

# LIFE SKILLS AT HOME: PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS WITH OLDER CHILDREN

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## DESCRIPTION

Overcoming Obstacles' *Life Skills at Home: Parents and Caregivers with Older Children* is a collection of activities you can use to teach your child how to set goals, make good decisions, study effectively, and more.

## INTRODUCTION

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Overcoming Obstacles is a nonprofit publisher of elementary, middle, and high school life skills curriculum materials that are research- and evidence-based, award-winning, and free. The organization was founded in 1992 and since that time has helped hundreds of thousands of educators in all 50 states and around the world teach over 70 million young people the skills they need to achieve success. Research shows that when students are taught the Overcoming Obstacles curriculum, grades and graduation rates go up, bullying goes down, and young people are better prepared for college and careers.

Our goal is that every child receives a life skills education. If you find the activities in this handbook useful, please recommend it to your family and friends. And for more free resources, visit [overcomingobstacles.org/library](https://overcomingobstacles.org/library).

## SNAPSHOTS | COMMUNICATION

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### **Listen Closely** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child develop listening skills.

Read your child a few paragraphs from your favorite book or magazine, then give a three-question quiz to see how closely he or she listened. Look at the results together and then read the same paragraphs again, presenting a new three-question quiz. Did your child listen more closely the second time? Suggest that repetition and careful listening are both helpful in understanding what is said.

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### **Can You Hear Me?** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child identify good listening practices.

Ask your child to think about a time when someone was not listening to him or her. Tell your child to write about how he or she could tell the person wasn't listening and what that felt like. If he or she has difficulty identifying a time when this happened, share a time in your life when this happened to you. Discuss the writing and then together create a list of signs that someone isn't listening (for example, lack of eye contact, asking you to repeat yourself).

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### **Take It Back** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child understand the importance of thinking before speaking.

Reflect on a time when you said something without thinking first and wanted to take it back. Ask your child if he or she ever experienced this. Suggest that your child write about that time in his or her journal and what they could have said instead if they had thought before they spoke.

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### **Choose Your Words Carefully** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child speak responsibly.

Read this quote by Dorothy Nevill to your child, "The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right place, but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment." Discuss how choosing words carefully is important to expressing opinions. Have your child give examples of situations in which it is important to be careful with words (for example, when disagreeing with someone, when negotiating for something).

## SNAPSHOTS | DECISION MAKING

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### **Know Yourself** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child understand that knowing oneself is an important step in decision making.

Read this quote by Dr. Clark Moustakas to your child, “When a person acts without knowledge of what he thinks, feels, needs or wants, he does not yet have the option of choosing to act differently.” Discuss the meaning of this quote with your child.

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### **Five Steps** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child learn the steps to decision making.

Read this quote by Alfred Montapert to your child, “Nobody ever did, or ever will, escape the consequences of his choices.” Work with your child to create an acronym that will help him or her remember the five steps of the decision making process (for example, “CROWD” for “Consequences, Research, Options, Weigh choices, Decide”).

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### **Decision Trees** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Your child will map the effects of an important decision to be made.

Have your child draw branching decision trees about an important issue of his or her choosing.

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### **You Have Options** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child understand that analyzing options is an important step in decision making.

Have your child create a comic strip illustrating a decision he or she must soon make, the options available to him or her, and possible consequences for each alternative. Discuss the finished artwork with your child, identifying options he or she may not have realized.

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### **Take Action** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child understand the consequences of not taking action.

Read this quote by Gary Collins to your child, “We can try to avoid making choices by doing nothing, but even that is a decision.” Have your child give examples of choices that were made because he or she took no action.

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### **Ripple Effect** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Have your child artistically depict the consequences of decisions.

Have your child depict a decision as ripples going across the surface of water; each wave radiating out from the source can represent consequences of the initial decision.

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### **Making The Right Decision** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Have your child consider his or her reputation’s impact in making decisions.

Read this quote by Admiral Raymond Spruance to your child, “A man’s judgment is best when he can forget himself and any reputation he may have acquired and can concentrate wholly on making the right decisions.” Have your child give examples of how the desire to protect his or her reputation can influence the decisions he or she makes.

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### **Bad Decisions/Good Decisions** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Show your child the importance of quality in decision making.

Have your child divide a paper in half and depict on one side what life would look like if he or she only made bad decisions, and on the other side what life would look like if he or she only made good decisions.

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### **Meant To Say No** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Discuss with your child a quote about peer pressure to learn about the consequences of his or her decisions.

Read this quote by Frank Crane to your child, “Most of the things we decide are not what we know to be the best. We say yes, merely because we are driven into a corner and must say something.” Have your child relate situations in which someone might say “yes” when he or she wants to say “no.” Discuss the consequences of these decisions.

