

## Teach Your Child to Climb (Figurative) Mountains

How do you climb a mountain? You take it one step at a time. Each single step, in and of itself, is not that difficult.

As adults we climb figurative mountains all the time. A client comes to us with a problem or a project that we have to figure out, solve, and deliver. When I speak of mountains, I am speaking of challenges to be overcome and conquered. If our children are to excel in this world, they will have to be excellent mountain climbers. Unfortunately this is not the focus of traditional schools, but in this article I'm going to focus on positive steps we can take as parents to help our children conquer the mountains that are certain to be presented to them in life.

### **Helping can do More Harm than Good**

The first reaction of many children to seeing a challenge or a mountain is to throw up their arms and ask for help. When you come to help, they will gently climb onto your back and let you piggy back them up the mountain. Many parents react by carrying their children up and then complaining about the challenge - all this does is teach your child to invest their efforts in finding a piggy back. The sooner you stop doing it for them, the better. Your child is smarter than you think, and we've seen many children outwit their parents in this regard. Ever recall the episode in "Everybody Loves Raymond" when Raymond teaches his brother to feign incompetence? Husbands, wives, and children might be more adept at chores and homework than they want to admit. Instead of carrying them, you need to teach your child to climb on their own. As parents our job is to prepare our children for when we won't be there.

### **Teach them to Teach Themselves**

A core part of the philosophy at The Learning Path is to teach children to teach themselves. Our logo embodies this idea. We effectively give our students a compass to empower them to chart their own paths. There is no one single correct Path - some will go to College, some will start their own businesses, others will join corporations, and the like. The main thing is that they are able to choose the path they want to be on. Our goal is for our students to become self-educators. They see a mountain and instead of looking for a piggy back ride, they reach for the Internet and their copy of "Mountain

Climbing for Dummy's", and get on with it. The children who will lead the future will be those who have the confidence and ability to "figure it out" on their own. The world is ever more dynamic and changing, and adaptability is the key to success. Those who are able to teach themselves can adapt quickly and intelligently.

### **Be Students Together**

So how do you teach a child to teach themselves? From a purely teaching point of view, it's actually best if you don't know much about the topic that your child is learning. You can then join them on a hunt to figure it out. Show them how to research the topic and look for answers. In this way you will teach them how to learn. Be sure to outline all the steps that you are doing. As you work on the second and third questions, start to pull back and get them to show you how to find the answer. You can then correct them or verify that they know how to do it.

### **Attitude and Discipline are Essential**

Much of becoming a self-educator comes down to attitude and discipline. Intelligence can help but it can also hinder. Highly intelligent kids often do not encounter much in the way of mountains during school - it's frankly pretty easy for them. When they get out of school they are often in for a shock, and many will then throw up their hands. They start to learn the lessons of hard work and discipline later in life than the rest of us, when it's more expensive to learn it.

### **Model a Positive Attitude**

Attitude is widely known to be infectious. If you are stuck in a room with people who are being negative, there's a good chance you'll join them. Make sure your child is not stuck in that room. You are largely responsible for the positive or negative environment that your child has the good fortune or not to be born into. I'll always recall how my mother failed to adapt well to our family's move from Australia to Canada. For many years she wallowed in melancholy over her missing friends, the warmer weather, the inferior fashion, you name it - she complained about it. This profoundly affected us as kids. In contrast my father embraced our new lives in Canada. He showed us that we were only an hour's drive from Banff with its profound beauty and world class skiing (and he always made sure we could go skiing if we wanted to). He loved the new and expanded

opportunities - our part of Canada has been a boom town for the last half century and he bought us all a lot of toys. We could pop down to the US for a visit, see relatives more easily, and the like. He saw all the many positive things. When I hung out with my father, Canada was a bright and wonderful place. When I hung out with my mother, Canada was an endless wintry dungeon. Unfortunately my father was often at work! Your attitude to the world and the hand of cards you've been dealt with in life will profoundly effect how your child views the world. Model a positive attitude.

