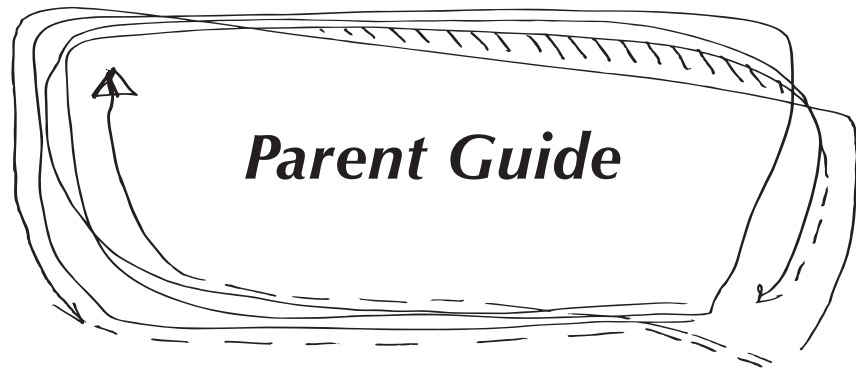


# Homeschool WITH Confidence



by Suki Wessling

## Dear Parents,

Congratulations on your recent acquisition of a teenager! I promise you will not be disappointed. Your teenager should be expected to display common teen features, including surliness, flashes of brilliance, sudden mood swings, unparalleled sweetness, antisocial tendencies, social neediness, advanced sense of humor, and unfailing attraction to all manner of digital devices.

This guide will help you guide your teenager through my goal-setting curriculum, following a few simple steps:

- *Do not, under any circumstances, let your teenager know that you are guiding them*
- *Do, always, give your teenager unconditional support and encouragement*
- *Do not let on to your teenager that you feel invested in the outcome*
- *Do let your teenager know that you see a bright future for them.*

Confused? Welcome to being the parent of a teenager.

Sociologists have found that the concept of “teenager” is not common to all cultures and across the span of human history. It may be a unique to modern industrialized societies.

However, that doesn’t make your job any easier. You are trying to guide someone who doesn’t want to be guided, mentor someone who may actually believe they are smarter than you, and stay sane in the process.

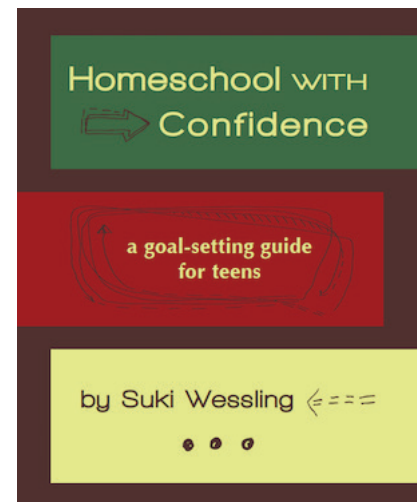
It’s a tall order.

## Why goal-setting?

When my older child was 13, I started to see a difficult near future. Though he’s generally a pretty mild-mannered guy, we were getting a lot of pushback and defiance about things that I didn’t consider important at all. It was wearying. I’m sure at some point I must have said this: “If you must fight with me, can you at least choose something meaningful to fight about?”

I started to read about teen development and realized that goal-setting might be a way to get around some of the communication difficulties we had. I couldn’t find a curriculum that wasn’t full of school and organized sports, so I did the homeschooler thing: We muddled through with what we had and adapted what we could find.

I was amazed at the changes in our relationship, and immediately started to integrate what I’d learned into my parenting and teaching. (I teach in-person classes and also online classes at [Athena’s Advanced Academy](#).)



It's really quite simple. Goal-setting allows you and your teen to:

- *Get to know each other on a new level, as humans with ideas and desires rather than just parent and child*
- *Develop a common understanding of your family's values and concerns*
- *Develop a common understanding of your teen's values and concerns (which may be different)*
- *Create a system of planning that is both focused and flexible*
- *Learn a new vocabulary to communicate without value judgments and emotionally loaded expectations*

## What is goal-setting?

Goal-setting is...

- *A system for identifying values and applying them to life choices*
- *A way to focus on current activities and pursuits that lead our students toward more remote goals*
- *A way to help students focus on their own definitions of success rather than judging themselves against the impossible standards set by society (and especially media)*
- *A way for students to address challenges such as disorganization, perfectionism, multi-potentiality, and lack of focus while lessening the potential for making them feel stigmatized and labeled.*

What goal-setting is not...

