



Parent & Faculty Education Conference  
THRIVING IN A COMPETITIVE WORLD  
Menlo School, February 7, 2015

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**Striking the Balance: Positive Parenting**  
*Attendee Notes*

**Opening Remarks:**

Outlook on parenting is that we all have one goal and that is to raise a successful adult. Keeping this in mind helps inform us on how we choose to parent.

**Question to Audience:** What traits does a *successful adult* possess?

**Audience Responses:** happy, independent, resilient respectful, kind.

It's important to know what you want your children to be like at 21 so you know where you're going. Guiding them to the goal starts NOW.

**Teaching the Traits:**

- The easiest way to teach the character traits you want your children to possess is to model the behavior. Be the person you want your kids to be. Act the way you want them to act because they learn by watching us.
- Teach important behaviors and life skills incrementally.

Example: Doing laundry – start them as toddlers to put clothes in the hamper. By the time they are adolescents they can learn about sorting and running the machine.

- Handling disappointment: allow kids to experience failure. We can be understanding and empathetic but shouldn't rescue our children before they have a chance to fail and work through and learn from the disappointment.

**Three Things to Remember about Teens/Tweens:**

1) Prefrontal cortex is not yet developed. As parents, we can't assume our brain filter of using logic and reason will be understood or used by our child.

2) Puberty - easy to remember girls changing through physical development but boys are changing too. Hormonal shifts are happening all the time without us being aware.

3) Kids live on a “roller coaster.” Emotionally, they can shift minute to minute. We need to not get on their ride but rather be calm constant support while they are going through the highs and lows. Again, modeling how to keep our cool.

### **Two Most Important Traits for Success:**

#### 1) Independence

Many parents monitor too much. If we don't back off, then when they get to college they will likely struggle. Kids need to know how to get help on their own and manage their own schedules. The message parents who over-monitor inadvertently send to their children is, “we don't believe you can do it.” If our children have the opportunities to be independent while still at home we can be there to catch them if they fall and they will build the skills to manage life on their own. Once they leave home, the stakes and the fall may be a lot higher.

*Tip:* Helping our child manage his/her own schedule and self-advocate: Ask...

- Do you need my help?
- How are you going to handle that?
- What is your plan?

This shows your child you are confident in his/her ability to work it out and you are available to help them develop a plan if they get stuck. Sometimes kids need coaching on how to approach a particular problem for the first time.

#### 2) Ability to Make Good Choices

Because the adolescent brain isn't fully developed, children need help to gain decision-making skills. Behavior management is the key.

*3 steps to behavior management:*

- Set a rule
- State the consequence
- Follow through

Follow through is the hardest step, but it is critical in getting the behavior you desire.

Establishing rules: health and safety is the most important, so start there. Other rules should be the ones you can actually follow through with monitoring.

Consequences: do not refer to this as punishment, but a consequence. Each choice has a consequence. Good choice = positive consequence. Bad choice = negative consequence.

*Tip:* Do not view every broken rule as a crisis!

Again, stay calm when dealing with the problem. Choose your battles and understand that sometimes you may need to let your teen's negative attitude slide.

### **About Improving Communication:**

1. Role model – listen to your kids, be attentive. Be polite and talk *with* not “at.”
2. Listen – they need to know that someone will be there to listen when they need to vent.

What we hear from our children is more important than what we say to them.

*Tip:* Best places to talk with your child so that it's not a confrontational "eye to eye" situation is: in the car, at dinner, at bedtime.

Bad questions: What did you do today? Most often, because there was so much that they actually had to do they don't even know where to start so they respond with something like, "nothing."

Good questions: Ask about best/worst moments. "What is one thing you did today."

We don't need to know everything – we just need to know enough. Children will shut down under interrogation.

*Tip:* Don't give answers to any socializing questions in front of their friends.

Example: "Can I have my friends over to stay the night." Take your child aside and discuss this so you understand what the child actually wants to have happen. They may be feeling pressure to host a bunch of friends when they actually want to go home and be alone that night.

Again, take the emotion out of communicating with your child. If you can calm yourself first before reacting you will be in a position to support your child rather than run into conflict.

## **Q&A**

Q: I have a senior. I worry about drinking and hooking up in college and I don't know how I can prepare my child.

A: Have a conversation with your child. Let him know you're concerned and ask them how you can help him prepare for this?

Q: My 7<sup>th</sup> grade son plays elite soccer and we argue about wearing protective headgear and no one else is doing it. How can I get him to do what I want?

A: This is a health and safety issue. Make a family rule if they want to play. Show empathy and let them know you are sorry they are the "only" one who has to wear protective gear and acknowledge that it must be difficult. You might also enlist the coach to help.

Q: What is the best action to rude and disrespectful back talk?

A: Sometimes it's better to just let that go and choose when to engage. Sometimes there are annoying behaviors that you just have to let your child do and not micro-manage every issue or insult.

Q: What happens when you spoil kids with material things?

A: The more we give them, the less they will work for them. If we want our children to be independent then we need to teach them the feeling of accomplishment and gratitude.