

# Parents: Strengthen family by changing your focus

**Our son has never been a great student, but the stakes are higher now that he's in high school, and we can't get him to understand that. Nothing we've tried has worked — he just doesn't care about getting good grades. What can we do?**

You might try taking a whole new approach — not only in how you deal with your son, but in how you view your family. The idea is to focus on family strengths instead of problems.

While the idea might seem appropriate only for eternal optimists, a new book, "Strong Families, Successful Students: Helping Teenagers Reach Their Full Academic Potential," suggests that this approach works for most families, but admittedly is probably more challenging than focusing on problems and assigning blame. Let's face it: When you see your children making poor decisions, you want to be sure they know where you stand. Saying something may not be pleasant, but it's relatively easy. But it rarely works.

The book, written by an Ohio State University professor of human development and family science, is supported by years of research. The basic idea is this: Families are basically a system of complex interactions. Rarely do you see a simple "action" causing an expected "reaction" — family relationships are too complicated for that — especially with teenagers. Most teens tune out the moment they hear a whisper of criticism in your voice.



The answer is not to ignore the problem, but, as the book suggests, "park" it on the side as you work on focusing on basic family strengths, which include:

- Sharing a common ideology.
- Understanding each others' talents and abilities.
- Being kind to each other and to others.
- Knowing how to find and use resources wisely.
- Knowing how to work together to solve problems.

Sounds good, you say ... but exactly how can a parent put those ideas into practice? The book outlines a series of steps designed to empower parents to guide the family in defining and working toward success. The guidelines build on a refreshing premise: That parents can be (and should be) the experts when it comes to their own families.

The author, Stephen Gavazzi, spent years researching these concepts in a program he developed called "Growing Up FAST," a family strengthening program that eventually focused on delinquency prevention. The youths in families that went through the program were much less likely to commit new crimes over the next nine months than those in families who didn't take part (18 percent vs. 60 percent). Gavazzi believes the basic concepts can work for any family: Try it and see if it's helpful for yours.

*Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu).*



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION  
OHIO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH  
AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

**For the month of  
April 2010**

By **Martha Filipic**  
614-292-9833  
[filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu)

**Dear Subscriber:** This column was reviewed by Stephen Gavazzi, professor of human development and family science in the College of Education and Human Ecology. When Gavazzi developed the Growing up FAST program, he was a researcher with a partial appointment with the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center.

To receive Family Fundamentals electronically, sign up at our subscription Web site, <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~news/subscribe.php>.

**Section of Communications  
and Technology  
News and Media Relations**  
2021 Coffey Road  
Columbus, OH 43210-1044  
614-292-2011

208 Research Services  
Building  
1680 Madison Ave.  
Wooster, OH 44691-4096  
330-263-3780

Ohio State University Extension embraces human diversity and is committed to ensuring that all research and related educational programs are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or veteran status. This statement is in accordance with United States Civil Rights Laws and the USDA. *Keith L. Smith, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, Ohio State University Extension*  
TDD No. 800-589-8292 (Ohio only) or 614-292-1868