

JENNIFER CONNELLAN: FUTURE FOCUSED

Help: It's Happening Again!

We are now about one month into school. At this point, the good intentions for the new school year are starting to wear off, and the reality of the year ahead is setting in. Those bad habits from last year are slowly sneaking back into your kids' lives, and you find yourself once again battling homework and organization.



First of all, know that you are not alone. I cannot tell you how many parents are stuck in this same situation. The cycle most likely began back in elementary school. Your child was probably disorganized, and it was easier if you just kept track of his responsibilities. So you ended up bringing the homework HE forgot to his

school, cleaning up HIS room, figuring out when HIS tests are so that you could remind HIM to study, etc. And I don't blame you... you wanted your son to succeed!

However, you unknowingly enabled this behavior. You sheltered him from the natural consequences of his disorganization, and he did not develop the responsibility for his actions. He basically learned that it is not important for him to be organized because someone else always ensures that everything is OK.

It is not too late to teach him responsibility and organization! You need to have an open discussion with your son about this issue, at a time when you both are calm and relaxed. Here is how to structure the talk:

1. Let him see that you are taking responsibility for your part in this problem. Tell him that you realize that you have contributed to his organizational problems, but that you want to work

with him to come up with a solution. Emphasize that you want him to have more freedom and control over his life.

2. Tell him what your requirements are. For example, you might say, "I am requiring that you do three key things: Keep track of your homework, have a system that keeps your papers in order for each class, and clean your room each week." Keep the number of requirements to three or fewer.

3. Offer him options for how to get organized, but let him choose what he is going to use. For example, you might suggest that he uses either a school planner, a notebook, a Palm Pilot, or even his cell phone to keep track of his

assignments. Require that he uses something, but let him choose which one.

4. Ask him what he thinks the consequences should be if he does not maintain your requirements. Come up with exactly how and when each one will be evaluated and be specific with the consequences.

Above all else you want to give your son OWNERSHIP over his organization. Ownership is the key ingredient in transferring responsibility from parent to teenager. Allow this to happen, and you will find yourself happily watching your son succeed ... from the sidelines!

Yuck. It's exhausting just thinking about all the energy that requires from parents! And honestly, there is absolutely no reason you should be shouldering more responsibility for your kids' homework than your kids are! By the time students are in junior high and high school, the burden of organization should be 85% on the students. It is your job to provide the structure, give them the tools, and set the boundaries. Other than that, students should be accountable for their own academic success.

But how do you transfer that responsibility? Here is a question I received this week from a parent with this exact concern:

Dear Jennifer,

I am a parent of a ninth grader. Every day, I struggle to keep him organized. I know he is too old for me to be so involved, but I feel like he will fail if I step back. What should I do?

JENNIFER CONNELLAN IS THE NEW COLUMNIST FOR THE SCHOOL SECTION OF THE CAPISTRANO DISPATCH. SHE IS THE CO-FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF SAN JUAN-BASED FUTURE FOCUSED. FUTURE FOCUSED HAS BEEN OFFERING HIGHLY EFFECTIVE LIFE COACHING AND TUTORING SERVICES FOR TEENAGERS SINCE 2003. SHE HAS TWO MASTER'S DEGREES IN PSYCHOLOGY AND YEARS OF EXPERIENCE DEALING WITH ADOLESCENT ISSUES. REACH HER BY EMAILING JENNIFER@FUTUREFOCUSED.COM

Saturday is World 'Play Day'

Cox Communications and Nickelodeon have teamed up for a Worldwide Day of Play event for all of Orange County on Saturday, Sept. 30. The free event aims to encourage kids to participate in active, healthy, and playful lifestyles with Nickelodeon activities, costume characters, family oriented health information resources and even green slime.

As many as 2,500 kids can participate in the public event, which will take place from noon to 4 p.m. on Sept. 30 at Hausdorfer Field at San Juan Capistrano

Community Center and Sports Park, adjacent to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Capistrano Valley at 25925 Camino del Avion.

The event will feature four different "Challenge Zones," designed to help participants overcome common health obstacles faced by kids and families and show them how to have fun by getting active. The event is one of more than 860 Worldwide Day of Play events planned for over 250,000 children at schools and community organizations nationwide.

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