklist isn't working and you need to go back to the whiteboard. Do what it takes to keep on track.

Chapter 5: Homeschool Success

Have you ever talked to your children about what you think “success” is? Something that occurred to me is that although I'd never talked about it directly to my kids, lots of other people were talking about it: pop musicians, random people in our town, politicians, TV writers...

Our culture is obsessed with “success,” except the thing our culture is obsessed with bears little resemblance to success as individual people define it. It's true: some people will never be satisfied if they don't have the most money possible, the most fame possible, and the coolest stuff.

However, most of us have quite a different definition of success. What we call success has a lot to do with our life circumstances (social class, culture, geographical location), our personal values (creativity vs. a job with clear boundaries, for example, or travel vs. being firmly rooted in a place), and the values of the people around us (family, spouse, friends, co-workers).

I hope that I succeed in this section of the book in not promoting my own personal values in defining success. I can only imagine that my definition of success is, and should be, quite different from yours. It's also important to remember that your child's definition of success, despite being raised in your house, may be quite different from yours. Helping your child define success will help them know how to prioritize their goals and tune out the significant amount of noise that we live with in our culture.

Attributes that pave the road to success

I notice that my students usually have a clear idea of their own attributes. Since I don't know them well, I have to take their word for it—but I'm guessing that they're often quite hard on themselves. I chose

some attributes that are commonly associated with “success” and presented them not as absolutes—“you must attain these in order to have success”—but rather as part of the spectrum of human capabilities. I feel that different qualities complement each other to create well-rounded, real human beings.

Often our teens have unrealistic expectations of themselves. It’s not hard to see why. They are inundated with media that tells them that they need to keep striving to perfect themselves, even though this is an impossible goal. It’s much healthier to view ourselves as a spectrum of abilities, some of them more developed than others, that we can keep developing throughout our lives.

➔ **Stress**

I can’t tell you how often kids with loving families who are trying to do the best for them confide in me about stress. Not only are they stressed out about other things, but they even get stressed out about being stressed out!

It’s important to give teens the sense that they have control over the stress in their lives, and also to let them know that not all stress is “bad.” Like so many aspects of parenting, we have to offer our kids a balance that’s hard to achieve perfectly. Just like our kids, we have to be content to muddle along as well as we can.

As far as stress levels go, probably the most important one to monitor is your own. We now know that our brains respond to other people’s emotions; without knowing it, we do in fact “stress each other out.” We parents can’t help our teens if we haven’t helped ourselves first.

The importance of failure

I believe that this is the most mind-blowing thing that happened to me in parenting: I found out that we have to let our kids fail.

I remember when it happened. My first child was a toddler. I had read that I shouldn’t make everything perfect for him, but I was probably trying too hard. Then I started to observe other parents, and how they didn’t jump right up when their child fell. They didn’t intervene immediately when their child was having a conflict with another child. They did a lot of watching and waiting. That seemed very wise—and rather unattainable—to me.

It’s not unattainable, though. A lot of good parenting involves waiting three beats before we speak. Sometimes those beats are literal seconds. Sometimes we have to let a few days pass. One time I had to bite my lip for half a semester as I saw my child going down the path toward failure.

But an instinct in me knew it was time to stop propping him up, and fail he did. However, it was a successful failure. The day he realized he was on the road to failure, his goal-setting training kicked into gear. He saw that this failure could have dire consequences for his college applications, and before coming to me to confess the looming failure, he came up with a plan to come out of it as much in one piece as possible.

It was a huge growth experience for him. It was great vindication for me—I wanted to jump in and save him, tell him what to do, force him to do the right thing. But I waited, and we both benefited in the end.

How can we know when to let our kids fail? There's a question that no one can answer for you. It may be hard to decide that it's this time that you will sit back for those three beats and wait to see what happens. But when you do, assuming you don't have to dash in at the last and save them from absolute disaster, you and your child will come out the better for it on the other side.

Happiness

We all want our children to be happy. The trick is figuring out what exactly that means for them. I'd love to tell you I've worked this out for my kids, but of course I haven't. The pursuit of happiness is life-long. But we can certainly help set our kids on the right path by valuing their happiness and acknowledging when we see that they are happy.

