



Helping your child set goals

A guide for parents



Introduction

Why is it important for children to learn to set goals?

Goal setting is a significant part of the educational process. Teachers want to know what your aspirations are for your child.

They will also be keen to know what your child's goals are for their own educational, social and skills growth.

As parents, we all want our children to be healthy, happy and safe. Sometimes it is easier to list what we DON'T want for our child. We don't want them to be stressed and anxious, teased or bullied.

We can usually think of social goals around having friends, fitting in and being part of a supportive community.

Learning to set and achieve goals is a life skill that all children can learn, and as their parents, you are the people who know them best, and so are in the best position to help them focus on meeting their objectives educationally, socially and in cultural and sporting endeavours.



“Children will be more motivated to achieve their goals if they’ve set them themselves because these goals will be important to them.”

Tahlia Mandie
family counsellor

Why is goal setting important?

Research shows that children who participate in setting their own goals tend to be more motivated. They take learning more seriously.

By setting and accomplishing goals children have more control over their growth and development. They become more confident about taking care of themselves and contributing to their community, school and family.

A child’s ability to set and achieve realistic goals is linked to better school outcomes and well-being.



The Power of Parents

If you want to help your child to be more motivated about school then help them to set some goals. There are studies that show there is improved academic performance when parents help their children set educational goals.

While schools are obviously important to a child's academic success, research says that parents play a powerful role. All parents have the power to set their child up for success in school. That power is the power of goal setting.

There is evidence that shows when parents have a goal for their child to be successful in school, they boost their child's potential for success.



How do I help my child set goals?

Begin the discussion by asking your child what he or she hopes to accomplish or learn this year. Have a few suggestions in mind, based on how they progressed the previous year. Remember though, that your child needs to come up with their own goals if they are going to be motivated to achieve them.

Goals should focus on your own child's improvement and not be about comparisons with other students. These are your child's personal goals. Goals do not necessarily need to be academic. Personal and social goals, artistic, cultural and sporting goals could all be considered.

These goals can be simple, and the younger your child, the less demanding the goal should be. Your child's goal might be to be organised for school on time, to hand in assignments when they are due, to improve their reading or audition for the school play.

It is important to write these goals down somewhere and to refer to them throughout the year so you can check on your child's progress.

You can provide an example by modelling setting and achieving your personal goals which will help your child to learn how to set and achieve their own goals.

Ask children what they'd like to do differently this year compared to last year.



FAILING TO
PLAN
IS PLANNING
TO FAIL.



Most of us have heard this saying in various forms, but the reason it is so popular is because it is true. Many of our New Year resolutions are unsuccessful because while we might have an idea in mind about a situation we would like to change, we do not put the steps in place to make them happen.

Once your child has decided on their goal for the coming year, it is then necessary to make a plan about how this might be achieved.

First it is important to set a time frame. When will the goal be accomplished? For example, if the goal is to swim 25 metres will it be achieved by the school swimming carnival, or the summer holidays or an anticipated pool party for a friend's birthday?

The next task is to make a list of steps working towards achieving the goal. What does your child need to do to swim 25 metres? Do they need swimming lessons? If they can swim do they need to build their stamina? Could they start swimming five or ten metres a week and build up to swimming 25 metres?

Who will need to help them? Do you need to engage a swimming coach to improve their stroke? Mum or dad or grandpa to drive them to the pool? How much will it cost? Do we need any special equipment?

Discuss with your child how they will know when they have reached their goal.

Tips for Parents: How to Set Effective Goals

State the goal in writing	I will swim 25 metres independently
Set a time frame to accomplish the goal	By the summer holidays
Write down the steps to achieve the goal	Find a swimming coach; find out when the local pool is open; book lessons; budget money for lessons and pool entry; ask someone to drive me to lessons and practice; training twice a week; start with five metres and build up by one metre each week.
Decide how your child will know when they have reached the goal	When I can swim 25 metres without any help and without feeling puffed and tired
Acknowledge setbacks	Sometimes when I am sick or tired I might not meet my weekly goal. That doesn't mean I will not be successful. Next week I will go back to swimming and keep trying.
Celebrate success	It is important to recognise the effort taken to achieve the goal with praise or cake (cake is always good!).



