

The Right Kind of Success Doesn't Cost Your
Child Their Well-Being

Redefining Success For Every Child

The Family, Flow & Fit Approach to
Achieving Personal Best

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Let Interest, Strengths & Passion Define Your
Child's Path-Not Society

Redefining Success For Every Child: The Family, Flow & Fit
Approach to Achieving Personal Best

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Disclaimer

This book is for educational and informational purposes only. It reflects the author's experience and professional insights as a parent, educator, and coach. It is not intended to replace medical, psychological, or nutritional advice. Every family's journey is unique — please seek support from qualified professionals as needed. The stories and examples shared are inspired by real experiences but have been altered to protect privacy.

Introduction

Parenting doesn't come with a guidebook, but it can come with guidance.

Over the years, I've coached parents in all kinds of situations—moms, dads, blended families, grandparents stepping in, and even expectant parents preparing for their baby. One theme comes up again and again: “I don't want to mess this up.”

Ashley, a young single mom of an 18-month-old, came to me with that exact concern. She worried that because her child wouldn't grow up with a father, she wasn't giving him a “real family.” Beneath that worry was something I hear often: parents reflecting on their own complicated, chaotic, or painful childhoods and wanting to do things differently for their own children.

I reassured Ashley and I tell all parents this: every family looks different, and what matters most isn't perfection—it's unconditional love and steady presence. That's what builds resilience and connection. Yes, you will make mistakes; we all do. But parenting isn't about flawless execution; it's about showing up, repairing when needed, and staying present for your child.

With this foundation in place, it's time to rethink success, not society's checklist, but a definition that reflects your family's values and supports your child's growth. Today's children face unprecedented pressure—from social media, peers, parents, schools, and teachers—to achieve more, earn more, and excel at everything.

No wonder so many kids feel anxious or stressed: society often acts as if there's only one definition of success, yet every child has unique strengths, interests, and passions.

Research shows that when students pursue goals aligned with their authentic selves, they experience less anxiety, fewer feelings of inadequacy, and a greater sense of control and pride. With 1 in 5 youth ages 15–24 facing a diagnosable mental health condition, the stakes couldn't be higher.

Helping kids focus on what truly fits them, not what society demands, reduces unnecessary stress, protects self-worth, and strengthens resilience.

The goal isn't raising children who are “the best” at everything on society's checklist. It's raising children who are empowered to be their personal best at what fits them.

That's where the three pillars come in:

- **Family** – The foundation that nurtures connection, love, and support, giving children the confidence to explore the world.
- **Flow** – Helping children discover activities that engage their strengths and passions, creating joy, focus, and meaningful challenges.
- **Fit** – Ensuring choices, goals, and activities align with who your child is, rather than what society expects, so they can thrive at school, socially, and emotionally.

Together, these three pillars help families redefine success in ways that build both achievement and well-being. But before we dive into them, we need to pause and ask an important question: What does success really mean—for your child, and for your family? That's where we'll begin.

*Success isn't something to chase
—it's something to define,
together.*

*The Result: A Healthier, More
Connected Life*

When you build decisions around Family, Flow, and Fit, the pressure-heavy checklist of “success” becomes shorter and far more meaningful. Your child’s well-being becomes the focus, and your family life becomes calmer, more connected, and more fulfilling.

Important terms/phrases to know

Homeostasis - body in balance which is an important health goal for all of us. In a true homeostatic state our mental and physical will be balanced allowing all body systems to work well together.

Eustress - positive stress which motivates us. Positive or healthy stress, the kind we get from flow pushes us to do our best, to grow and become better and stronger. However, eustress must be within our skill set and interests or it won’t be motivating. An example of eustress is encouraging your child to take an advanced placement class that they have an interest in and are good at. This is when they will experience true success from an appropriate challenge and this is what good or eustress looks and feels like.

Distress - when an individual’s coping skills and life skills and experience don’t match the type of stressors coming at him/her. This is when the body feels threatened and acts like it does when a car is about to hit or being chased by an enemy. The body can’t tell the difference between the threat of a car coming at them or being an overscheduled student. If it feels like a threat, the body will react e.g. physical and mental reactions that serve great purpose in time of physical threat but not before a test etc. eyes, dilate, bp increases, appetite suppressed, blood constricts, etc.