Family Values and Goals

Then there's the moment when you realize that what makes your child happy...may in fact be objectionable to you. It may simply be something you don't value (playing video games, for example). It may be something that baffles you (in our house, making enormous amounts of slime!). Or even worse, it may be something you find immoral or repugnant.

These are the moments in parenting when we have to decide why we are parenting. What's the goal here? Is it to create mini versions of ourselves? To add population that will support our favorite causes? To replicate our lives? To relive our lives, but better this time? If so, you may have a problem.

Our children will have a way of becoming themselves whether we want them to or not. The question as I see it is what sort of relationship we want to have with them once this happens. If you are the sort of parent who answers that you would be happy not to have a relationship with them if they choose ways of seeking happiness that you don't approve of, then you should probably just skip to the next section because we clearly don't agree on this issue.

However, I expect that most readers want what I do: We want to support our kids for who they are. We know that our kids may in fact make choices that we wouldn't make, may enjoy activities that we find unpleasant (or worse), may end up doing something which we feel they are unsuited for. And we arm ourselves for that day that we have to smile and offer our support when we feel like gnashing our teeth.

This isn't the same as not giving them advice, or not warning them against poor choices. This is about supporting what makes our children happy, and learning to be OK with that choice.

Mentorship

Mentorship is a way to get our children the support they need when we might not be able to give it. As homeschoolers, we're used to figuring out how to serve our children's needs. But sometimes we're not the best person to do that, or in fact, we simply can't do it.

I thought of mentorship as an "old-fashioned" thing until I heard speakers explaining it at a homeschool conference. It made so much sense. In modern life, we don't utilize our community nearly as much as we could. Our children have formal relationships with adults, such as student/teacher relationships, but they don't often have less formal mentoring relationships. These relationships can be incredibly valu-

able. I believe that my older son's relationship with his mentor, a man he has physically met only a few times, was one of his most valuable homeschool experiences. And we came up for the idea of finding him a mentor because of those early mentions that stuck with me at a homeschool conference. Without that, we may have just kept encouraging our son to take classes rather than go out and find real work (unpaid) with an adult who was already doing what he wanted to do.

Chapter 6: Long-term goal-setting

This is where we finally get to what parents usually think of as “goal-setting.” Why so late in the book? Why not do more of it?

Developmentally speaking, your teen is probably not ready to do much long-term goal-setting. Their idea of long-term may reach as far as next semester. Maybe they're actually willing to plan for college a bit. But lots of teens aren't.

Keep reminding yourself: This is completely developmentally appropriate!

It can be so frustrating to have a teen who isn't ready to do long-term planning, when you know that if they want to optimize the next few years, they really need to start now.

However, the teen years aren't about optimization, thinking ahead, being efficient, planning it out. The teen years are all about growth and experimentation. Though we might know a teen who is totally on track and focused, this isn't actually developmentally typical. If you expect this sort of behavior of your typical teen, you'll immediately set up conflict.

At this point, you might want to read my “note about collaborative problem-solving” in Part 1 of my Parent Guide ([downloadable from my website](#)). Rather than expecting your teen to be the person you want them to be, talk to them and find out who they are. It's a cliché, but a useful one: meet people where they are and you'll have more success working with them.

Homeschooling also can throw a wrench into long-term planning. If your student were in school, their options would be extremely limited. They would be presented with a very small number of possible futures (at some schools, only one: Go to a four-year university immediately after graduating!).

But homeschoolers know that they have options, and this can cause a lot of confusion. That's why goal-setting can be so helpful: we can work on ruling out all the long-term plans that clearly don't appeal to your teen.

“What if I don't know what I want to do with my life?”

Some of your teens will have no idea, and this is totally fine. This is a good time to bring out biographies of famous people who didn't move in a straight line to success, and also point out the varying paths of people they know who have happy, “successful” lives on their own terms.

Homeschoolers have the gift of time. We aren't required to take a lot of classes that we really aren't interested in unless dictated by one of our goals (e.g. “getting into a competitive university”). So we have a lot more flexibility to explore and create opportunities for ourselves. Teens who don't know what to do might have some interests that don't seem career-worthy: pursue them anyway. You never know where

they'll lead. A friend of mine who owns a thriving art-education business says she has a dream of creating a successful TED Talk on why parents should encourage teens to go to art school! (It's done great things for her career.) You just never know.

“I know what I'm going to do in ten years—is that OK?”