Short Term Goals and Long Term Goals

When setting goals teachers have two types of goals in mind. It is helpful for parents to be aware of this. Long term goals take more time and effort to achieve. An example of a long term goal might be for a child to achieve a particular reading level by the end of the year.

Short term goals are more specific and take less time to achieve. Long term goals can be broken down into several short term goals. These can be monitored, assessed and reported back to the child and you. For example the short term goals might be for the child to be able to read a certain number of sight words or to read a set number of pages without stumbling. They will then progress to the next level reader and another set of short term goals will be established.

Teachers use a lot of information to set long and short term goals. If the goal is for your child to read at level 30 by the end of the year, then the teacher will assess the reading level your child is on now. The teacher will determine what progress most children would make over four terms, look at the reading competencies your child already has and the skills they need to develop, consider the syllabus requirements and any school or departmental targets.

The teacher will establish the aims for your child (and the others in the class) to achieve for each week and term in order to reach the desired goals by the end of the year.

If students are not on track to meet the goal the teacher will adjust strategies, reassess, conference with other teachers and plan approaches that will help students to meet their learning goals.

Be prepared to be flexible

Sometimes things don't go as planned (remember that time when you decided to lose weight or quit smoking?). Maybe the goal needs to be adjusted. It could be because it was too ambitious, or perhaps because the necessary equipment or money was not readily available.

Goals can (and need to be) constantly evaluated and reconsidered. This does not mean that your child was unsuccessful, or a failure. It just means that there was a mismatch between the desired outcome and current circumstances.

Maybe it will take your child longer to achieve the goal and the accomplishment date needs to be changed. Perhaps the resources are not available (it is difficult to learn to swim 25 metres if there is no local swimming pool!).

Talk to your child about the need to be flexible with their goals and discuss what adjustments may be needed for them to be attained.



Ten Goal Setting Tips for Parents

The following tips are from www.oxfordlearning.com

- 1) **Begin early.** Before school begins, sit down with your child and review last year's report. Discuss successes and areas that need improvement and set goals in several areas.
- 2) **Take time and listen carefully.** Don't limit goals to academics; include extra-curricular activities such as sport. Stay calm and show your children that they have your undivided attention. Ask what they are concerned about. Are they anxious about anything in particular? What were the biggest challenges they faced last year?
- 3) **Set Goals That Are Achievable, Measurable and Believable.** Achievable: Goals need to be set at a level that is more advanced than the level the child is currently working at, but not so advanced that it is unachievable or beyond reach. Measurable: Goals need to be measurable so that both you and your child are able to track progress and success. Believable: Your child must believe in the goal and believe in their ability to achieve it for them to be successful.
- 4) **Set Goals That Are Relevant To Your Child.** Your child must be motivated. It's important that they see the goal as being of value to them. Goals are very personal and individual so make sure they truly reflect your child.
- 5) **It's Never Too Early or Too Late to Set Goals.** No matter what your child's age or level of ability, it's never too early or too late to teach them the fundamentals to help them succeed.



- 6) **Make Goal Setting a Family Affair.** Sit down with your child and set goals together. Share your goals with family members (e.g. over dinner, in the car ride to school) so that everyone knows and can support your child as they work towards achieving these goals.
- 7) **Be Supportive, Respectful and Encouraging.** Express to them your support of what they are trying to achieve and let them know that you are there to help and encourage them every step of the way. This will increase their confidence. Be proud of your child's efforts as well as accomplishments.
- 8) **Work in Partnership with your Child's Teacher.** Meet with your child's teacher and talk about possible learning goals for your child for the coming year.
- 9) **Monitor Progress.** Each term sit down with your child and review the goals together. Make any adjustments, if required, and touch base with the teacher if necessary to make sure that everything is on track.
- 10) **Celebrate When Goals are Achieved.** When goals are met, celebrate! Positive reinforcement will help to encourage your child to set new goals and continue on the path to success.



Celebrate!

The experts are divided over whether it is beneficial to offer rewards or enticements to help children achieve goals; however, an important part of the whole goal-setting process is to celebrate your child's success when their goal is reached.

