

CHALLENGE SUCCESS

Parent Toolkit: Aligning Your Actions with Your Values

Overview: Raising well-balanced children in today's world requires families to have a clear sense of what success means to them and to have explicit guiding principles, or core values, to serve as filters for family decisions and actions. Without explicit consideration of these principles, many families get swept up in the frenzied pace and unwittingly acquiesce to the excesses of the performance-based culture.

To align your parenting actions and decisions with your foremost goals and values, we encourage you to follow this three-step process:

- 1. Define what success means for your children (analogous to an organization's mission statement)**
- 2. Determine the guiding principles for your family (analogous to an organization's values)**
- 3. Align your modeling, messaging, and use of time with your guiding principles (analogous to an organization's strategic plan)**

Expect this process to take a couple of hours or more of rigorous thinking spread over a handful of sittings. Allow iterations as you gain clarity with each draft. This process is hard work, but in the end it is extremely worthwhile because it provides you with the clarity to parent in greater alignment with your foremost goals and values.

(*Note:* Process tips for two-parent collaboration are included at the end of this document.)

Step 1: Define success for your children. When your children leave the nest, what does success for them look like? That is, what are your hopes for them? Use words, phrases, bullet points, or sentences to describe the attributes you hope your children will have when they leave the nest. Limit yourself to about 30 words. Your success definition is analogous to an organization's mission statement, or the "what."

Here's an example:

Definition of Success

- Competent, self-reliant, resilient, sound decision-maker
- Core values based in kindness, ethics, and hard work
- Passionate and excited about life's journey and its possibilities
- Interpersonally skilled
- Emotionally intelligent
- Socially aware, responsible, and active

Step 2: Determine the “guiding principles” for your family. Identify 4 or 5 guiding principles that represent your bedrock values as parents. Consider these as the principles that guide parenting decisions and provide a framework for how you can support your child’s path to success. The guiding principles create the conditions to foster your definition of success and help guide your modeling, messaging, and family’s use of time. Your guiding principles are analogous to an organization’s values, or the “how.”

For each guiding principle, start with “We believe. . .” and include 4-6 bullet points to specify what the broad principle means to you. Be sure that your principles align with your success definition above.

Here are examples of three guiding principles.

Guiding Principles

We believe in the primacy of family time. For us, this means:

- Having regular family meals together
- Keeping weekends under-scheduled
- Developing seasonal and holiday family rituals
- Building connections with extended family
- Taking fun vacations together
- Consciously creating memories

We believe in the inherent value of hard work and effort. For us, this means:

- Doing your best is the standard
- Results take care of themselves
- Encouraging risk taking and embracing “successful failures” to develop resiliency
- Delayed gratification is the norm

We believe in developing and supporting passions. For us, this means:

- Reflecting on personal values and aligning life in accordance with them
- Participating in activities that bring a glimmer to your eyes
- Choosing life work that is meaningful to you
- Being a life-long learner
- Finding joy, fun, and humor in life

Step 3: Align your modeling, messaging, and use of time with your guiding principles. List ways you can align your modeling, messaging, and/or use of family time with each of your guiding principles. Use the example below to guide your work.

Guiding Principles	What We Can Do to Align Modeling, Messaging, and Use of Family Time
We believe in the primacy of family time. For us, this means:	
Having regular family meals together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid extracurriculars that take place during the dinner hour • Leave work by 6 pm three nights per week • Shut down home computers most nights from 6-9 pm • Meet with daughter’s teacher about limiting Gr 4 HW to less than an hour (no more leaving the dinner table “because I’ve got too much homework”)
Keeping weekends under-scheduled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No fall baseball, only soccer. • Make no social commitments at least one weekend a month.
Developing seasonal and holiday family rituals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue as is
Building connections with extended family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue as is
Taking fun vacations together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go camping this summer • Rent house at the beach in August
Consciously creating memories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More backyard s’mores, family slumber parties in family room, flashlight walks, and spontaneous adventures

continues

Guiding Principles

What We Can Do to Align Modeling, Messaging, and Use of Family Time

We believe in hard work and effort. For us, this means:

Doing your best is the standard

- Ask “Did you give your best effort?” rather than “What did you get on the test?” or “Did you win?”

Results take care of themselves

- Link school, sports success to effort and hard work, not talent or being smart (Dweck’s “growth mindset”)

Encouraging risk taking and embracing “successful failures” to develop resiliency

- Remind kids as they leave for school “Take some risks and make some mistakes.”
- Share our daily risks and mistakes during dinner conversation.
- Tell stories of our own past risks that succeeded and failed.
- Take guitar lessons and allow kids to see me struggle as a learner

Delayed gratification is the norm

- Have kids do chores first on weekends before play
- Give allowance and let kids manage their money—even if it means they blow it and have to wait for next purchase
- Participate in long term projects (such as our family garden) that delay gratification

We believe in developing and supporting passions. For us, this means:

Reflecting on personal values and aligning life in accordance with them

- Schedule periodic “date nights” or “getaway retreats” to check alignment with values

Participating in activities that bring a glimmer to your eyes

- Maintain our hobbies; share the joy with the kids
- Allow daughter to continue horseback riding despite time, cost
- Allow son to play seasonal club basketball

Choosing life work that is meaningful to you

- Talk with kids about our career choice and friends’ choices who are doing important work
- Bring kids to work so they can meet the kids I teach and see the impact

Being a life-long learner

- Take kids to library with us
- Let grandparents share what they are learning in the classes they take

Finding joy, fun, and humor in life

- Do more family dancing
- Tell more jokes at dinner
- Leave work stress at the office more often

Process Tips

Here are some tips for completing this process most effectively with two-parent collaboration:

1. Have each parent brainstorm success attributes and guiding principles separately. This ensures that both parents have a voice in the process and discourages passive participation. As you brainstorm, disregard the word limitations.
2. After individual brainstorming, meet to compare notes. Identify similarities and differences. Discuss the relative importance of the similarities. Reconcile differences. Create a merged list that both parents agree upon. See if there are themes or groups of ideas that emerge that will help you adhere to the word limitations.
3. Have one parent write a rough draft definition of success and a list of guiding principles.
4. Have the other parent review and revise it.
5. Let the revised version sit for a day or two.
6. Meet again to finalize it.
7. Individually identify ways to align your modeling, messaging, and use of time with your guiding principles.
8. Meet to compare ideas and finalize your “What We Can Do” list.