



Motivating the Rising Generation

Here are four ways to help your children set and achieve meaningful goals to grow as the Savior did.

By Wendy Ulrich, PhD

As parents and leaders, we want to help children and youth become lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ who are motivated from within to serve the Lord and fulfill their personal missions.

Children and Youth is a simple but powerful set of resources to help children and youth grow spiritually, socially, physically, and intellectually, as the Savior did (see Luke 2:52). This can happen as they learn and live the gospel of Jesus Christ, participate in meaningful and exciting service and activities, and set and achieve their own goals. Like the parents in the story below, however, we may already feel overburdened without adding someone else's goals to our list. Or we may worry that our children won't grow unless pushed.

Goal-setting Conversation, Example 1:

Alana, 15, sat with her mother, Rachel, scanning a list they had made of potential goals that Alana could work on. Alana's dad, Jeff, walked by. "Which of these should I do, Dad?" Alana asked.

Jeff looked at his watch, grimacing a little, and glanced at the list. "Um, this one looks easy. How about 'Memorize a hymn'? You can get that one checked off pretty fast. What else looks easy?"

Rachel jumped in, remembering how reluctant Alana had been to try out for the school track team. "Actually, maybe you need to try something hard! How about something with exercise?" she suggested.

"Ugh," mumbled Alana, reaching for her phone. "I think I'm done."

How Can Parents and Leaders Help?

Parents and leaders can do a lot to help children and youth be motivated from within to adopt good values, make good choices, and enjoy both their progress and their accomplishments.

Think of a time when you were highly motivated to work toward a goal. What motivated you? Chances are you saw an opportunity or skill you really wanted or a problem you needed to solve. The example and support of others inspired you to try.

Likewise, children and youth will be more motivated from within when they (1) prayerfully decide what they want (not just what others want for them), (2) create a plan for getting it, (3) aren't overly influenced by rewards or punishments, and (4) feel parents and leaders are on their side.

1. Help youth figure out what they want most

Everyone wants something: to make the team, get more sleep, feel less lonely, be closer to God. The Lord and His messengers often ask people, "What do you want?" (see Mark 11:24; 1 Nephi 11:1–2; Alma 18:15; 3 Nephi 27:1–2; Ether 2:23–25). But knowing what we want most, not just what we want right now, takes experience and self-reflection.

As you think of a child or youth you want to help, ask yourself:

- How could I introduce them to new experiences, values, and ideas in a context of positive relationships and fun?
- Do I let them experience the consequences of poor choices so they want to make better ones?
- When can I ask them about what they believe and value? (See the accompanying list, "Helpful Discovery Questions.")
- How can I point out their strengths? (Try: "I see you being really good at _____. How could you use that to serve the Lord?")

2. Help youth create a plan

Once they settle on a goal, youth are often pretty good at figuring out a plan. Younger children may need more ideas.



Add your suggestions only when they are stuck. But be excited, not defensive, if they like their ideas better than yours!

To help others create a plan, you could ask:

- What's your goal? (Abstract goals like "Be nicer" are hard to define unless they include specific actions like "Compliment someone every day" or "Apologize when I get mad.")
- Why is this goal important to you? (How will it help them live their values or become more like the Savior?)
- Is this a good time to work on this goal? (Why or why not?)
- What is a small, easy step you could take to get started? (Remind them that action creates motivation. Help them start, or start again, with something small and simple.)
- How could you set things up to support your plan? (Consider creating reminders, posting words of encouragement, making a chart or timetable to track progress, removing temptations, getting the right tools, or asking for help.)
- What obstacles might get in your way? How could you handle them? (Help them remember their plan, get curious about what went wrong, practice the hard parts more, try a new strategy, or adjust the goal.)



To help others through setbacks, you could share experiences from your life or family about people facing trials and being resilient. Also try asking:

- What have you tried? What else could you try?
- Who can help? How can I help?
- What ideas come to mind as you pray about this?

3. *Be cautious with rewards or punishments*

Small rewards can help people try something new, make a hard task more fun, or celebrate success. When overdone, however, rewards can actually undermine motivation. People who already enjoy a task will often do it less, not more, if they are paid for doing it, concluding that it isn't worth doing just for the reward. And while children need to experience the consequences of poor choices, they

learn to fear and avoid people who punish them rather than learning to internalize good values.

Of course, people expect to be paid at work, where bonuses or recognition can also provide helpful feedback. But when it comes to living the gospel and achieving personal goals, internal rewards are the most motivating in the long run. Internal rewards include:

- Feeling the Spirit.
- Feeling connected with parents, leaders, and friends.
- Living their values.
- Learning, trying new things, and solving problems.
- Having fun.
- Making a difference for good.

Help young people recognize and value these internal rewards. And occasionally provide a small related reward to celebrate a job well done!

4. *Help youth feel your love*

Loving relationships are one of the most important ways to influence others' values, goals, and motivation. How have people communicated to you that they truly love and cherish you? How do you decide who is safe to be honest with about your mistakes or struggles? If you didn't really feel loved at home, what do you think you needed that you didn't get?

Your answers can help you know how to communicate to young people that they are cherished and safe with you.

With practice and heaven's help, we can help motivate and influence the rising generation.

Goal-setting Conversation, Example 2:

Alana, 15, sat with her mother, Rachel, scanning a list of goals Alana could work on when Alana's dad, Jeff, walked by. "Which of these should I do, Dad?" Alana asked.

Jeff looked at his watch, grimacing a little, and glanced at the list. "Um, this one looks easy. How about 'Memorize a hymn'? You can get that one checked off fast. What else looks easy?"

Jeff paused. Something didn't feel right, so he took the time to think about what it was.

I'm late, he thought. I just want to get this over with. I'm not very good at this parenting stuff. Hmmm. He looked at his daughter and then realized he felt other feelings too. Hope. Delight. This was not just about checking things off. This was about her growth. And this was a chance to connect with her. A smile spread across his face.

"Let's stop and think about this," he said. "What if we each write

down what we have felt prompted to work on lately?"

"Um, OK," said Alana. Rachel found pencils and paper, and they spent a few minutes thinking and writing.

"OK," said Rachel. "Now what?"

Alana remembered, "I think we're supposed to pray about it and then choose a goal and make a plan. But Dad, do you really think

Heavenly Father cares about what goal I choose?"

Jeff reflected. "You have lots of good ideas, so maybe Heavenly Father just wants you to choose one to start with. But I am absolutely sure of one thing. Heavenly Father cares about you."

"I know you want to use your gifts to make a difference," added Rachel, "so if one of these is more important, I'm sure Heavenly Father will help you feel that."

Alana smiled, then remembered, "President Nelson asked the youth to do a thorough assessment of our lives. Can I go get what I wrote?"

"Sure!" said Jeff, smiling. He looked at his watch again. "Oops, I've got to run. Find what you wrote and let's talk at dinner, OK? I have some questions that might help."

"Great!" said Alana, smiling. "And, Dad? Mom? Thanks." ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.



HELPFUL DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

To help children and youth find what they want most, discuss some of these questions with them:

Whom do you admire? Why?

How do you like to be treated? How do you want to treat others?

What promises in the scriptures, teachings of prophets, or your patriarchal blessing seem important to your future?

What would you like more or less of in your life?

When are you happy and engaged with life? Doing what?

What would you do with your life if you weren't afraid to fail?

What problem is bugging you these days?

What do you think the Lord wants for you and from you?

What would you like to try or learn this year? Why?

What are your goals this week? Why might they matter to the Lord?

As we talk, I hear you saying you want _____. Is that right? What else?