

For some reason, it was easier for me to admit my mistakes in the classroom than in my own home. In the middle of an argument with my teenager, or when I'd grabbed the reins on some household task that had spiraled out of control, I could feel my heels digging in, even when I knew I'd screwed up. I had to push my pride aside and admit to my mistakes, and show my kids that I have the courage to fail, face it, take the lessons to heart, and move on.

When my husband and I stopped dangling rewards in front of our kids, we decided to try using something I had been using for ages with my advisees at school: goals. My former middle school uses an advisory system, and teachers meet weekly with students to help them set goals regarding everything from school to social issues to handwriting. I think goals work well for students because they are rewards that remain squarely under the kid's control.

Sometimes, when I feel my advisees could use a sense of renewal or a clean slate we talked about starting from scratch with new goals for a semester. For example, one of my advisees set goals to get over her shyness, and we devised plans for talking to teachers and asking other adults for help. She made huge strides that semester, because it was *her* goal, to be completed according to *her* parameters, and if she failed, so what? She was accountable to no one but herself for those failures. Self-imposed goals are about the safest place there is for a kid to fail. If kids make up their own goals, on their own timeline, according to their criteria, then failure is not a crushing defeat. Goals can be amended, changed according to circumstances, and even postponed to maybe next week. For kids who are particularly afraid and anxious about failing, goals offer a private proving ground, a safe way to take risks, fail, and try again.

If we want our kids to invest in long-term goals, those goals have to be their goals, not ours. A friend of mine figured this out recently when her son pleaded to stop taking piano lessons. She was finally swayed when he told her, "Mom, I think playing piano is your goal, not mine." This can be hard to keep in mind, particularly when a student is having problems, but for a goal to work, the child has to own it.

Teenagers may resist the practice of goal-setting, particularly if you have been a controlling parent until now (I believe my older son mocked the entire idea the first couple of times I brought it up). However, once they realize that you have turned over a new leaf and want to help them achieve *their* goals, their trust in

your motives will return. And remember this goal-setting does not have to be conducted like a business meeting. The best discussions are relaxed, calm, and casual. My favorite conversations take place in the car, on walks, and in all those moments that pop up when you least expect them. Teenagers are not always ready to listen or talk, and sometimes you simply have to be ready to meet them where they are and when their minds and spirits are willing.

Be supportive of their goals. Some goals are going to seem trivial, but if they are important enough for your child to verbalize, they are important enough for your respect and support. Deci calls this strategy "autonomy-supportive" but I call it smart parenting.