- *Goal-setting is not planning out your child's future for them*
- *Goal-setting is not focusing on the goal without consideration for other more immediate factors*
- *Goal-setting does not involve rigid planning that locks your child into a single path*

## A note about collaborative problem-solving

My views about healthy parent/child interactions were heavily influenced by the work of Dr. Ross Greene. His first book, [The Explosive Child](#), changed my world. After years of frustration parenting my own explosive child, I learned from Dr. Greene that it wasn't, in fact, my job to "fix" my child. I also learned that my child's behavior was not my "fault," nor was it his.

Now, it's likely that you don't have an "explosive" child. After I read Dr. Greene's first book, I started telling people it should be renamed "The Child" because everything he said about raising "explosive" children was true about raising children in general. Dr. Greene went on to write a general parenting book called [Raising Human Beings](#) that I recommend for those of you with less explosive children.

Dr. Greene's approach is through [collaborative problem-solving](#). He asks parents to consider a simple proposition:



Once parents agree to adjust their view of children's behavior in this way, we also agree to remove all value judgments and blame from our children's behavior. Children "act out" because they need something. It's a simple and very powerful idea.

You are reading this because you have a teen or a future-teen and are using my book. I urge you to at least take a look at Dr. Greene's website so that you can get a sense of how collaborative problem-solving language is different from standard parenting language. At the very least, take to heart Dr. Greene's advice that the best thing you can say to your teen when a complication arises is, "What's up?" Try to open yourself up to the fact that your teen is becoming their own person and that the more respect you show for this development, the more respect you'll get back.

(No, I'm not promising you that this book will make your teen respectful in general! Sorry.)

## Special Challenges in Goal-setting

### Multi-potentiality

It's particularly hard for students who have many areas of interest and skill to focus on one thing. In this case, make sure that your goal-setting approach takes into account the fact that some people never do focus on "one thing." Some people have multiple consecutive or concurrent careers; others build a multi-faceted career. Biographies of successful people with multiple talents will be helpful models.

### Temperament, maturity, learning styles, LDs

Your individual student will present individual challenges. A student who has social/emotional challenges will likely need to put off goal-setting until later, or may have goals that are non-academic or career-oriented. Keep in mind that there are many different paths to the same goal, and make sure that your student is aware of that as well.

### Stress

Students today are under a lot of stress. It's important to watch your student and make sure that goal-setting doesn't add another layer of stress. Students should feel positive and energized by seeing that there are concrete steps toward achieving their goals. Of course, individual situations are sometimes stressful, but the overall effect of goal-setting should not be to increase a student's overall perception of how stressful their education is.

## How to support your students to *Homeschool with Confidence*

As explained above, this approach will be most successful if you commit yourself to new developments in your relationship with your teen. One of the important personal qualities I write about in the book is flexibility—you'll need that as well. I also write about grit, and having grit is always a plus when raising a teenager!

Teens range everywhere from being very focused and goal-driven to having no idea what a goal is. Some teens are already setting and achieving goals, and this book will be a support for them in this process. Some teens will be starting at zero, and may find the exercises in the book challenging right from the start.

No matter where your teen is starting, however, I suggest a few specifics in your approach:

### ➤ **Be consistent**

I tell your student in the introduction to the book that it should be neither be read in one sitting nor should it be forgotten in a corner for months between chapters. Goal-setting benefits from consistency. Meet with your teen and schedule regular check-ins to make they are on track. This will not only help your teen; it will help you. The way we develop habits is to force ourselves the first few times to do the action we desire to be habitual. Eventually, if we force ourselves often enough, we start to form the new habit. You just have to keep with it.

### ➤ **Consider forming a group**

Teens tend to run in packs for a good reason. It's developmentally healthy for them. You can build on this by getting buy-in from a group of teens. If you have any sort of pre-formed group, such as at a class or club, consider piggy-backing on it. Meet on a regular basis to do goal-setting check-ins. If there is an outside adult involved with the group, all the better. Teens tend listen more carefully to the opinions of people they don't live with!

If you can't form a group, still be semi-formal about it. Put the meetings on your calendar and stick with them. If you think your teen is able, ask them to lead it.

