

A Stanford dean on adult skills every 18-year-old should have

This question originally appeared on Quora : What are the skills every 18 year old needs? Answer by Julie Lythcott-Haims , Author of NYT bestseller How to Raise an Adult ; former Stanford dean; podcast host.

1. An 18-year-old must be able to talk to strangers

Faculty, deans, advisers, landlords, store clerks, human resource managers, coworkers, bank tellers, health care providers, bus drivers, mechanics—in the real world.

The crutch: We teach kids not to talk to strangers instead of teaching the more nuanced skill of how to discern the few bad strangers from the mostly good ones. Thus, kids end up not knowing how to approach strangers—respectfully and with eye contact—for the help, guidance, and direction they will need out in the world.

2. An 18-year-old must be able to find his or her way around

A campus, the town in which her summer internship is located, or the city where he is working or studying abroad.

The crutch: We drive or accompany our children everywhere, even when a bus, their bicycle, or their own feet could get them there; thus, kids don't know the route for getting from here to there, how to cope with transportation options and snafus, when and how to fill the car with gas, or how to make and execute transportation plans.

3. An 18-year-old must be able to manage his assignments, workload, and deadlines

The crutch: We remind kids when their homework is due and when to do it—sometimes helping them do it, sometimes doing it for them; thus, kids don't know how to prioritize tasks, manage workload, or meet deadlines, without regular reminders.

4. An 18-year-old must be able to contribute to the running of a house hold

The crutch: We don't ask them to help much around the house because the checklisted childhood leaves little time in the day for anything aside from academic and extracurricular work; thus, kids don't know how to look after their own needs, respect the needs of others, or do their fair share for the good of the whole.

5. An 18-year-old must be able to handle interpersonal problems

The crutch: We step in to solve misunderstandings and soothe hurt feelings for them; thus, kids don't know how to cope with and resolve conflicts without our intervention.

6. An 18-year-old must be able to cope with ups and downs

Courses and workloads, college-level work, competition, tough teachers, bosses, and others.

The crutch: We step in when things get hard, finish the task, extend the deadline, and talk to the adults; thus, kids don't know that in the normal course of life things won't always go their way, and that they'll be okay regardless.

7. An 18-year-old must be able to earn and manage money

The crutch: They don't hold part-time jobs; they receive money from us for what ever they want or need; thus, kids don't develop a sense of responsibility for completing job tasks, accountability to a boss who doesn't inherently love them, or an appreciation for the cost of things and how to manage money.

8. An 18-year-old must be able to take risks

The crutch: We've laid out their entire path for them and have avoided all pitfalls or prevented all stumbles for them; thus, kids don't develop the wise understanding that success comes only after trying and failing and trying again (a.k.a. "grit") or the thick skin (a.k.a. "resilience") that comes from coping when things have gone wrong.

Remember: Our kids must be able to do all of these things without resorting to calling a parent on the phone. If they're calling us to ask how, they do not have the life skill.

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