

Science Says the Most Successful Kids Have Parents Who Do These 9 Things

Much has been written about the attributes of high-achieving adults, and what makes them different from everyone else. But if you're a parent, a more compelling question may be: "What can I do to make sure my kids succeed in life?" Here's what researchers say.

1. Don't tell them they can be anything they want.

According to a survey of 400 teenagers, conducted by market research agency C+R Research, young Americans aren't interested in doing the work that will need to be done in the years to come. Instead, they aspire to be musicians, athletes, or video game designers, even though these kinds of jobs only comprise 1 percent of American occupations. In reality, jobs in health care or in construction trades will be golden in future decades. Why not steer them into well-paying professions in which there will be a huge shortage of workers?

2. Eat dinner as a family.

According to a nonprofit organization operating out of Harvard University, kids who eat with their families roughly five days a week exhibit lower levels of substance abuse, teen pregnancy, obesity, and depression. They also have higher grade-point averages, better vocabularies, and more self-esteem.

3. Enforce no-screen time.

Researchers have found that the brains of little kids can be permanently altered when they spend too much time using tablets and smartphones. Specifically, the development of certain abilities is impeded, including focus and attention, vocabulary, and social skills. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) says children younger than 18 months should have no screen time at all, other than video-chatting. For kids ages two to five, it recommends limiting screen time to one hour a day. For older kids, it's a matter of making sure media doesn't take the place of adequate sleep, exercise, and social interaction. The AAP also says parents should make the dinner table, the car, and bedrooms media-free zones.

4. Work outside the home.

There are certainly familial benefits to having a stay-at-home mother, but researchers at Harvard Business School have found that when moms work outside the home, their daughters are more likely to be employed themselves, hold supervisory roles, and make more money than peers whose mothers did not have careers.

5. Make them work.

In a 2015 TED Talk, Julie Lythcott-Haims, author of *How to Raise an Adult* and the former dean of freshman at Stanford University, cites the Harvard Grant Study, which found that the participants who achieved the greatest professional success did chores as a child.

6. Delay gratification.

The classic Marshmallow Experiment of 1972 involved placing a marshmallow in front of a young child, with the promise of a second marshmallow if he or she could refrain from eating the squishy blob while a researcher stepped out of the room for 15 minutes. Follow-up studies over the next 40 years found that the children who were able to resist the temptation to eat the marshmallow grew up to be people with better social skills, higher test scores, and a lower incidence of substance abuse. They also turned out to be less obese and better able to deal with stress. To help kids build this skill, train them to have habits that must be accomplished every day--even when they don't feel like doing them.

"Top performers in every field--athletes, musicians, CEOs, artists--are all more consistent than their peers," writes James Clear, an author and speaker who studies the habits of successful people. "They show up and deliver day after day while everyone else gets bogged down with the urgencies of daily life and fights a constant battle between procrastination and motivation."

7. Read to them.

Researchers at the New York University School of Medicine have found that babies whose parents read to them have better language, literacy, and early reading skills four years later before starting elementary school. And kids who like books when they're little grow into people who read for fun later on, which has its own set of benefits. That's according to Dr. Alice Sullivan, who uses the British Cohort Study to track various aspects of 17,000 people in the U.K. "We compared children from the same social backgrounds who achieved similar tested abilities at ages five and 10, and discovered that those who frequently read books at age 10 and more than once a week when they were 16 had higher test results than those who read less," she writes for *The Guardian*. "In other words, reading for pleasure was linked to greater intellectual progress, in vocabulary, spelling, and mathematics."

8. Encourage them to travel.

The Student and Youth Travel Association (SYTA) surveyed 1,432 U.S. teachers who credit international travel, in particular, with affecting students in a myriad of good ways:

- Desire to travel more (76%)
- Increased tolerance of other cultures and ethnicities (74%)
- Increased willingness to know/learn/explore (73%)
- Increased willingness to try different foods (70%)
- Increased independence, self-esteem, and confidence (69%)
- More intellectual curiosity (69%)
- Increased tolerance and respectfulness (66%)
- Better adaptability and sensitivity (66%)
- Being more outgoing (51%)
- Better self-expression (51%)
- Increased attractiveness to college admissions (42%)

If sending your son or daughter abroad or bringing them with you overseas isn't feasible, take heart. The survey also asked teachers about domestic travel and found similar benefits for students.

9. Let them fail.

While it may seem counterintuitive, it's one of the best things a parent can do. According to Dr. Stephanie O'Leary, a clinical psychologist specializing in neuropsychology and author of *Parenting in the Real World: The Rules Have Changed*, failure is good for kids on several levels. First, experiencing failure helps your child learn to cope, a skill that's certainly needed in the real world. It also provides him or her with the life experience needed to relate to peers in a genuine way. Being challenged also instills the need for hard work and sustained efforts, and also demonstrates that these traits are valuable even without the blue ribbon, gold star, or top score. Over time, children who have experienced defeat will build resilience and be more willing to attempt difficult tasks and activities because they are not afraid to fail. And, she says, rescuing your child sends the message that you don't trust him or her. "Your willingness to see your child struggle communicates that you believe they are capable and that they can handle any outcome, even a negative one," she says.