

THE GPS WAY TO THRIVE!

When you want to go somewhere new, a map or a GPS device is helpful. It can guide you through new streets that might be confusing. Without a map or a GPS, you might eventually get to your destination. However, you are at more risk of getting lost or upset along the way. Just like a GPS device, people can develop their own GPS goal skills that guide them to where they want to go. Research studies show us that youth need strong goal skills to reach their full potential. Youth learn this GPS ability through coaching from adults and practice.

Scientists have identified three parts of GPS goal skills. GPS stands for:

- G Goal Selection** — “Where do you want to go?”
- P Pursuit of Strategies** — “What are the many ways to get there?”
- S Shifting Gears** — “How do you adjust when the road gets rough?”

You can help your young person develop GPS skills by focusing on each part of GPS:

G Goal Selection – Help your young person develop goals that are realistic and meaningful to him or her.

- 🎯 **Engage your young person’s emotions** by asking, “What is a goal that matters to you? What will it feel like when you reach your goal?”

Suggest that your young person draw a picture or write details of that future day. Visualize what that success will feel and look like. We are more likely to get to a goal when we are excited and have thought about it in detail.

- 🎯 **Shrink the Change:** Help your youth break down each goal into bite-size pieces. That way the goals don’t feel so large or far away.
- 🎯 **Examine relationships among goals.** When your young person has multiple goals, help him or her think about relationships between them. Do the goals work together or are they in conflict?

When two goals work well together, chances are higher for reaching both. With goals in conflict, chances are lower for reaching both. Perhaps there is a conflict between your youth going to a best friend’s party or studying for a high school graduation exam. Until your young person has a plan to deal with this conflict, his or her decisions will be shaped by emotion more than reason.

Questions to Ask

“What are your goals? Do some help others?”

“Do you have goals in conflict? Which are most important to you? Why?”

“How can I help you think of strategies to deal with conflict between goals?”

P Pursuit of Strategies – Help your young person see a range of strategies for reaching goals. Then help select the best strategy for that moment.

- 🎯 **Encourage effort** to stick to a plan.
- 🎯 **Encourage creative thinking** about strategies.
- 🎯 **Find Bright Spots.** Help your youth think about his or her progress and find behaviors that are working. We call them “bright spots.” Help your youth think about how to do more of them. These signs of early success provide hope to your young person that he or she is capable of reaching goals.
- 🎯 **Develop “action triggers”.** Support your youth to plan the exact time and place to work toward his or her goals. These “action triggers” will help your youth stay on track and be less controlled by emotions of the moment.

Action Triggers Work!

In an experiment, students were asked to write a paper during holiday break. Half the students didn't plan ahead. Researchers “triggered the action” for the other half. They asked these students to plan their time and place for writing the paper. One student said he'd get up early on Christmas morning. He'd work in his Dad's study before the family got up.

The result? 75% of the Action Trigger students completed the paper compared to just 33% of those who didn't plan. Action Triggers work!

S Shifting Gears – At times, things get tough. Learning to adapt, or shift gears, is important for life success. Help your young person develop these skills:

- 🎯 **Seeking out new people and resources** to help with a goal.
- 🎯 **Adjusting a goal** when the goal becomes unrealistic. For example, if a young man wants to be a professional quarterback, but develops a bad back, he might consider changing his goal to becoming a sports reporter.
- 🎯 **Copying strategies** that others have used.

With your encouragement and support, your young person will build strong GPS goal-skills that will guide him or her on the road to thriving!

References:

- 1) Dr. Chip Heath, Thrive Chair, Stanford University, and brother Dan Heath. *Switch*. Crown Business (2010).
- 2) Dr. Richard Lerner, Bergstrom Chair in Applied Developmental Science; Director, Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development. GPS Project. (2010)