

I've Got Plans

Immediate gratification. Developmental psychologists usually associate the need for immediate gratification (getting what you want and getting it now) with toddlers and infants. Babies communicate their needs as they happen. If hungry, they cry. If tired, they cry. If needing a diaper a changed, they cry. Parents become quite adept at interpreting these needs. Sometimes a parent can even detect differences in the crying.

As children grow, one of the things that becomes difficult to teach is need to delay gratification (get what you want, but not now). It is important for school age children to learn this skill. We teach it by playing games when children learn to wait their turn. We teach it while shopping as kids learn to wait in line.

Unfortunately, many things in our society are in favor of the less mature need for immediate gratification. Advertisers focus on the “new and improved” to imply a need we must satisfy now. Stores use the “impulse aisle” to feed on desires to get it now. Chocolate sells well in these aisles.

I've Got Plans reminds us that there is more that can be found in goal-setting than what we think we need now. Beginning with dreams and a vision for what can be, this book emphasizes the hopes that children can create. By fostering an optimistic approach to the future, complete with the freedom for children to change their dreams as they grow, *I've Got Plans* celebrates the possibilities.

How do we teach children to plan?

Parents find it easy to plan for their children. They think about their hopes for each child, sometimes reflecting upon their own life choices along the way. But how do we teach our children to plan for themselves?

One way to approach this issue is to realize that these plans, even if they begin with parents, are realized by the kids themselves. Ask what they dream about. What does your daughter want to try? Encourage it to give it her best effort. What opportunity is there for your son? Let him give it a shot.

Play. Allow children to play. Play with them. They will learn. They will set their own goals. Watch them as they play. Help them know what they do well. Focus on those things and encourage them to do better. Children will make their own plans. And they will often change those plans as their interests develop. Support their efforts and you will find that soon they begin to achieve the goals they set.

To help children plan, let's walk through one of the activities in *I've Got Plans* found on pages 30-33.

How I See Myself Now

What motivates your son/daughter? What is it that s/he enjoys? How does s/he interact with others? Does s/he relate better to children or adults? This activity gives children the freedom to fill in the blank to several questions that will help them think through who they are. I like the fact that this activity also includes a section that allows children to freely express their thoughts in pictures. School-age children often express themselves better through art. Parents can look at the picture and learn even more than the sentences.

Hint: Allow your son/daughter to write his/her own sentences. Encourage him/her to write about things they enjoy—even things about that those they admire.

How I See Myself When I Grow Up

On the surface this activity seems just like the one before. However, the sentences are designed encourage relationships that support the good things your son/daughter knows. Once again, children are encouraged to express themselves with a picture in addition to the fill in the blank. This time the picture gives a simple direction. What would your child look like when happy? Parents can learn quite a bit about the things your child enjoys now by looking at the first picture. The second picture might be just as informative—and it might also give you an idea of your child's hopes.