Respected Australian adolescent psychologist, Andrew Fuller states that "rewards might be especially useful for academically unmotivated students."

As an adult, we are often able to motivate ourselves and we respond to what are called INTRINSIC rewards. We feel proud of ourselves when we reach a goal, say, to lose weight or quit smoking. We appreciate the added benefits of feeling healthier, having more money or fitting back into our skinny jeans. We also receive support and compliments from our family and friends which encourages us to continue to strive towards our goal.

Sometimes children need some help to reach goals. They may respond to tangible or EXTRINSIC motivators. Parents may negotiate some treat or reward for effort for achieving a goal, particularly if the child becomes disheartened or is struggling. This may be especially beneficial if your child is trying to achieve a behaviour related goal.

Make sure you acknowledge your child's progress along the way. Knowing that mum or dad noticed will increase your child's sense of accomplishment and reinforce their self-determination.

As a parent you know your child best and can decide whether they will need the encouragement that a reward will offer or if they are self-motivated to achieve their goals. Whatever you decide, make sure you acknowledge when the goal is achieved and take time to celebrate.

Confidence and Self Esteem

Being able to set and accomplish goals gives your child some control over the way they change and grow. This allows them to feel confident about taking care of themselves and contributing to their family, school and community in a positive way. The knowledge that they can take care of the basic tasks that daily life requires will help them gain the confidence to face any unexpected challenges.



SMART Goal Setting

We have discussed the benefits of goal setting, short and long term goals and motivation. But how do parents help their children set goals that are appropriate and realistic? A popular model for goal setting is to make sure that goals are SMART.



Specific: Can your child see clearly what they want to achieve?

Measurable: How will your child know that they are making progress towards their goal and how will then know when the goal has been reached?

Attainable: Is there a plan for achieving the goal and a reasonable likelihood that it can be reached?

Realistic: Does the goal stretch your child beyond their current capacity so they improve but is not so difficult that it is beyond their ability?

Timely: Have you identified a specific time when the goal will be reached?

...and finally

Think about what school success means for you and your child. We all have big ambitions for our children, and while we may be motivated by the best intentions, it is important not to let the pressure become overwhelming.

We need to focus on current expectations and stop stressing about future long term success. Of course we would all love our children to be the next Einstein or prima-ballerina, but we need to focus on what our 7 or 10 year old is capable of learning during THIS year.

“Our goal as parents is to produce children who are learners that work hard and show steady academic growth month after month. Once parents change to this mindset, they will find that the stress level in the house will go down and their children will become happy and successful learners.”

Sharon Duke Estroff
www.scholastic.com



Want to know more?

The following links have been used to put together this eGuide and provide a wealth of information for parents who would like to know more about goal setting.

<http://assist.educ.msu.edu/assist/classroom/community/strategies/homelearning/toolgoalsetting.pdf>

<http://singleparents.about.com/od/yourchildseducation/qt/settinggoals.htm>

<http://www.kidspot.com.au/Back-to-School-For-parents-Goal-setting-for-the-new-school-year+3929+153+article.htm>

<http://voices.yahoo.com/how-parents-set-education-goals-help-their-6687616.html>

<http://www.thelearningcommunity.us/resources-by-format/tips-for-parents/setting-goals.aspx>

<https://www.kumon.co.uk/blog/helping-children-learn-to-set-goals/>

<http://www.oxfordlearning.com/2005/08/08/help-your-children-set-goals-for-success-top-ten-t/#sthash.hPWkV5O0.dpuf>

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct92/vol50/num02/Using-Multiple-Intelligences-to-Set-Goals.aspx>

<http://www.examiner.com/article/academic-goal-setting-for-k-8-students>

<http://laurelsprings.com/2013/01/30/goal-setting-for-kids/>

<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748704758904576188453057819300?mg=reno64-wsj&url=http%3A%2F%2Fonline.wsj.com%2Farticle%2FSB10001424052748704758904576188453057819300.html>

<http://www.scholastic.com/parents/resources/article/parent-child/setting-school-year-goals-kids>