



My Growth Chart: Deliberately Growing Both Personally and Interpersonally

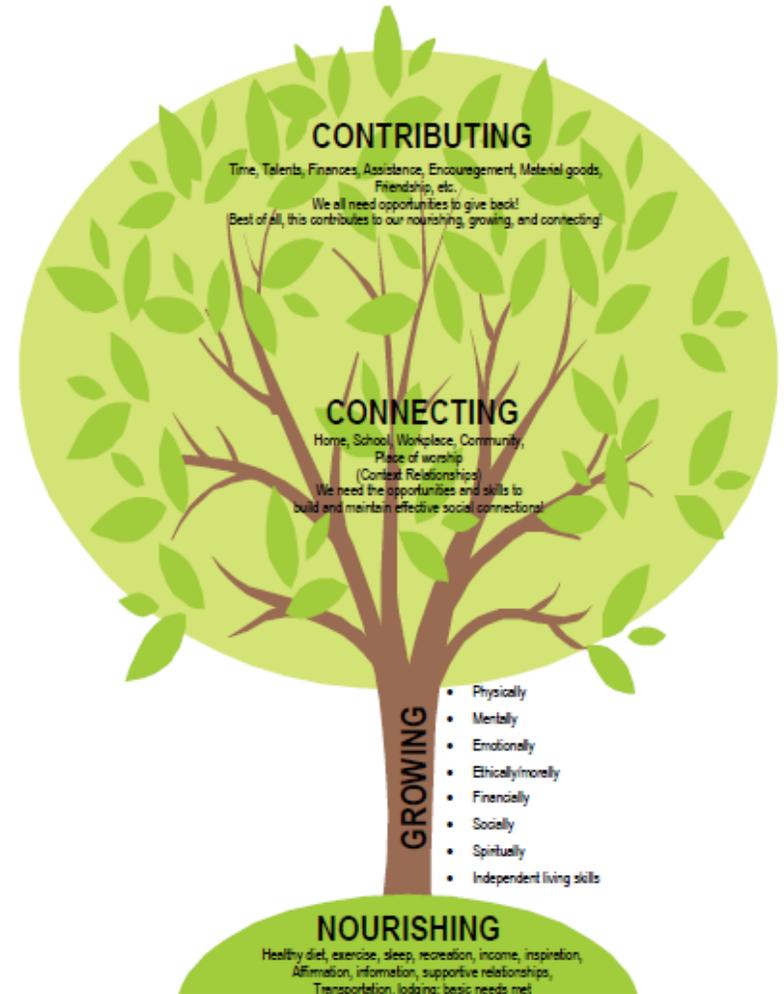
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Through almost 26 years of parenting and coaching, I have become convinced that there are four basic areas where each of us needs to be deliberately focusing in order to experience and enjoy personal and interpersonal success. Here are each of those categories, along with some challenges to consider:

1. **NOURISHING:** Are your basic needs getting met? Do you do a good job of advocating for and pursuing (for yourself and others) a healthy diet, adequate sleep, relaxation, and recreation, healthy diet and exercise, medical care, inspiration, motivation, new information, supportive relationships, sufficient income to meet basic needs of transportation, lodging, clothing, etc.? Do you have negative things in your life (bad relationships, addictions, etc.) which cause more harm than good?
2. **GROWING:** As our basic needs get met (if we don't get stuck in the nourishing phase—waiting for someone else to meet our needs), we can focus on growing in a variety of areas: physically (including self-care skills), mentally, emotionally, socially, spiritually, financially, organizationally, morally and ethically, and in skills for independence and interdependence. Are you growing? What have you learned in the past year? What steps have you taken to keep growing this year? How are you being intentional about helping others grow?
3. **CONNECTING:** We all need opportunities and abilities that enable us to connect in meaningful ways with other people, at home, at school, in the workplace, in a place of worship, and other community venues. Are you connecting with others? Are you encouraging and assisting those in your care (your children, students, colleagues, employees, friends, etc.) to connect successfully with others? Usually, success does not come in isolation.
4. **CONTRIBUTING:** We all have gifts to share with others (time, talents, material goods, financial support, friendship, forgiveness, practical assistance, encouragement, etc.). And as we give back, we typically find that our needs (many of the items in number 1, above) and those we're connecting with are getting met, providing the nourishment we all need to keep growing, connecting, and contributing! Are you and your family members contributing, at home and in your community?

These are the ingredients for healthy living—a sustainable model of growing personally and interpersonally that will help us experience success throughout our lives. We begin to learn these lessons already in infancy, and have countless opportunities to keep growing throughout our lives. The challenge is to personally assess where we're doing well, and where our growth is stunted, or “dead wood” is appearing.

