Raising Problem Solvers: 10 Questions Every Parent Needs to Ask Their Child!
The hardest parenting lesson I had to learn was to stop telling my kids what to do. Doing so took time and patience, neither of which I had in abundant supply when my daughter and son were younger. It was much easier for me to bark out orders than to let them figure things out on their own. And the net result of that were two kids who relied heavily on me to tell them what they needed to do, when they needed to do it, and even where they needed to be. They had become expert direction followers.

One day I came to the realization that they needed to take some ownership. But in order for them to do that, I’d have to change my behavior. Familiar at all with the Hamilton soundtrack? Aaron Burr gives this advice to Hamilton: “Talk less. Smile more.” My parenting tip is a variation on that: “Talk less. Ask more.” By talking less and questioning more, I compelled my children to listen, think and formulate responses.

Through some trial and error, I hit on the right questions:

1. **What is your plan...**after dinner, this weekend, to study for your math quiz when you get home from soccer so late, [fill in the blank]?

The purpose of asking this question and in this manner is to help you child to begin to develop a sense of time. I always say for the most part your child lives in two worlds—the “now” and the “not now.” They have a very difficult time making the connection that what they have to do later in the day or even later that week or month, can affect what needs to be done now.

This lack of “future awareness” is one of the hardest concepts to teach and one of the hardest to learn. It is the essence of time management. In this way, this question is an organic way for children to being to formulate routines and schedules and remember what they need to accomplish in the process.
2. **What do you need to do in order to**...get ready for soccer, get ready for school, take out the trash, etc.?

   The purpose of this question is to help your child begin to build visual checklists for what needs to be done and how to do it.

3. **What is the first step for**...starting your science project, studying for your test, writing your college essay [fill in the blank]?

4. **What are you going to do before/after/in a hour/after dinner/after rehearsal?**

5. **Can you tell me what your priorities are today?** With regard to getting homework done, for instance.

   Asking what your priorities are instead of what do you have to do requires the brain to do some heavy lifting. Your child will need to “problem solve” to figure out what his biggest “must-do” for the day is.

6. **What could possibly get in your way today** [or tonight or this weekend] 
   that would interfere with you getting your homework [or chores] done?

   Or in other words, “**Maybe you should check your calendar to see what else you have going on!**”

7. **How will you know when you are fully prepared for your exam?**

   Because you and I both know that rereading our notes or aimlessly highlighting the textbook just doesn’t cut it. This question cuts through the clutter and really forces your child to think beyond the obvious or the easiest.

8. **What does “done” look like to you?**

   Followed by... What do you need to do to get to done? What materials? How much time? Type of environment?

   I love this question! Why? Because if you have a child that has a hard time initiating, having them look at the end and build roadmap to get there will help them get started.
9. How are you going to remember to remember?

Are you going to write it down? Take a photo? Text it to yourself? The list is endless.

10. And...Tell me, what do you know? Deploy this anytime they say, “I don’t know” in response to a question.

In other words, by asking instead of telling, you’re requiring your children to do some problem solving on their own. Do this consistently, and you all will begin to reap rewards—more skill building for them, less exasperation for you. A win-win!
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