



## 5 Parenting Goals for 2018

It's not too late to make some new resolutions for this new year! Parenting is a complicated job, but even small improvements can make a big difference and offer your child benefits now that will continue to pay off in the future. Here are a few parenting goals that make good New Year's resolutions because they are achievable, with just a little bit of practice.

### 1. KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN

Everybody has good days and bad. We all have different moods and reactions that are fueled by feelings that we may or may not recognize in the moment. Children experience this too, but they are even less likely to reflect on why they don't feel happy or cooperative. They may be grumpy, unable to listen, or follow directions. This could be related to poor diet, lack of sleep, or just the simple need for a break in their daily routine. Grumpiness may also be related to hurt feelings or fears and worries. Sometimes those feelings are rooted in surprisingly minor misunderstandings or simple things that can easily be fixed. So, how do we establish the kind of communication with children so they feel safe approaching us, as parents, when they have these feelings that they may or may not understand?

Sharing uneasy feelings takes practice and it only becomes a skill if children are confident that they won't be punished or criticized for doing so. That means parents have to watch for changes in mood and behavior and respond supportively. That often means putting other things aside for a moment. Is my child just hungry or perhaps tired, or is he feeling frustrated about something? Could she be angry with someone or nervous about something?

Parents can create a safe environment for children so that they can switch gears and get their needs met rather than engaging in a power struggle. This can calm the situation and it teaches children to become empowered, communicate well, and be strong.

### 2. PARTNER WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHERS

Everyone is busy and parent-teacher communication is one of those things that often gets overlooked until there is a problem. Parents and teachers each have a responsibility to try to prevent problems. Sometimes teachers find that proactive communication is not always reciprocated so they avoid bothering parents.

Opening up communication is a way of making it clear that you are interested in partnering with the teacher to do well by your child.

Your child may need extra help in a specific area or with a certain project. Homework is an activity where parents get to see how children are coping with lessons and skill development. It is also a window into self-esteem and your child's feelings about their life and work at school. These are areas of potential partnership between parents and teachers. Behavior is another topic for two-way communication. Not necessarily bad behavior but changes in mood or ability to concentrate are normal and important to know about and discuss. You may know of changes or stressors at home that would help your child's teacher to be understanding and supportive. It might be that you or perhaps the teacher has developed a strategy that works well as a support to the child and you can learn from each other.

### 3. INVEST IN SELF-DISCIPLINE

Children need structure and predictability. It helps to reduce anxiety because they are learning everything for the first time at an amazing pace and that can sometimes leave them feeling exhausted. They need to experience the repetition of activities to perfect their skill. They also need your help in setting a pace that ensures there is adequate time and energy needed to be successful with tasks. They also need your example of self-discipline as they learn how to create order and manage time and emotions.

Here are a few tips for teaching and modeling self-discipline:

- Set rules, for yourself and your child, and follow through with rewards and consequences as planned
- Set the schedule and try to stick with routines for meals, homework, and bedtime
- Reflect on choices and the impact of choices so your child learns to think of others and make good decisions
- Encourage your child to express difficult emotions like frustration, anger, and disappointment in ways that allow them to validate their feelings without hurting themselves or others
- Establish positive expectations for play and activity that allow them to be powerful and respectful

## 4. ENCOURAGE AGE-APPROPRIATE INDEPENDENCE

Learning about independence requires some trial and error. Every child is different and they all need support and monitoring as they develop skills at their own pace. Parents should be cautious, ensure safety first, but yet, let children try new things.

As children age, independence extends to big things like independent study, independent transportation, independent choices related to food, clothing, friends, and interests. If we want that process to go well, it helps to begin with practicing independence in small, thoughtful ways.

- Allow young children to solve puzzles and feed themselves on their own.
- Gradually teach children to participate and then master home tasks and self-care: pick out their clothing, dress themselves, tie their own shoes, pack school snacks, put away their toys and books, keep their room organized, make lunches the night before, and set their own alarm clocks
- As they grow, encourage them to do homework and projects with more independence, letting them ask questions and get help as needed.
- Have your child help around the house and gain responsibilities instead of waiting to be served. Some skills children can help with are putting away laundry, setting and clearing the table, helping you to bake and cook, and keep their space in order.

## 5. REMEMBER TO HAVE AN OPEN HEART

Of course, you love and cherish your children. We can at times become tired by responsibilities and other challenges. Everyone carries burdens and experiences adversity. Combine that with the drive that a parent feels to push children so they will become strong and stay safe and you can see how easy it is for routine parent-child communication to become impatient and over-critical.

The most valuable parenting resolution for 2018 may be to keep an open and loving heart when relating to your children. Be sure they are not afraid to approach you. Remember that they are small, young, and figuring it out as they go. They are most vulnerable to you and your opinions of them. The key is to put the time and attention in to good things so your relationship with your child is not defined by stress and reactions to problems.

If you would like more information on this topic you can contact Family Centre and ask to speak with the Community Support Worker at 232-1116.

- Talk with your child about fun and interesting things each day – even if it's just for a few minutes.
- Put down your smart phone, turn off the TV and computer at important moments in the day such as when your child returns home, at mealtimes, and bed time. Look them in the eye while having a conversation.
- Speak to your child in a tone and with the words that you would like them to use with others. Make this an example of respect that they can repeat in all of their important relationships in life.
- Express your love every day, no matter how difficult the day may be.

There's always room for improvement in our lives, and it doesn't have to be a new year to make a change. However, by setting new goals for yourself and then following through, your children will see the value in setting goals for themselves and following through. Tell your child about one or two of your new goals and then strive to achieve it together. It's okay to make mistakes and have setbacks, but admit that to your child so that the two of you can work together to get back on track. Show your child the real value of continually striving to succeed.

We wish you a very happy, healthy, and prosperous 2018 and beyond!