If you are living or working with individuals with autism, you will likely find that you need to be particularly intentional about growing, both in your personal life, and in helping individuals with ASD to grow. Both stress, and the inherent difficulties associated with autism, can stunt growth and cause people to get “stuck.” Yet I've seen countless examples of deliberate steps people take in these areas, which lead to very positive outcomes for themselves and others.



I developed a lesson on these components to challenge my own children to spend their summer deliberately growing. I created a spreadsheet with ten areas for each day, divided between the four categories. Each night the kids would choose activities to satisfy the requirements of those areas, just 20 minutes for each of the ten areas. It was fun to see how quickly they caught on, and creatively suggested a 40-minute bike ride with a friend as a way to fill in two segments, one under “nourishing” (exercising) and one under “connecting” (spending meaningful time with others). One of my sons began mowing the lawn for a neighbor with a disability. His 40-minute mowing sessions satisfied the requirements for one segment of “nourishing” (as he got necessary exercise), and one of “contributing,” (giving back to our neighbor).

Babysitting for their younger brother, writing a note to a grandparent or friend, helping with chores around the house, planning and cooking meals, reading a book, playing board games, and even occasionally playing a video game with a sibling became choices they made to meet the expectations laid out in the spreadsheet. Instead of creating lots of rules for the summer, or trying to find activities for my kids to do, or letting them default to video games and surfing the Internet, this spreadsheet became an excellent tool to raise my kids’ awareness of other meaningful activities that they should be engaging in, and gave them a lot of freedom to make their own healthy choices.

I would approve the kids’ choices the night before, or make suggestions for other activities if I determined that their choices wouldn’t work for some reason. They colored in the squares on their spreadsheet as they completed each task, and at the end of the day, were paid 10 cents for each completed 20-minute square. We had a separate spreadsheet to help them track their earnings, savings, and charitable giving.

It was exciting to see how my children rose to the challenge presented by the “Growth Chart!” They liked the opportunity to make most of their own choices for how they would spend their time. Through the summer weeks, they got better at identifying creative ways to engage their minds, be productive, and interact with others in meaningful ways. Our family summer chore list got completed as the kids stepped through cleaning vehicles and the garage, organizing closets, helping to plan family vacations, and more! And they grew financially, not only because they earned money, but because they learned valuable lessons about tracking their income and expenses, saving, and donating to worthy causes.

More recently, I have challenged many of my pre-employment students to find activities in these four categories to fill their time during the COVID-19 crisis. Instead of spending all their time watching TV and social media, or playing video games, they have been practicing social distancing while learning new hobbies, writing to people, coloring, reading, making dinner for their family, doing extra chores around the house, etc. Most have found it to be so enjoyable that they are continuing it beyond my original challenge!

Best wishes as you work to grow personally and interpersonally and teach your children to do the same!



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NAME: _____

MY GROWTH CHART: Each section represents 20 minutes.

Date:	Mon. ___/___	Tues. ___/___	Wed. ___/___	Thurs. ___/___	Fri. ___/___	Mon. ___/___	Tues. ___/___	Wed. ___/___	Thurs. ___/___	Fri. ___/___
NOURISHING: Meeting basic needs, necessary for healthy living and productive growth										
<i>Inspiration</i> (reading a devotional, looking at art, getting new ideas)										
<i>Exercise</i> (biking, walking, running, playing outside, swimming)										
<i>Reading</i> (learning new things, engaging your mind)										
<i>Recreation/Relaxation</i> (puzzles, sketching, sitting outside, napping, engaging in a hobby)										
GROWING: Becoming more independent and increasing personal/interpersonal effectiveness (physically, mentally, emotionally, morally, spiritually, financially, socially, organizationally, etc.)										
<i>Academic</i> (science experiments, flash cards, budgeting)										
<i>Life Skills/Cooking</i> (planning a meal, grocery shopping, baking, cooking, learning about the vehicles, etc.)										
<i>Music or meditation</i>										
CONNECTING: Reaching out to others in meaningful ways (fostering interdependence)—Some of this should be in-person, NOT all online (Facebook) or texting										
<i>Socializing</i> (calling a friend, spending time with a friend, writing to someone)										
CONTRIBUTING: Giving our time, talents, and other resources to benefit others										
<i>Helping someone</i> (babysitting, mowing a lawn, getting groceries)										
<i>Encouraging someone</i> (give a gift, write a note, give a compliment)										
<i>Doing chores at home</i> (garbage, dusting, vacuuming, cleaning, cooking)										
<i>OTHER:</i>										
TOTAL TIME										

