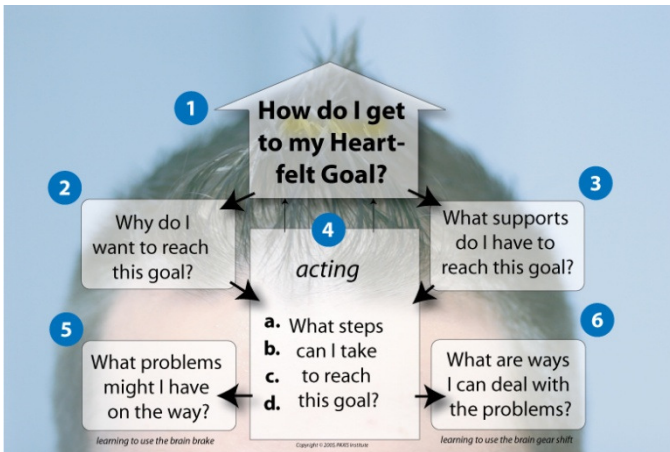


Raising healthy kids: Strategies for the whole community

By Dennis F. Embry, Ph.D.

A Simple Gift™ is a small, proven strategy to influence behavior.^{1,2} For more information, please check out www.paxis.org, www.GiveSimpleGifts.com (launching soon!) or see www.youtube.com/drdennisembry. Here are five Simple Gifts you can give to your child. These Simple Gifts can help protect your child's and your child's friends' futures. Please give these Simple Gifts.

1. Give the Simple Gift of a Future Goal Map...



Your grandmother probably uttered something like, "People fail without a vision." She was right. Young people who have a clearer motivational map of their future are more likely to live a better life.³⁻⁸ And, if the map is done with gentleness and clarity about helping your child find their authentic passions, the future map can reduce your child's use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco. Here are the basic steps for doing a Future Goal Map:

Future Goal Maps need to be done every now and then with gentleness and love, not with lecturing or force.

- 1) **Ask** your child about something they would really, really like to do months or years from now. Focus on a heartfelt goal of the child, not just something important to you. Write that goal down on the map.
- 2) **Probe** what the heartfelt reason is that the child really wants to achieve the goal. The first answers are often superficial such as "make money." So ask something like, "so why is making money important to you?" You might then get something deeper like, "I'll have more friends or have respect." Those answers are more authentic.
- 3) **Inquire** about what supports the child might have to get to the goal. Again, the answers will be initially superficial. Give the child choices of other support options such as meeting a couple of people who are doing what the child is interested in or visiting a college teacher who helps people learn about it.
- 4) **Boost** the child's ability to pick an immediate action—such as making a telephone call—and then move through specific actions to be taken later that would move the child forward. Be sure to praise the child as he or she does those steps.
- 5) **Clarify** what problems or barriers the child might encounter. Every goal has barriers—some external and some internal to

the person. The child will quickly identify external barriers, and those need to be honored. The child will be slower to identify internal barriers to the goal. You may gently address those harder issues with such questions as:

- a. "How is watching so much TV helping you with your goal of wanting to get all A's?"
- b. "How is hanging out with the kids who are drinking and using drugs helping you with your goal of getting into the Marine Corp?"
- c. "How does cursing at the security staff help you stay in school?"

It is important NOT to shame or guilt the child here but to ask gentle yet pointed questions. It is always useful to consider asking how alcohol, drugs or tobacco use fit into the child's goals.

- 6) **Coach** your child to choose ways to resolve the barriers with specific actions and real choices. Ask who or what might resolve that barrier or problem. If the child has no idea, ask if the child would like to have some ideas presented.

Find out more about this Simple Gift at the upcoming website, www.GiveSimpleGifts.com. Search for "Goal Map."

2. Give the Simple Gift of Recognition & Rewards for Doing the Right Thing...



When your child comes back from his or her adventures, notice when they have done the right thing—including NOT using alcohol, drugs or tobacco.

The more you notice your child doing the right thing, the more right things they will do. And your child—like all children—craves being noticed. Without being noticed for the right things, children tend to seek out being noticed for doing the wrong things—often in the wrong places, with the wrong people, at the wrong times. It is the *being noticed* that counts, and you have complete control over what you notice in your child—for the good or the bad.

Teens need more than praise because of their brain wiring. So, every so often—every 3 to seven days—offer a Mystery Motivator reward to your child for doing the right thing immediately after you have recognized them for it. The Mystery Motivator is a proven way to strengthen the behavior of children, youth and adults alike.⁹⁻¹⁹ Your teen gets to draw from a jar or box containing slips of paper. The paper slips name Mystery Motivators, which can range from hugs, praise, silly things, candy, an extra hour up at night, a pass on chores, a friend over, a special meal, some money, movie passes, or special fun.



