

Sustaining HOPE in Children

Maintaining hope in children is critical to their well-being. Hope is what combats re-experiencing abuse, traumatic events, and even some forms of depression and anxiety. Hope is resiliency. Your children may go on to experience challenging things in life, but hope is the foundation for persevering through the tough times. Hope will help them cope.

The 40 developmental assets are a great way to sustain hope in your child and build resiliency. But what else can you do to keep hope alive?

Goal Setting - You will need to help your children goal set at first. Here are some tips to help your child with setting goals:

- Start small at first. Think 1-3 months, then maybe beyond that.
- Help them to prioritize their top goals.
- Rank those goals in order of importance.
- Focus on the positive, future-oriented solution of the goal, not avoid something in the “now.”
 - Example: “I want to get better at basketball” (in the future) is better than “I will stop drinking soda” (in the now).
- Break down the goals into steps, especially the long-term goals.
- There is more than one way to reach a goal. Have your child visualize what reaching the goal looks like and encourage them to problem-solve barriers to goal reaching.
- Tell stories of success. The story doesn’t have to be personal, but can be about a famous politician, celebrity, athlete, performer, etc. who persevered to get to their goal.
- Keep it light and positive. Goal setting should be fun! Children should enjoy the process and even laugh when they face obstacles and make mistakes.

Remember that children will be more likely to achieve goals they set for themselves. Goal setting is a great activity to show kids that they can accomplish the things they want in life.



Even the tiniest of hopes can show me the way to arrive at my goal.

Sri Chinmoy



Kind self talk and talk about others - Changing the way children talk about themselves and others is an important step in sustaining hope. Children will encounter messages of shame in their lives and realizing the difference between shame and guilt is crucial.

If a child does something bad or hurts someone’s feelings it is important to point out that the child DID something bad (guilt) rather than IS bad (shame). Teaching them to tell themselves “*I said something I shouldn’t have*” or “*I did something really bad*” is better than saying “*I am a horrible person*” or “*I am always the problem.*” When a child can learn to forgive themselves and others they will be able to live a more positive and affirming life.

These subtle changes encourage hope rather than despair.

Encourage your children through love - As parents/caregivers giving your child love is already a part of your daily interaction with your child. Hugging, and verbally encouraging your child let them know that they are worthy of love, even if they make mistakes. Whenever children make mistakes, it's important to let them know they are not a bad person for making the mistake. They are loved in the good times and the bad.

Community Involvement - Not everyone has time to be a regular volunteer in the community, but for those who can, volunteering with your child can be very rewarding. There is no shortage of ways to get involved with your child. Can you and your child help in a community garden once a month? What about getting involved with cleaning up a park? Does your church/school host activities that encourage parents/children to help out? The work doesn't have to be glamorous to give your child a sense of belonging or show that what we do can effect others in good ways.

Point out HOPE every day - Every night at Camp HOPE, your children sit around a camp fire and talk about where they saw hope during that day. Recognize when children help each other to complete a task, or when someone they know helps out another kid or adult, or maybe they reflect on how good it felt to make a new friend... etc. The list is endless. Ask your child: *"Where did you see hope today?"* Then sit back and listen with your ears, your eyes, and your heart when your child tells you their story.

Help them find their "spark" - While some children/teenagers may know what they want to do when they get older, others may not. Parents sometimes know their children better than they know themselves. To help find your child's "spark(s)," ask yourself:

- What are your child's current or potential unique qualities? (Make a list)
- When did you first notice these sparks? Are they new, or did they show up earlier? When?
- Who are the adults who know and support your child's/teenager's spark? What do they do to help your child shine?

Talking about passion with your child might be difficult to do at first, so pick the right time and place, like in a car on the way from school, for example. Mirror their excitement and use encouraging words to show your support.

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A strong mind always hopes, and always has cause to hope.
Thomas Carlyle

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