If an individual doesn't know how to calm these reactions down, the body will become unbalanced with one system working harder, the immune system weakens can lead to increased chances of common cold, flu or worse especially if this lasts over time.

Stress inoculation - the process of learning and growing from a difficult experience. This is also an example of flow and eustress.

Psycho/Bio/Social Model

This model explains that mental health is shaped by a combination of psychological, biological, and social factors. When looking at the rise in mental health conditions among youth, it's important to recognize how all three influences come into play.

Many conditions we're seeing more frequently—such as cutting, eating disorders, substance use, and suicidal thoughts—often stem from untreated anxiety or depression. These are not just behaviors, but signs of unhealthy coping strategies that develop when teens are overwhelmed and lack the tools to manage their stress.

- **Biological factors:** A family history of mental illness can increase a child's risk.
- **Psychological factors:** Struggles with self-esteem, perfectionism, or trauma can contribute.
- **Social factors:** Academic pressure, peer relationships, social media, and family dynamics all play a role.

If you have a brain, you're vulnerable to mental health challenges. But with the right awareness, support, and healthy coping techniques, teens can build resilience and thrive, even in high-pressure environments.

Understanding The Teen Brain

Still Developing: Brain matures around age 25, especially areas for decision-making and impulse control.

- **Risk-Taking is Normal:** Teens are wired to seek novelty and take risks; it's how they learn.
- **Can't Always Reflect:** Teens may struggle to recall past coping strategies or think ahead.
- **Vulnerable to Addiction:** The developing brain is more susceptible to substance use.
- **Needs Support, Not Fixing:** Structure, connection, and skill-building help teens thrive.

Goals of this book

- Create awareness and normalization of mental health through relatable explanations of basic brain functions
- Emphasize the importance of self-care for a healthy brain. (5181 Rule)
- Learn the power of looking at stress differently... “make stress your friend” (Kelly McGonigal)
- Identify stressors & manage stress response
- Create a stress management tool box
- Identify your child’s fit and flow by knowing personal strengths, passions, & interests.
- Remember that family is the foundation for fit and flow and everything else about your child’s path forward.

Dedication

For Dad. You inspired me. As a career psychologist, I consider you the original mental health coach. You modeled curiosity and a love of learning. I know how well you did your job and we have always been proud of you. You helped thousands of people.

You would often say, “This too shall pass.” These words make me think of you and they helped me learn resilience which is something many kids today are lacking. Just as you did in your practice, I hope to help my clients be the healthiest, most balanced and resilient people they can be. Love you always.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Redefining Success	1
Chapter Two: FAMILY: The Backbone of Success	7
Chapter Three: FLOW: Supporting Strengths & Passions	15
Chapter Four: Strength + Passion= Perfect Fit	22
Chapter Five: Let Them Fall: Ground That Helicopter	32
Chapter Six: 5181: Wellness Made Simple	37
Chapter Seven: 6 Words & 3 Statements	43
Chapter Eight: Sleep: The Missing Piece in Mental Health	48
Chapter Nine: Befriending Stress	56
Chapter Ten: Grow Through Challenges	64
Chapter Eleven: Normalizing Emotions & Mental Health	69
Chapter Twelve: ANCHOR & HARBOR	75
Chapter Thirteen: Trust Your Gut	79
Conclusion	92
References	94

Chapter One: Redefining Success



What is success?

The Webster dictionary defines it as: *“The fact of getting or achieving wealth, respect, or fame; the correct or desired result of an attempt; someone or something that is successful; a person or thing that succeeds.”*

For young people and their families, the line between society’s checklist of “success” and a realistic, personally meaningful path has become blurred. Have you looked at your definition of success lately? By comparing your definition with your child’s, you can see whether you’re headed down the same track, and create space for a healthier, more individualized approach.

Workshop Activity – Defining/Redefining Success

In a recent parenting workshop, parents and children completed an exercise called “Defining/Redefining Success.” Many parents were surprised by their child’s rankings: grades, college acceptance, athletic performance, or popularity often ranked above kindness, giving back, and other values parents hoped to prioritize.

