

Do This to Get Your Kid Into College

Parenting book author shares the 7 essentials for raising children who succeed

By Laura Kastner, Ph. D.

Did you come to this article hoping to read about SAT/ACT prep? Or maybe that your kid should lighten up about AP classes since [Harvard said so](#)? Perhaps you're looking for that one quality — grit, leadership, extreme excellence — that'll help your kid stand out.

If so, I'm going to disappoint you. It's not that these issues aren't important for college admissions. It's that designing the perfect college résumé doesn't work. Doing so not only narrows your parenting to academic achievement, it results in stress and insensitivity to other developmental issues that'll more likely result in underachievement and burnout.

As an author of five books on parenting (one of which [specifically discussed college](#)), I think of college prep like this: **Preparing a child to be successful in college is the same thing as providing that child with a healthy childhood.** Even better news, I can confidently report that child and adolescent development research indicates seven main predictors of success. Keep these in mind as goals to help raise a child who will succeed before, during and after college.

7 goals for raising successful children (and launching them to college)

- 1. Secure attachment with parents:** a close and trusting parent-child relationship providing the child with acceptance, reliable support, affection, empathy and understanding
- 2. Self-control:** the ability to delay gratification, control impulses, wait, resist temptation and tolerate frustration, all of which help children meet behavioral expectations and personal goals
- 3. Academic success:** good school performance, academic skills and study habits.
- 4. Social thriving:** the ability to make, keep and enjoy friends, cope with social challenges, choose positive peer groups, avoid problem risk-taking and individuate from family with a healthy identity
- 5. Emotional flourishing:** emotional competence and mental health, which allow one to cope with stress, regulate negative emotions, demonstrate empathy and experience a sense of well-being
- 6. Strong character:** the integrity to stand up for what's right, morally reason and act in the face of ethical dilemmas and demonstrate commitment to values such as honesty, altruism and courage
- 7. Physical health:** habits that insure physical fitness, good nutrition, stress management, digital self-management, sleep hygiene, exposure to nature, limiting risk-taking and general health maintenance
I can't imagine a parent who wouldn't agree that these are good goals for raising kids.

Now let's talk about some of the challenges and solutions associated with this mission.

1. Since college is an educational venture, parents know that grades and test scores are important. But your child will not achieve academically if he or she is unhappy, struggling with social issues and/or using a lot of weed. To prevent these problems in high school, parents need to be addressing their early signs and symptoms. **Solution: Don't avoid early signs of social and emotional struggling. Get help.**

2. Parents often don't realize how much time and effort healthy child-rearing requires. Also, most parents report high levels of stress from a host of other problems. As a result, parents let everyone default to their digital worlds. **Solution: Get out a calendar. Choose times to unplug from electronics. Plug in activities that build the seven essentials.**

3. Parents are often unrealistic about how messy normal childhood can be. Instead of becoming effective problem solvers, they get angry and critical of perfectly normal behaviors, like rudeness, noncompliance and sibling conflicts. Little problems with small children can turn into big teen problems. **Solution: Read up on child development and tips for addressing difficult but normal behavioral challenges.**

4. Anxiety and stress about behavioral challenges can polarize parents and amplify parenting differences. If you believe your child needs more firm discipline than your co-parent does, you can become more rigid and authoritarian. If you think your child needs more mindful and emotionally sensitive parenting than your co-parent does, you might become more indulgent and permissive. Child problems mushroom. **Solution: Prioritize unity and negotiate middle positions rather than winning over your co-parent to your perceived "right" position.**

5. Even though we receive formal training for our jobs, athletics and hobbies, we don't for parenting and yet for some reason think we can wing it. **Solution: Attend every parent education opportunity you can, associate with parents you respect and reach out to wise others for support.**

These are just a few of the obstacles that can thwart a healthy childhood, but you get the idea on how to create effective solutions. Don't let the buzz among those anxious, "designer" parent-types tunnel your vision to just grades and sports. Better to widen your focus to how much family members are laughing, learning, sleeping and engaging with loved ones.

The cool thing about focusing on the family fish tank (instead of just the little fishes) is that parents also benefit. The little fish is only as healthy as the tank she swims in, which means a healthy tank for the whole family.

And even if we feel like some days we come up short, remember that kids don't need perfect parents. In fact, **they benefit from parents who model self-acceptance while also taking steps toward realistic, small improvements.** Kids will be more likely to thrive with some messy and sloppy parenting mixed with copious amounts of joy and laughing than rigid, perfectionistic parenting devoid of humor and free-range play. **One of my favorite recommendations to parents: "Don't postpone joy."**

Read more from Dr. Kastner

- [*Getting to Calm, The Early Years*](#) — Cool-headed strategies for raising caring, happy and independent 3- to 7- year olds
- [*Wise-Minded Parenting*](#) — More on the seven essentials for raising successful tweens and teens
- [*The Launching Years*](#) — Tips to help you and your family through senior year of high school and beyond

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