

Ring in the NEW YEAR Right!

Making New Year's Resolutions as a Family Sets Kids on the Path to Success

BY LISA EVANS

The end of the calendar year provides the perfect opportunity to take stock of our lives and make changes. Including kids in the practice of making New Year's resolutions can be a fun family activity that encourages skills development in goal-setting and self-evaluation that will serve kids well into adulthood. "[Making New Year's resolutions] is a really positive activity for the family. It sets kids up to have good life skills and it allows for achievement and success, which are really important for children's self-esteem," says family therapist Joanna Seidel.



The Importance of Goal-Setting

Goal-setting is one of the most highly correlated traits of successful individuals. In a study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, college students who completed a written exercise identifying their goals and mapping out steps to reach them, achieved higher grade scores than students who didn't undergo this exercise.

Teaching goal-setting early sets kids up for a lifetime of achievement. "You learn to have more control over your life when you set goals," says Seidel. Planning ahead encourages stability and predictability and can result in positive daily changes such as starting a school project early rather than waiting until the last minute or doing chores without being asked.

Make Meaningful Resolutions

Making New Year's resolutions forces us to think about the things we want to do differently in our lives. "It helps kids to think about life not just in a day to day sense but think about the kind of person they want to be," says Meg Cox, author of *The Book of New Family Traditions: How to Create Great Rituals for Holidays & Everyday*.

Allow kids to take ownership of their goals by making resolutions themselves. While you may be inclined to intervene and set goals you think your kids should work towards, experts say the role of parents in this practice is simply to help children clarify goals and make sure they're age-appropriate. "Resolutions will be more meaningful if they come from the child. Each child will have their own individual goals as they mature and develop at their own rate and parents should really encourage and be respectful of goals children set for themselves," says Seidel.

Parents can help by providing broad categories such as school, social and personal goals or ask guiding questions such as 'What would you like to be better at?', 'Is there something you wish you did less of?', or 'What do you wish you could do more of?'. This can be a great opportunity for the family to have a meaningful conversation and learn what's important to each other.

Cox suggests beginning the discussion of making resolutions by reflecting upon achievements of the previous year. This could be done by making a scrapbook together or a family calendar using photos of the previous year. Cox's family starts the process by making a top ten list. "We each do a questionnaire about the best of the year. What's the best book you read, what's something you did that you never thought you'd do, what's something you did to help another person, what's something that happened that year that you think will be in the history books," she says. Using the list or the photos as a frame of reference, discuss the things you each want to continue doing and then move on to the things you'd like to change.

Make Them Fun

While doing your homework every night, keeping your room clean and being kinder to siblings are important goals, Cox encourages her kids to infuse some fun into their resolutions. "If they have one that's about breaking a bad habit like eating less candy, try to have one that also seems like fun—seeing more of their friends or going to the movies more often," says Cox.



Step by Step

How many times have you made a New Year's resolution only to have it fall through the cracks a month later? Adults typically have difficulty following through on resolutions because we either have too many or they're too broad. Limit the number of resolutions to three and break them down into easy-to-follow steps to ensure kids are successful at achieving the goals they make for themselves.

Keeping your room clean, for example, can be broken into stages that can be charted on the calendar. Week one may involve putting shoes in the closet every day when you come home from school. Week two may involve putting toys away after play, and so on.

Set Narrow Goals

Doing well in school, while an admirable goal, is very broad; whereas studying for one hour each day is a more specific goal that can be visually charted by marking an "X" on each day of the calendar that the goal is met. Similarly, eating healthy may involve eating one fruit at breakfast and one vegetable at dinner. Helping out around the house might be achieved by setting the table every night or following a chore chart. Discuss what is meant by each goal and break them down into steps to help kids evaluate their progress.

Keep Track of Goals

Be sure to write down your goals in a journal or on a calendar so you can keep track of progress. Cox says she places the family's goals in an envelope, which she keeps beside the family calendar and pulls them out once a month to review. "Continue to look back and remind yourself what your resolutions were," she says.

Make a Family Resolution

After making individual goals, go through the exercise of making a family resolution. Ask each member of the family to think of something they would like to change about the way the family operates or something they would like to do more of together. Exercising together, hosting a family game night or sitting down for dinner together every Sunday evening are great resolutions for families to improve bonding.

Make Resolutions a Ritual

Sharing resolutions with each other brings the family closer. Cox says families can make it even more meaningful by adding elements of ritual. Playing the family's favourite music and providing fun snacks, such as hot chocolate with marshmallows, can make the tradition special and something the family looks forward to every year.

Resolutions for Kids

- ★ I will eat a fruit and vegetable every day.
- ★ I will practice good hygiene by brushing my teeth after meals, washing my hands after using the bathroom and covering my nose and mouth when I sneeze and cough.
- ★ I will be kinder to my siblings.
- ★ I will do my homework every night.
- ★ I will keep my room clean by making my bed every day and putting away my toys and clothes.

Resolutions for Families

- ★ We will have family dinners every Sunday evening.
- ★ We will do one physical activity together each week.
- ★ We will unplug for one day each week. This means no television or video games for kids and no Blackberry for mom and dad.
- ★ We will have a family game night once a month.
- ★ We will participate in one charitable event every month.