Sometimes having a goal-oriented teen can seem like a blessing, but it has its own challenges. What if you see your teen working so exclusively on a goal that you see them missing out on developing other important parts of their lives? What if you worry that your teen is following a passion that won't be long-lived? What if you heartily disagree with the choice your teen has made?

Once our children reach their teen years, we hope that we've instilled our values into them. However, we also have to know that they will be their own person, and that person will make different choices than we would. Most teens, frankly, make most of their decisions in a very similar way to their parents. Although we parents tend to notice the defiance and rebellion, research shows that most adults were deeply influenced by their families' values.

But teens will also strike out, often in directions that surprise us. When our teens get fixed on goals that we don't agree with, we have to decide whether it's worth risking our relationship with our teen to try to stop it, or whether we will continue to support our teen (while possibly voicing our reservations, depending on the situation). Adults who had unusual life paths and eventually became successful invariably say how important parental support was to them, but you are on the other side of that. You have no idea whether your child's plan is going to succeed or not, so you will have to make the decision that seems best for now. (Ah, welcoming to parenting, where there are never any right answers.)

Failure in meeting long-term goals

At some point, our kids are going to fail. And we will have to be there to support them. However, most failures aren't that important. A failed math test can be gotten past. A failed try-out may result in a completely different opportunity.

Then there's the big failures: When your teen realizes they need to step back from something they really wanted. Maybe there's a good reason that they have no control over, such as lack of money, injury, or other changes in circumstances.

But usually failures come because they simply failed to make the steps they needed to make. And your teen will have to come to terms with this. Perhaps your avid violinist didn't make the competitive orchestra they had been planning on for years. Or perhaps your avid violinist just gets caught up in a new pursuit that doesn't leave enough time for practice. Perhaps your college-bound teen did terribly on standardized tests and won't get into the competitive universities they planned for.

The topics I address in this section are all about reframing failure. Every failure, no matter how painful and upsetting, is the beginning of something else. The problem is, we don't always know what that something else is. Also, we can't predict what will happen if we stick with something despite a failure. Should our student who didn't get into the orchestra recommit to practice and try again next year? Should the college-bound teen go to community college for a year and then reapply? We can't answer

these questions except in hindsight. As a parent, all you can do is talk with your teen about the resulting feelings and help them plan a new way forward.

When other people get in your way

One of the hardest things as teens come into themselves and step out into the world is accepting that sometimes other people are the obstacles they face. Kids with great interpersonal skills will simply understand this and even enjoy it. They will relish running for student government or working out a conflict with a teacher.

But kids with weaker interpersonal skills will be tempted to blame their lack of progress on those other people, and this is a dangerous road to start down. This is a great time for your teen to learn that there will always be other people to negotiate with.

If you have a teen on the spectrum who hasn't done any formal training with a professional, this might be time for them to address these lagging skills. Sometimes teens just need a caring adult to point out unspoken rules that they haven't clued in on. And this goes for all kids: My non-spectrum teen's homeschool advisor took him aside one day to talk about hygiene. It was very helpful!

Setting up a support system

Finally, it may be time for you to help your teen open up their world to other teens and adults who can support them as they prepare to leave your nest. Perhaps you truly feel that your relationship with your teen is all your teen needs at this point. However, homeschooled kids who do best out in "the real world" are those who have developed and nurtured strong relationships outside of the family before they leave home.

Your teen's support system might already be in place. Other thoughtful, supportive teens can form great teams. Your teen might be working with adults outside of the home who can mentor them and support them.

If not, encourage your teen to start branching out. Explicitly seek out situations where your teen can get support and mentorship outside of the home.

Conclusion

I hope this guide has been helpful. It may have ended up being as long as the book itself! If you are still looking for support, please join my email lists <http://sukiwessling.com/contact.html> and attend some of my workshops. Also, if your teen has trouble negotiating goal-setting alone, [my teen workshop at Athena's](#) is a fun and supportive environment.

Thank you for reading my thoughts. And give yourself a pat on the back. It's hard being a parent of a teen, and you are taking steps that show that you are doing the best that you can!

Enjoy the process, and enjoy getting to know the adult that your student is in the process of becoming!

Looking for more specifics?

[Download the first installment of this guide](#), an introduction to goal-setting for homeschooling parents.

Onward!



This document is available for free download at www.SukiWessling.com/goal/