### ➤ **Listen to your teen**

We all hope that we do this, but sometimes it takes intentional listening to really hear what your child is saying. When I did goal-setting with my second teen, he made very clear statements to me....which I didn't hear. Later, thinking back once we had made the decision to find a school for him, I finally "heard" him. Going back to school just simply wasn't in my view of appropriate futures for my kid, so I had to listen intentionally in order to hear it. In that case, he had clearly internalized the point of goal-setting; I was the one who hadn't!

### ➤ **Forgive your teen for being themselves**

What do I mean by that? I don't mean that parents consciously blame their teens or consciously want them to be someone else. But even when we don't say the words, we often telegraph the meaning loud and clear: "I blame you for being..." "I blame you for not being..." Insert the phrase that makes sense in your case. How about a few of these?

"...for being different from your older sibling."

"...for not having the same interests as me."

"...for being obsessed with something I think is inconsequential."

"...for not pursuing this skill that I think you have a natural talent for."

Again, like intentional listening, be intentional about removing all potential "blaming" language from

your interactions with your teen. Listen carefully to your words and imagine if you were thirteen again and your parent was saying them. It can be a powerful experience to hear yourself this way.

## How to use the process to get your own homeschooling life in order

“Physician, heal thyself.”

Man, did goal-setting get me to notice how badly I was doing in setting and achieving my own goals! Not just in homeschooling, but in life in general. With my first child, I realized that I had all sorts of undefined expectations of how our family life worked. I realized that I depended on family members to know what I thought they needed to do. I realized that I had become scattered and frazzled, and that I let stress negatively affect our homeschooling.

Goal-setting with my second teen helped even more. My second one started in a very different place than my first. My first was [just about] ready to take the reins and focus on his goals. My second needed a lot more support. I had to get my own bookkeeping, calendar-keeping, and note-taking processes in line in order to work with him.

I’m a better mom, a better wife, a better educator, and a better friend having gone through this process.

## What to expect from this approach • • •

I’d love to tell you that it’s going to be so fabulous! Buy my book and change your life! But I bet you know where I’m heading here:

### → **Some kids will find this approach life-changing**

I know this because some of my students, and one of my children, showed immediate, clear positive responses to working on goal-setting this way. Yes, we all wish that this will happen, but...

### → **Some kids will dutifully go through the process and seem unchanged**

We hope that they are storing up the techniques and information that they’ve learned, ready to use it later when it makes more sense to them. Often this is the case. I can’t tell you how many times my supposedly “successful” goal-setting child has said to me, “Did you know that....?” and then regurgitated something that I had said to him years ago as if it were new information. In this case, trust that something is happening, even if you aren’t seeing immediate results.

### → **Some kids will resist with all their might**

My first one could be belligerent—he had to suffer through a curriculum that included sports analogies for everything!—but he also clearly “got it.” My second one, however, was in full resistance mode. He didn’t do any of the exercises. He got angry when I tried to talk to him about his goals. He professed to have none. “I dunno” was pretty much all he said.

However, remember that even your resisters are getting something from the process (especially if you are able to keep it civil—a hard task!). My resistant student was finally able to come around and verbalize what he was looking for in education. Imagine my surprise when he rejected pretty much everything I thought he would want. As mentioned above, we came to realize through this process that school would be a better fit for him. We used this process to make some goals for his near future, and though sometimes the process was painful, it did in fact have long term, positive results.

## Different homeschooling high school outcomes

Homeschoolers come to this mode of education for a wide variety of reasons. In my experience, it most often has to do with “difference.” Your family has a different set of values, your child learns differently, you are looking for something different than the norm. In some way, your situation is “different.”

Not surprisingly, then, the outcomes of homeschooling are wide and varying. Some kids like my older son will end up applying to and attending competitive universities. Others will go straight into the work world. Some will take extra time to finish their education. Others will zoom through homeschool high school and into college early. Some homeschoolers will end up pursuing a life path that doesn’t look particularly out of the ordinary. (Heck, I know adult homeschoolers who have become public school teachers!)



These differences can sometimes be hard to stomach for us parents who have specific hopes and desires for our kids. But the outcome of goal-setting will hopefully be that not only will your student have a better idea of what they want from their education (and life), but you will also have a better idea of what you want for your student.

*Enjoy the process, and enjoy getting to know the adult that your student is in the process of becoming!*

## Looking for more specifics?

Stay tuned for a second installment of this guide, a chapter-by-chapter parent support manual.

Onward!



*This document is available for free download at [www.SukiWessling.com/goal/](http://www.SukiWessling.com/goal/)*