## SNAPSHOTS | GOAL SETTING

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### **Dream Big** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Have your child use his or her imagination to identify goals for the future.

Have your child use poster board to create a “Dream Board” featuring things he or she wishes to make a part of his or her life in the future. Images should include careers, places to live/visit, material objects (homes, cars, clothing), and anything else wished for.

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### **Goal Totem** (15 minutes)

Purpose: Your child will create a work of art that shows his or her goals.

Have your child create a totem pole that shows his or her goals. Have your child glue a cardboard base to an empty paper towel tube. To tell the story of the goals, your child can glue on small pictures and objects, snippets of newspaper articles, etc. Have your child explain the significance of the totem once he or she is finished.

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### **Get Back Up** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Your child will analyze a quote about the importance of perseverance and depict the meaning of the quote with art.

Read this quote by Mamie McCullough to your child, “Success is failure with the dirt brushed off.” Ask he or she what they think this means. Have your child create a poster or collage to illustrate this idea.

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### **Stepping-Stone Goals** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child learn about stepping-stone goals.

Have your child write a letter to himself or herself about where he or she wants to be 10 years from now and what he or she would like to be doing. Then, using the “On Your Way” activity sheet ([download link](#)), direct your child to write a long-term goal followed by the stepping-stone goals needed to accomplish the long-term goal. To conclude, suggest that your child place the letter and activity sheet somewhere safe and periodically look at them to assess goal attainment.

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### A “To-Do” List (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child learn how to set priorities and accomplish goals.

Help your child list things he or she must accomplish tomorrow and in the order they should be done. Have your child revisit the list the following evening when he or she makes a new “to-do” list for the next day. Discuss the various ways that people determine priorities (for example, time, ease, importance).

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### Discipline (10 minutes)

Purpose: Your child will learn about the importance of staying on top of his or her goals.

Read this quote by David Campbell to your child, “Discipline is remembering what you want.” Have your child offer examples of how remembering goals might prompt him or her to avoid procrastination.

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### Scrapbooking (10 minutes)

Purpose: Your child will create art documenting how he or she met goals.

Have your child create a scrapbook of photos and stories about how he or she overcame obstacles and achieved an important goal.

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### Success (15 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child see that goals can be non-material things.

Read the poem “Success” by Ralph Waldo Emerson to your child. Ask what the poet is trying to share. Lead your child to see how Emerson believes success in life comes from non-material things. Cut the poem out for your child and suggest that he or she post it somewhere it can be seen every day.

“Success”

by Ralph Waldo Emerson

To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.

## SNAPSHOTS | STUDYING EFFECTIVELY

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### **Better Grades** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Share strategies for grade improvement with your child.

Discuss with your child how he or she can receive better grades. Suggestions can include setting up a more consistent study schedule, finding a tutor, encouraging your child to study in a group, or asking your child what he or she thinks would be helpful.

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### **A Marathon Runner** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child better prepare for exams.

Ask your child how far in advance he or she usually prepares for a test. Suggest that your child prepare for a test as a runner prepares for a marathon (a marathon runner begins training well in advance of a race). Gradually, the runner builds endurance, running longer and longer distances. Finally, it is the day of the race. The runner is confident that he or she is ready and able to complete the race at peak performance. Challenge your child to relate preparation for a marathon with test preparation. Explain that just as with training for a marathon, people perform their best on exams when they allow themselves plenty of time to prepare (for example, studying, eating well, getting a good night's sleep).

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### **In A Flash** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Bring this study tip for academic success to your child.

If your child has an upcoming test that involves a large amount of memorization, it could prove beneficial to direct your child to make a series of flash cards to better prepare. Once your child has completed the cards, you can lead him or her through a few rounds of drills leading up to the exam.

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### **Reduce Anxiety** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child reduce exam anxiety.

Ask your child how anxious he or she is before or during a test. Explain that test anxiety is very common, but there are some simple things that can be done to reduce it. Encourage your child to offer suggestions (for example, being well prepared, taking deep breaths, thinking calm thoughts) and discuss them with him or her.

## SNAPSHOTS | SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION

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### **Burning Bridges** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child understand the impact substance abuse can have on loved ones.

Discuss with your child how it is often the case that those who develop serious addictions often end up alienating those who matter most—a significant other, friends, and family. Have your child consider the relationships most important to him or her and write about how substance abuse could impact those relationships.

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### **Possession** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Your child will consider addiction from a materialistic standpoint.

