



# Goal Setting and New Year's Resolutions

For many of us, New Year's resolutions are grandly made and easily broken. Why? Because a resolution is just that—a decision. To make a life change, you need more than a decision. You need a plan. The plan is the guide to put your decision into action so that you can reach your goal. It's up to you to take steps to get closer to your goal. Learning how to set goals takes practice.

Whether you resolve to lose weight, save money, or adopt a healthier lifestyle, New Year's resolutions can be hard to keep. By Valentine's Day, most New Year's resolutions are a distant memory. Help your child understand that time and patience are usually involved in making changes. It takes time and commitment to your plan for your resolution to become a habit.

Setting a small goal, like getting up half an hour earlier in the morning so that you can get where you need to be on time, may be challenging—it just takes practice. After a few weeks or months, it will just be a positive habit. Knowing that you can make small changes can give you the motivation and confidence to tackle a bigger goal. An adult may choose to become a nonsmoker or start exercising regularly; a child could choose dribbling a soccer ball or practicing multiplication tables on a daily basis.

Setting realistic goals can lead to a healthier lifestyle and improved self-esteem. The temptation to make New Year's resolutions can be strong, but you can set all kinds of goals at any time during the year. Pick a day that's meaningful for you—your birthday, your anniversary, your child's birthday, or any personal date.

Children also benefit from learning how to plan and reach goals. It helps them learn how to manage their time and make good decisions—skills that can have a lasting and positive impact on their future. Together with your child, set a healthy goal and create a plan! Working toward goals can improve your life in many ways. Once you've accomplished a goal, be it big or small, you'll know it can be done and you'll have confidence for your next goal.

**The following tips can help you and your children successfully plan and achieve your goals:**

- **Be specific.** When thinking about goals, be as exact as possible. People who set specific goals are more likely to succeed. For example, instead of saying that you want to save money, set a specific goal to save \$20 (or whatever your goal amount is) per week.
- **Put it in writing.** Write down exactly what you want to achieve and post it in a place where you will see it every day. This will help remind you of what you're working toward. When you write, use positive terms. For example, instead of writing, "I will stop eating junk food" re-word your goal in more positive terms: "I will make healthy food choices."
- **Set realistic goals.** When you think about setting goals, make sure that they are within your reach. Be mindful of your finances, schedule, and other personal affairs. Remembering these important factors will help you set realistic goals. It's unreasonable to expect to make a lot of big changes at the same time.
- **Develop an action plan.** Create a timeline with steps toward your goal. Set deadlines for each step and cross them off as you go. Sometimes just crossing things off and watching your list get smaller can give you a sense of accomplishment and help you stay motivated.
- **Believe in yourself.** Stay positive about your progress. Share your goal with a friend and ask him to help keep your spirits up. To quote Henry Ford, "If you think you can or you can't, you're right."
- **Be flexible.** Keep in mind that setbacks can happen. Don't get discouraged and give up. Try again! Your hard work will pay off!
- **Ask for help.** If you get stuck or need a little encouragement, don't be afraid to talk about it. You might be surprised what kind of support people offer.
- **Reward yourself.** Acknowledge your achievements, even the small ones. Reaching a goal takes hard work and you should be proud of your efforts. Celebrating could mean sharing an apple with your child or taking some time for yourself.

Having clear goals and a plan can bring your family together and help you be healthier all year. All positive changes—tiny or drastic—can improve your everyday life. Make this New Year count and create a plan to follow through on your resolutions!

**Source: [www.family.samhsa.gov](http://www.family.samhsa.gov)**