

## New Year, New Goals

While you're stocking up on back-to-school supplies, take some time out to help your child think and dream about his future.

The exciting, intimidating start of the school year is an ideal time to talk with your child about goals for the future. Encouraging children to set goals and embrace the future with creativity.

### What role do parents play in the beginning of the school year?

The beginning of the year is a really important time. As parents we can set the stage to help kids feel positive about learning. It is essential to create a positive learning environment at home. Support learning by showing interest in your kids' schoolwork. This is also the perfect time to develop new goals. By sitting down with kids and helping them focus on their priorities, you can help them target their efforts and be more successful.

### What's the best way to do that?

Ask specific questions about what your child is studying and what is happening with their friends. Use what they are learning in the classroom as a springboard to thinking about their own dreams and goals. If the class is learning about animals, talk about what kinds of careers might involve animals like a veterinarian, farmer, or biologist.

Goals can be of a personal or academic nature. It's best to start out with only a handful of goals; otherwise, the student can easily become overwhelmed and discouraged. Goals should also be, as much as possible, driven by your child. Having a goal thrust upon them without their input does nothing for motivating them.

If your child comes up blank, try this. Ask them to envision themselves as they would like to be at the end of the school year. What do they see that is different from how things are now? Start making a list of ideas: more involved in activities, more close friendships, making the honor roll, etc. These ideas can serve as a springboard to a discussion about what they really want to accomplish.

Once you've narrowed it down to one or two ideas, use this goal-setting process to outline what needs to be done:

**Identify long-term goal.** This is what will have happened or changed by the end of the year. Usually, this is a "bigger picture" type item that will be accomplished by setting and meeting a number of related short-term goals. The examples



**Reach for the stars, Gallie  
Reach for the stars!**

given above would all qualify. If it's something that can be done quickly and easily, it isn't a long term goal. Help the teen to identify and write down two long term goals to work with.

**Identify short-term goals.** For each, have the child list several short term goals that will assist them in meeting the long term goal. For example, if the goal is "Make honour roll," some short-term goals could be "Study every night," "Take better notes," "Stay organized," and "Improve study skills." Write each of these down with plenty of room to make notes and plans.

**Steps to Success.** For each short term goal, identify small tasks that can be utilized to help get there. For example, for the short-term goal "Take better notes," steps might include "Pay attention in class," "Write more neatly," "Review notes regularly for gaps," and "Ask teacher for note-taking tips." These are all very specific things the student can do on a daily basis. The benefit of breaking the goal down to steps is that the tasks are now more clearly defined and are in manageable chunks. For many kids, "Make honour roll," is way too overwhelming. They don't even know where to begin.

**Reassess plan.** Periodically, review the progress that is being made towards each goal. Revise plan if necessary. Be sure to celebrate the small achievements that will ultimately result in meeting the goal. Often, kids need the frequent feedback and success that will continue to motivate them towards completion.

### How can parents introduce the idea of goal-setting?

Take that extra step by saying, "You've learned this; how can you use it in your real life?" Kids often fail to see that connection. Talk about what their goals are for the year.

You can help your kids set smart goals. The goal has to be easy to understand and easy for the child to take action. Also, be aware of words that they use. There are a lot of goal-buster words that parents use like "no, never, can't, won't, maybe," so watch your own language and encourage children to be aware of words they use when faced with new challenges or old fears. This helps parents and children develop some positive life skills.

### What should kids do after they've identified some of their goals?

Translate the goals into something more practical like a Goal Ladder. In this activity, kids identify something they'd like to learn more about or get better at. With a parent's help, they write a letter outlining what they'd like to do, why they'd like to do it, specific steps to do it, and dates to achieve it. Dreams and goals come with responsibilities and challenges that kids need to map out to achieve. They can also write goals in stars, colour them, and hang them in their rooms.

### Dream Chest

Parents can also work with kids to make a dream chest. A dream chest can help children focus on who they are and what their skills and talents are. Have your child decorate a cardboard box in some way that reflects their interests. Then over the year, they fill it with cool stuff — anything interesting or inspiring: magazine articles, cartoons, poems, quotes, or pictures. Don't think about it too much, just put it in. Throughout the school year, take a look at what is in there. It is a great way for kids to find out who they are. Parents can help them identify patterns by seeing that a lot of the contents of the dream chest are related to sports, or to plants, etc. Then parents know where to put their emphasis when encouraging particular interests.

At the start of each year one teacher challenges his students with **two questions**:

- Focusing on tasks:  
***What am I going to do better this year?***
- Focusing on virtues:  
***How am I going to be better this year?***

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