Begin by asking your child if there is anything he or she is currently saving money to buy (for example, a game console, bike, purse). Then, explain that substance abuse is not only harmful but also very expensive and can make it unlikely that one can buy the desired item while supporting the addiction. Then, tell your child that it is even likely that a person with substance abuse issues will have to sell things already owned in order to maintain an addiction. Have your child consider pawning all of his or her possessions to buy something that is bad for him or her, and then write in a journal for five minutes detailing thoughts on the subject and all that could be lost.

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### **Just Because It's Legal...** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Have your child consider the risks associated with alcohol abuse.

Start a discussion about alcohol abuse with your child by asking, "What makes illegal drugs dangerous?" Then ask, "What about legal drugs?" Share with your child that perhaps one of the most socially acceptable substance addictions is alcohol. Even though alcohol is legal, it is just as dangerous as many illegal substances and that an alcoholic withdrawing from alcohol use is more at risk of death than a heroin addict withdrawing from heroin use. Have your child write in his or her journal describing why the risks of alcohol may be downplayed and why being legal doesn't necessarily mean something is safe. Discuss with your child.

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### **Self-Sabotage** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Your child will consider the dropout risks associated with substance abuse.

Have your child research statistics related to alcohol and school dropout rates, and then use the information gathered to write in a journal about why substance abuse can lead to someone dropping out of school.

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### **A Risk Nonetheless** (151 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child consider the risks that marijuana poses and how it can result in complacency.

Share with your child that while marijuana may not pose the same threat as harder drugs, it poses a risk nonetheless. In an episode of a popular television show (South Park), one of the characters tells his son, "Marijuana can make you fine with being bored." Ask your child why this is a bad thing. Then, share the rest of the quote, "It's when you're bored that you should be learning some new skill, or discovering some new science, or being creative. If you smoke pot, you may grow up to find out that you aren't good at anything." Have your child write in a journal for five minutes on whether he or she agrees or disagrees with the quote, and then discuss the things that marijuana can hold someone back from accomplishing.

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### **Glass Half Full** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child understand how positivity can impact his or her life.

Share with your child that our surroundings have a direct impact on the way we feel and even the way we perceive the world around us (for example, having a messy room can often lead to stress and feelings of unhappiness). Seeing things through a "glass half full" perspective is important when you consider that it is much easier to notice the negative things in life than the positive. Encourage your child to select 10 things that make him or her feel positive. The list can include people, places, music, movies, books, quotes, memories, etc. Suggest that your child post the list somewhere he or she can see it each day to help stay positive.

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### **There's No Shame In Asking For Help** (10 minutes)

Purpose: Encourage your child to ask for help if he or she ever needs it.

Tell your child that if he or she fears they may have an addiction or are being pressured into trying drugs, the best course of action is to ask you for help.

## SNAPSHOTS | GRADUATION AND BEYOND

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### Reflection (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child remember the best of the past to prepare for a bright future.

Sit down with your child and reflect on his or her experiences from kindergarten all the way to today. What were some of his or her proudest moments? Toughest challenges? Biggest surprises? What is he or she most excited about moving forward? Does he or she have a particular piece of writing, a project, or artwork that he or she would like kept safe? If he or she could offer advice to a past version of himself or herself, what would your child say? While asking these questions, record your child's responses (either with pen and paper or with audio recording)—it could prove to be a worthwhile memento.

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### Possible Career Path (60+ minutes)

Purpose: Share a day of community service with your child to explore a possible career path.

Together with your child, plan to do some community service (some ideas could include a food bank, animal shelter, park conservancy, legal aid center). After the volunteer activity has concluded, discuss the experience with your child. Ask if the day has changed the way he or she looks at a given issue. If your child was enthusiastic about the community service, discuss ways that the one day of volunteering could turn into an internship, a part-time job, and possibly a career path.

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### First Impressions (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child develop skills for a successful job interview.

Before your child interviews for an internship or part-time job, share that although we shouldn't "judge a book by its cover," first impressions still are important. In the work world, it is often the case that the first interaction between two people begins with an introduction and a handshake. It is important not only to speak clearly when you introduce yourself and to make eye contact but also to have a firm (but not too firm) "web-to-web" handshake. Practice the proper handshake and eye contact with your child. Stress too the importance of good hygiene and proper attire for the workplace.

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### Your Resume (30 minutes)

Purpose: Work with your child to develop an age-appropriate resume.

Tell your child that although mastery of interviews and a firm handshake are both important elements in getting a job, it will be difficult to get opportunities to demonstrate these skills if one does not have a strong resume. Work together with your child to draft a compelling and professional resume to use and update as he or she advances in life and career.

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### **Where To Look** *(15 minutes)*

Purpose: Help your child find a job.

Help your child consider possible employment opportunities by pointing out job searching websites, local career fairs, internship opportunities, and other options.