

Goal setting interviews

The impact of overindulgence and the power of habit

I was recently asked to present a session to assist teachers conduct goal setting interviews. This led me to consider two ideas that I think underpin a student's ability to succeed - the impact of overindulgence and the power of habit.

Understanding the Impact of Overindulgence

“Overindulging children is giving them too much of what looks good, too soon and for too long. It is giving them things or experiences that are not appropriate for their age or their interests and talents. It is the process of giving things to children to meet the adult's needs, not the child's.

Overindulgence is giving a disproportionate amount of family resources to one or more children in a way that appears to be meeting the children's needs but does not so, so children experience scarcity in the midst of plenty. Over indulgence is doing or having so much of something that it does active harm, or at least prevents a person from developing and deprives that person of achieving his or her full potential.

Overindulgence is a form of child neglect. It hinders children from performing their needed developmental tasks and from learning necessary life lessons.” (Jean Illsley Clarke.)

If children grow up in a situation of overindulgence, the unintended messages children hear are: “Don't grow up, don't be who you are, don't be capable, don't think for yourself, it is not okay to say no, you can break any boundaries, you can't say what you need.”

When hearing this, parents shouldn't get defensive and teachers cannot be blamed because:

- It comes from a good heart – no parent plans to harm their child
- Overindulgence can occur at any level in society
- It is all around us.

Three types of overindulgence:

Giving too much. Anything that costs money e.g. toys, clothing, sports equipment, lessons, entertainment, holidays, junk food, tobacco, alcohol, or illegal drugs.

Over nurturing. Providing too much care, doing things for children that they could or should be doing for themselves, (or) keeping them from learning to handle situations they should be mastering.

Soft structure. Giving children too much freedom and license which can mean giving children choices and experiences that are not appropriate for their age, interests, or talents.

Understanding the Power of Habit

According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, a habit is, “A set of behaviours that are repeated regularly and tend to occur unconsciously”.

Habits form because our brain is constantly looking for ways to save energy. Our brain has developed a three step loop to assist us to create habits which involves:

a cue – the thing that reminds us to do something e.g. a study calendar in the bedroom, a reward - e.g. feeling good from the study, passing a test, acknowledgement from parents, and then doing it all again because the reward was positive.

Over time this loop becomes more and more automatic and a habit is born. When a habit emerges the brain stops fully participating in the decision making. You might not remember the experiences that create your habits, but once you have them they influence how you act without your awareness. In 2006 a study carried out by Charles Duhigg, at Duke University in the USA, found that more than 40% of actions people perform each day weren't actual decisions they were habits.

In order to successfully change a habit you need to be specific about the change you want to make. Being clear about what you want to change is the first step in changing. Do not kid yourself. You will not maintain your change if you don't really have the internal motivation to change.

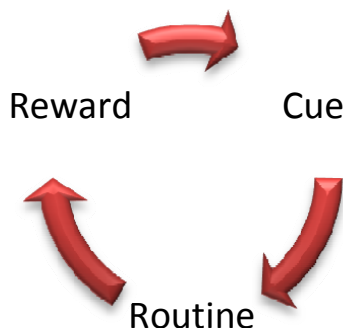
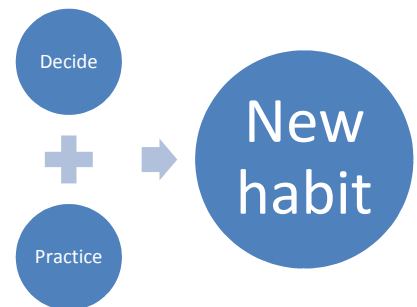




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Questions to explore if you want to build a new habit:

- What are the good things about the old habit?
- What would happen if you didn't change? – Now, in one year, in 5 years, in 10 years, in 20 years?
- Who wants you to change and why?
- What tells you that you cannot make the change?
- What habits have you changed in the past? – think of as many as you can
- Do you really want to make a change? Is yes, keep going. If no, allow yourself not to change and accept the consequences of your choice.

Habits and Overindulgence

The first question to ask is: Who needs to learn and create the study habit?


If you want students to invest in their own learning then you need to motivate and support them to learn.

Questions for teachers to ask parents:

- What is your role in helping create a habit of study for your student?
- Do you need to change how you currently do this?
- What will happen if you don't?
- Do you really want to help create a study habit?
- What do you need to do differently?
- What action steps can you take?
- When will you take them?
- How might you sabotage yourself?
- What support do you need to keep yourself on track?

Questions for parents to ask their students (Please adapt for age of child)

- Do you want to create a habit of study to reach your goals?
- What will happen if you don't study?
- What is the reason you don't study now?
- Do you really want to create a study habit?

- What do you need to do differently?
- What action steps can you take?
- When will you take them?
- How might you sabotage yourself?
- What support do you need to keep yourself on track? 

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