

Teach Your Child How to Set Goals— And Reach Them!



It has been said that a goal is “a dream with a deadline.” Educators know that one of the best ways to give children the motivation to reach their dreams is by teaching them how to set achievable goals, reach them and then set even higher goals.

Here’s a step-by-step approach you can use at home to teach your child how to reach any goal—from getting ready for school on time and completing schoolwork to achieving a better grade on a math test.

QuickTip

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Choose an Attainable Goal

Kids want to change the world. That’s great—but they can become frustrated when it doesn’t happen right away. Your job is to help your child choose a goal that can be reached. She can’t eliminate world hunger—but she can work at a soup kitchen to feed people in your community.

The best goals are those that help children stretch, reach and grow—but are within their sights. Choosing a goal that is impossible to achieve will defeat your child even before she begins.

Be a Cheerleader For Your Child

Teams have cheerleaders because visible support can help athletes reach their goals. Students deserve the same support when they’re tackling school problems as they do when playing sports. You can be a cheerleader for your child. Here are some encouraging things to tell your child while she’s working toward a goal:

- **Practice makes perfect.** Let your child know that effort is important—and that it will pay off in the end.
- **We’re all on the same team.** Remind your child that you, she and the school are all working together toward the same goal: her success. Be sure to stay in touch with your child’s teachers.

- **Help keep score.** Make sure your child sees the results of her hard work.



HOW TO ACHIEVE GOALS:

Setting realistic goals is good—but achieving them is even more important. Here's a five-step process that can help your child reach his goals:

- 1. Write it down.** Have your child post his goal where he can see it. Psychologists say that people are more committed to goals they write down. Putting a goal in writing will help remind your child of his ultimate objective every day.
- 2. Brainstorm strategies to reach the goal.** Once your child has selected a goal, it's time to help him think of ways to break it down into smaller, achievable steps. For example, if his goal is to improve his spelling grade, he might:
 - **Divide the list of words** into several small lists of just a few words each. Study just one list until he can write those words correctly, then go on to the next list until he can correctly write all the words on all the lists.
 - **Spell the words aloud**, using the "one small list at a time" technique, until he can spell all the words correctly.



- **Use each spelling word** correctly in a sentence.
 - **Ask family members** to give practice tests on a few or all of the words. They can ask him to write them down, spell them aloud, tell what they mean or use them in a sentence.
- 3. Check progress.** As your child completes each step, praise his progress. Remember—nothing succeeds like success. If he gets off track, help him refocus.
 - 4. Look for lessons** in both success and failure. Did your child reach his goal? Why or why not? If he did, what can he learn from his success? If he didn't reach it, what can he learn that may help him in the future? Remind your child that even if he didn't reach his goal, he is still learning.
 - 5. Celebrate progress**—and set another goal. Each time your child reaches a goal, he's building his self-esteem. Help him set another goal that will make him stretch and grow just a little more.

Avoid Unrealistic Expectations

Parents sometimes set unattainable goals for their children. These unrealistic expectations can harm a child's self-esteem.

If your child consistently fails to meet your expectations, you may need to change what you expect. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- **Why do I have this expectation?**
- **What purpose does it serve?**
- **Is this expectation** based on my needs or my child's?
- **Is it realistic to expect this** of a child this age and temperament?

There is a lot of wisdom in the old Chinese proverb, "The longest journey begins with but a single step." That simple, step-by-step idea is the secret to helping your child set and reach worthwhile goals. By first choosing a realistic goal, achieving it through small steps, and then setting a new even higher goal, your child can achieve success in nearly anything he chooses to do!

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