### **Teach a Positive Attitude**

Still, it's not enough to simply model a positive attitude. We still need to teach it. My wife and I go to great pains to always see the glass as half full in front of our kids, and to see a bump in the road as something fun that might take us somewhere new and exciting. Nonetheless I've noticed that our kids do not always do the same. They can be prone to wallowing in their circumstances. Their ego gets the better of them, which is understandable as they are young. Empathy usually requires some age and perspective. So we go out of our way to teach them to fight their inner voices that lean towards melancholy, and seeing the glass as half empty. We banish negative talk and try to teach them perspective and empathy. For example we will be volunteering in the spring to build houses in the Baja, and I plan to take my eldest son along so he can see how people live just south of the border. He has no perspective on what he has, and this is something I can teach him.

### **Teach Discipline**

How does one see a mountain and break it up into a thousand tiny and achievable steps? I recall starting my PhD and my Supervisor encouraging me to investigate the finished products of his former students. Frankly it was incredibly daunting. How the heck was I going to write 300-400 pages of well researched, thought out, and cohesive material? In my first year there were many times when I honestly wished that I had not set my sights on this particular mountain - it was a bit too much. Then I took an optional side course recommended by the LSE that showed me how to break down the writing of a PhD into many achievable steps. It modeled a path that I could climb. I stopped fixating on the height of the mountain and started working on the little pieces that I could do. I tried not to stare up at the unnervingly tall height of my little mountain and instead focus on each doable piece, one at a time. Before I knew it I had an introduction, a plan,

and had filled in many pieces of the puzzle. Eventually I switched gears and stitched all the pieces into one and had conquered my mountain. Somehow I had written a cohesive and well researched academic book of 371 pages - and it only took four years of my life! It all came down to learning how to plan and how to chop that plan up into bite sized chunks.

## **Homework is an Opportunity**

Homework is an opportunity to teach discipline. Many households struggle with fights over homework, and finding the time to do it. Our kids are tired at the end of the day and react emotionally, and we as parents often follow suit. Instead of figuring out homework on the fly, late in the evening, make a plan for the coming week on the weekend. It's not as if you don't know your kid is going to get homework. They are going to get it. Take their weekly homework, break it down into bite sized chunks, and prioritize. Frankly some homework is more important than others, and this largely depends on your child and their subjects. Prioritize the weaker subjects as your child will naturally want to do these last. Establish boundaries of time, and ensure that your child is doing their best within those boundaries. If you establish a plan and schedule, prioritize their work, and ensure your child is giving it their best within the schedule, that is about all you can do. Having done this, it should be rare for your child to not be able to do it all. If this is the case on a regular basis in spite of all your planning and efforts, there is something wrong with the homework load and/or the work that is being assigned (for instance it may be too advanced for your child's current understanding of the subject). Since you have put a plan in place, you will be able to intelligently review that plan with your child's teachers and work with them to create a more capable and appropriate load. Your child's teachers and Principal will listen to you, especially if you can outline the efforts that you and your child have taken. As you succeed with the planning and the scheduling, slowly pass the baton to your child. S/he need to take over this task well before they get to College and you (hopefully) won't be there to hold their hand. If you are, you haven't done your job.

## **Model Discipline**

Don't forget to model discipline in your own life. The example you set is the example they will follow (at least at first). It's valuable to your kids to see your work and understand it. For instance many of us are knowledge workers and our work is not



immediately evident to those around us. They see you working on the computer and might think you are playing video games. Take the time and make the effort to show your kids what you do and how you do it. Show them how you plan out your day and figure things out. Show them how you climb your mountains. Your kids will take interest and will start to imagine how they would do things themselves. For most of our kids, their primary routine focuses around school and some extra-curricular activities. They know little of what is to come after school and you can start to prepare them.

The sooner we teach our kids to see the mountain, reassure themselves with a positive attitude, and start breaking the mountain down into a plan, the happier and better prepared they will be for life. Being able to face down our challenges ultimately means that we are happier. We can rest at night knowing that whatever life throws at us, we'll figure out a way to make it work, we'll find some way to make lemonade out of lemons.

#### **Takeaways for teaching our kids to climb mountains:**

- 1) Model a positive attitude to life
- 2) Teach a positive attitude to life
- 3) Use Homework as an opportunity to teach your child how to plan their ascent of that mountain. Help them create the first plans and schedules.
- 4) Delegate the planning and scheduling of Homework directly to your child but continue to supervise them and hold them accountable. If necessary, step back to #3 with the goal of re-delegating as soon as possible.
- 5) It all comes down to discipline. Model discipline to your child. Teach them how to do the same.