

Parenting Tips

January is a great time to sit down with your child(ren) and review the school year so far and set new goals for the rest of the school year, the upcoming months and the year overall.

Why have children set goals?

Setting goals with children helps them develop skills for success:

- **Determination:** For children who succeed easily, challenging goals provide a new level of opportunity. For children too familiar with failure, goals provide a means to achieve success.
- **Responsibility:** By setting their own goals, children learn the steps necessary for following through and achievement.
- **Effort:** With the extra prodding of a stated goal, children discover how much they can achieve.

Determining Goals

How do you start your child down the goal-setting path?

- **Let them dream.** During the dreaming (brainstorming) stage, no idea is too big, too insane or too small. Laying out the dreams is the first step.
- **Focus on all areas of life:** Your child does not need to only select academics for goals and achievements. He can find areas in sports, saving money, meeting new friends, volunteering in the community, even beating a video game.
- **Divide the goals:** Once your child has her (probably overwhelming) list of goals, break them into short-term goals and long-term goals and decide which ones to work on first.
- **Your child decides:** An adult's role in goal-setting is only to guide, not to set the goals for a child. Your child's goals for himself may not be your goals, but for the goal setting to be successful, he needs to make the choices. Parents who set their children's goals usually find they're not completed.

Organizing Goals

Determining goals is only the first step in successful goal-setting. To give children the means to accomplish their goals:

- **Write goals as specifically as possible.** While a less-than-athletic child may have a goal to do better in gym class, it is too vague to actually be achieved. Instead, a goal of earning the Presidential Fitness Award has definition.
- **Break goals into individual, doable steps.** Setting that goal of earning the Presidential Fitness Award for the non-athlete can feel overwhelming. Focusing on that goal with daily and weekly fitness steps make it less awe-inspiring and more achievable.
- **Overcome obstacles.** Almost all goals worth achieving will have roadblocks to their achievement. Brainstorm now to consider roadblocks to the goals and how the roadblocks can be bypassed.

- **Set a time frame.** Each action step of a goal needs a deadline to keep children from procrastinating and missing their goal.

Succeeding – and failing – at goal setting

Now that all the hard work of setting goals and putting the plans into action is complete, it's time to sit back and watch all those achievements roll in. Afraid not. The hard work is really just beginning:

- **Start small.** Your child's list of goals could look overwhelming. To get used to setting and achieving goals, start with an easily accomplished goal and work toward the more complex. Set your child up for success.

- **Keep the goals visible.** Whether they are posted in your child's bedroom, on a bulletin board in the kitchen or in a notebook in your child's bookbag, your child's goals need to be visible and watched. Check off the steps as they are achieved. Track if the steps are happening on time or if the goal is starting to fall behind. For example, to achieve the Presidential Fitness Award, the more difficult fitness achievements must follow a timeline or the goal will not be met at the time of testing.

- **Deal with setbacks.** Sometimes it won't be possible for your child to follow her goal plan. Whatever the reason – she breaks her leg and can't train for the Presidential Fitness Award – let her know that setbacks happen and the best way to deal with them is to reassess her goals and rework the plan (she knows her initial scores for the fitness test, her new goal could be to return to those levels after the broken leg, or improve them by 10 percent, depending on the initial scores and the break).

- **Continue to set goals.** Achieving goals needs to be a continuous process; so should setting goals. As a child's interests, classes and friends change and evolve, so should his goals. It is important to continue to sit down on a regular basis to evaluate goals and to determine new ones.

- **Failure as success.** Not every unachieved goal has to be a failure. Take time to look at the goal and decide what went wrong and how to fix the problem. Take the opportunity to teach your child to view a problem from a different angle, to reassess her desires or ability to set aside failure and try again.

By teaching your children to set goals, and by giving them the tools to achieve them, you give your child a great gift this season: the ability to face risks for greater achievement, to learn from failure, and a determination to achieve their greatest desires.