Definition of Success Family Exercise:

Redefining success doesn't mean lowering the bar. It means shifting the focus from chasing perfection to building a life that fits your individual child's definition of success based on their interests, strengths, and passions.

This activity works best when you listen closely, reflect with care, and keep an open mind. The conversations it sparks can shift perspectives and even change the course of your family's journey in powerful ways

Here are directions for an activity to open a meaningful dialogue and create a shared vision of success with your child:

- Take a few minutes to define what success means to you.
- **Set aside 10 uninterrupted minutes** for a conversation, phones down, TV off.
- **Ask your child:** "What does success look like to you?" Encourage them to list qualities and achievements. Don't reveal your list and avoid any comments or input on theirs.
- **Let them brainstorm their own list**, no judgment, just curiosity.
- **Share your own list** of what you believe makes someone successful, especially for your child.
- **Compare both lists.** Look for:
 - Overlaps (shared values)
 - Gaps (misunderstandings or pressures)
 - Insights (new values to explore together)
- **Talk about it!** Ask questions like:
 - "Where do you think this idea of success came from?"
 - "How does this definition make you feel?"

- **Find common ground** by identifying character traits, passions, and shared values that matter most.

It's nice when the lists are similar, but if they aren't, it makes for a great discussion between parent and child. The key is to be on the same page.

Discuss the differences and similarities between the lists while looking for character traits, passions and interests.

Mother-Daughter Example

One mom shared her experience with this activity. She said her daughter felt success included maintaining straight A's and attending a "good" college. The mom had those two achievements on her list but not in her top five hopes for her daughter.

The mom believed kindness, a good sense of self and a strong work ethic represented traits that would make her daughter successful. The mother and daughter both reported that this discussion helped them redefine success.

The daughter said, "My mom asked me what a 'good college' was? I named Ivy League schools, of course. My mom told me she hoped I would attend a college that fits my personality and interests. This lifted a load off me knowing I don't have to apply let alone attend certain colleges, which so many of my peers feel are the most important to attend."

The mom said, *“I was surprised and saddened that making all A’s and going to a good college were my daughter’s top two measures of success. I had hoped she felt confidence and kindness were at the top of her list. She was so surprised that I ranked these character traits ahead of grades and choice of schooling. We shared a great discussion after we evaluated our measures for success. I wondered how the top two traits on my list had fallen so low on her list. I know she knows these are important. I realized that if we don’t keep up our family discussions about what is important, peers, teachers, social media, and other adults will have stronger influences in her life. The older she gets, she will spend more time with these people than she does with our family.”*

D1 Football Scholarship

Years ago, one of my students from the community college was adjusting to moving back home. He asked me for some support.

He told me he had been forced to leave a 4 year college due to academic probation and was adjusting to living at home again. I asked him how he felt about the change and he said, *“Honestly, I am relieved. I didn’t choose that college. My parents chose it for me. They really wanted me to play D1 football in college and I did all the things to get there. I became burned out and depressed in the dorm and didn’t want to make friends because I didn’t want to be there. I am looking forward to working on my grades while at home and choosing the college I want to go to when I am ready.”*

Hopefully, as we discuss with our kids views of school, their issues in learning, their choices on education and their plans for the future, we can create a dialogue so they can have an appropriate amount of say in their class choices, college choices, activity choices, etc.

By doing so, we will create a society of life-long learners rather than ladder climbers and more than likely this will equate to much happier people.

Danielle's Story – The Fear of Letting Go

Danielle, a mother of a high school junior, worried about letting go of control. She wanted her daughter to succeed but feared making the “wrong” decisions. Through discussion, Danielle realized that her daughter's personal best would not always look like Danielle's definition of success—and that allowing her to make choices within boundaries was actually a gift, not a risk.

Key Takeaways

- Redefining success doesn't mean lowering the bar; it means focusing on what truly matters.
- Discussing values and definitions of success helps children feel supported and reduces unnecessary stress.
- Encourage exploration of interests, passions, and strengths to create a more meaningful, balanced path to success.

Talking about success is powerful, but how do you make sure your child truly lives it? That's where Pillar One comes in: Family. By revisiting your values and weaving them into everyday life, you create a compass your child can trust, no matter what pressures they face.