When your child draws their Mystery Motivator, praise them like this or similarly: *“When you do good things, you never know exactly when, where, or how it will pay off—but it will. And, the more good you do, the more good you get back. It’s a Law of the Universe. And the reverse is true. When you do bad, you never know when, where or how it will come back to hurt you—but it will. And, and the more bad you do, the more bad you get back. Thank you for creating good in your life.”*

Find out more about this Simple Gift at the upcoming website, www.GiveSimpleGifts.com. Search for “Mystery Motivator.”

3. Give the Simple Gift of Good Sleep to Your Child...



Our children today sleep a lot less than children just 10-20 years ago. The lack of sleep, even as a young child, significantly predicts getting drunk, stoned, or in trouble with the law, being violent, and doing poorly in school.²⁰⁻²⁴ The reason is not more homework or family stress. The reason is simple: Children’s bedrooms today are like electronic super-stores—often with a TV, a computer, electronic games, and now cell phones.^{23 25-32} These electronic things are a lot more exciting and sleep depriving than reading a book under the covers with a flashlight.³³ When parents significantly reduce use of these things—especially in children’s bedrooms—children and teens are healthier, less irritable, do better in school and are less likely to get into all manner of trouble.^{34 35} Here are some strategies to slim your child’s media diet if you are unsure what to do:³⁶

- *Remove the TV from your child’s bedroom.* There are no studies that show a TV in a child’s bedroom is beneficial—only studies that show varying degrees of harm in some form.



- *Cellphones, gameboys, etc. have a curfew.* Your child turns in their cell phone to you before bedtime. That way your child won’t be texting and calling late at night. Remember to turn off the machine or take the battery out so that the beeping doesn’t disturb your rest.
- *Use Time-Lock software or devices on bedroom or child accessible computers.* Computers have very engaging, addictive activities that will keep your child up too late or get them involved in things that can lead to problems such as depression, aggression or self-destructive acts. The time-lock devices or software—some of which are free—can help make sure your child is not staying awake playing games, using instant messaging, glued to social networks (or worse) at night or other times.

Find out more about this Simple Gift at the upcoming website, www.GiveSimpleGifts.com, search for “Good Sleep.”

4. Give the Simple Gift of Brain Food to Your Child...



Yes, your child needs brain food to work properly. Children in America are increasingly having less and less good brain food compared to wealthy countries like ours in Europe and Asia.³⁷ Here are two essential brain foods for your child.

- **Good Fats.** Remember how parents and grandparents used to tell children to take cod-liver oil? Yes, it tasted yucky, but they were on to something important.³⁸⁻⁴¹ The human brain is composed of 60% fat, and one-half of that is supposed to be omega-3—an essential brain “food” essential for human brain development.^{42 43} Today’s diet—especially for teens—has too little omega-3 (fish oil) and too much omega-6 (found in cotton seed oil, soybean oil, and cottonseed oil and most processed foods).^{37 44-46} This imbalance hurts the healthy brain development and functioning of many children. A mountain of research suggests that by simply increasing your child’s weekly diet to include 2 servings of oily fish (salmon, trout, etc.) or by giving your child 2 full grams per day of omega-3 supplement, your child is less likely to have mental illnesses, behavior problems, or criminal or violent behavior.^{37 47-54} It will also reduce your child’s risk of asthma, obesity, and lifetime illnesses, as shown in controlled studies.⁵⁵⁻⁵⁷ If your child already has an emotional-mental or behavioral disorder, it is now recommended that your child take omega-3 every day to reduce those symptoms.^{53 54}
- **Physical Activity.** Remember how mothers and grandmothers used to say to children every day, “Hey kids, go out and play, and don’t come back until dinner”? It turns out that exercise is an essential “brain fertilizer.” Without extensive physical activity (running and playing outside, active sports, etc.) every day, humans do not generate enough Brain Derived Neuro-Factor— BDNF for short—essential for sleep, positive mood, memory and learning.^{58 59} BDNF helps brains learn to avoid harm as well as how to get the good things in life.⁶⁰⁻⁷⁵ With low physical activity, the result is increased risk of depression, memory problems, and poor decision-making skills; but when exercise levels increase, depression decreases (just as much as it would with medication), and thinking skills are improved—among both children and adults.⁷⁶⁻⁸⁰

Find out more about this Simple Gift at the upcoming website, www.GiveSimpleGifts.com, search “Brain Food.”

5. Share These Simple Gifts with Other Parents and Adults...



The future of our own children depends on the safety and wellbeing of other people’s children. So, please talk to the parents of your child’s friends about these Simple Gifts. In the next week, speak to five other parents. Together, we can change all our futures.

Find out more about this Simple Gift at the upcoming website, www.GiveSimpleGifts.com, search for “Our Futures.”

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