

Ask the Experts

Compiled by Danilae Smith

Making Resolutions Stick

Q I always fail at my New Year's resolutions, but this year, because I want to include my child in making and keeping a resolution, I want to make sure I stick to it. Do you have any suggestions?

Parent

A It's that time of year again. The time when we decide to pick our New Year's resolutions, and the time when we have those wishful thoughts that this is the year we will actually stick to them. The usual ideas for resolutions typically come to mind quite easily. The list often includes eating healthier meals, exercising more, increasing or improving social relationships, or creating and sticking to a budget. However, many parents find it a challenge to stay focused on New Year's resolutions throughout the course of a year. As adults, parents realize the importance of making a promise to themselves and sticking to it, but they also realize that their children might very well benefit from having their own resolutions. After all, this business of New Year's resolutions falls under the same category as goal-setting, and goal-setting is something every parent wants to teach their child for their child's future success and well-being. It often comes as no surprise that while juggling the multiple responsibilities of raising children, the enthusiastically declared resolutions at the start of the New Year somehow drift off into oblivion not too soon afterwards.

Helping your child to set and meet goals is an invaluable tool they can take into their adulthood. Goal-setting together can be even more powerful. Setting New Year's resolutions together as a family can be an efficient way to achieve goal success for each member of the family. Working on New Year's resolutions together as a family can provide an atmosphere of teamwork, increase communication between family members, promote a positive family environment, and increase motivation to reach goals. Coming up with common goals that will benefit both you and your child can also streamline your approach to setting resolutions for the New Year.

Some important New Year's resolutions that will benefit you and all the members of your family can include those related to healthy

eating. Tell your child specifically that you are setting a few new healthy eating habits for yourself and that your child can do the same.

Too often, overly vague goals are set, such as "I will not eat any junk food whatsoever." During the resolution-setting stage, it is important to break goals down into clear, concrete, and manageable steps, so as to avoid becoming overwhelmed or easily disappointed after one impulsive stop at the local drive-thru. Help your child create a list of steps for his or her goals and help him post it in a clear place for him to see each day. Most importantly, rewarding yourself for good progress is essential, and also helping your child choose rewards for his good progress will increase his motivation. Make sure to do something happy and meaningful so they don't all feel like a list of chores. This will promote health and well-being, and in children can promote self-esteem and an increase in self-worth.

There are multiple ways to achieve long-term goals. Studies have shown that setting too many goals that require our storehouses of willpower to be used all at the same time will wear down motivation. This is one of the main reasons most New Year's resolutions are doomed to fail. Instead, pick one goal — like cutting down on eating at fast food restaurants or reducing your intake of foods with refined sugar, and focus on only that one goal for 6-8 weeks, and watch your willpower improve. This will allow you to not only achieve a specific goal in a realistic time-frame and create a routine of a new healthy behavior, but will also recharge your motivation to reach the next goal on your resolution list. Achieving one important goal at a time together as a family is an effective display of goal-directed behavior for your child to directly experience right alongside you. Before you know it, a few more goals have been crossed off the list, and the year is up.



Dr. Cristy Pareti has a doctorate in Clinical Psychology and is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist with a private practice in San Clemente. She has a specialty in children and adolescents and also sees individuals, families and couples.

www.cristypareti.com