



Setting Goals for a New School Year

By Jodie Fishman

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Before my son's first day of kindergarten, I asked him what he was most excited about.

He answered without hesitation: "My backpack!"

At least he was honest. The back-to-school air is filled with questions for our school-goers (How was your summer? What class are you in this year?) along with school supplies, feelings of anticipation, first-day jitters, and maybe even some resolutions.

That's right — resolutions. Our family calls the night before the first day of school New School Year's Eve. It's the perfect fresh start as kids move to new classrooms and embark on exciting new learning adventures.

As you pack your child's backpacks with gear for the new year, don't forget to fill their minds with goals to help make this school year their best yet.

Easy ideas for new school year resolutions

Try something new. Encourage your child to embrace a new experience. Your child could try new foods at lunch, join a new after-school club, or even read a new genre of books. It may take a little courage — like when Daniel Tiger was worried about starting gymnastics. But Dad Tiger taught him that if you're brave, you can do anything. (That exact scenario happened

with my daughter, and now gymnastics is her absolute favorite activity. It was a great “try something new” success for our family!)

Talk to someone different. Making new friends is fun, but it can be a little scary too. Encourage your child to introduce themselves to three new friends (or teachers) each day until they’ve met everyone in their class. New friendships take time, but the small goal of taking a risk and talking to someone new can have big rewards. This goes for parents too: Introduce yourself to your child’s teacher, parents of your child’s classmates, or even the principal — the principal’s office doesn’t have to be scary!

Improve routines. Are mornings hectic in your home? Do evenings leave your family frazzled? Brainstorm together to find small ways to make school-day routines a little less stressful. Maybe you can pack lunches the night before, create a secret handshake to help your child feel confident at dropoff, or come up with a bedtime routine to ensure that your child gets enough rest to take on each new school day.

Focus on progress. Help your child prepare for challenging times at school by creating a go-to mantra to repeat or routine to try when things get difficult. Talk about what their triggers might be and how they can cope in a healthy way. Could they take five minutes to cool off when something doesn’t go their way? Would their teacher allow them to write in a journal or draw a picture when they feel frustrated? Could they try a checklist (with pictures or words) to help stay on task? When things don’t go as planned at camp, Donkey Hodie and Panda take a deep breath and then sing a catchy tune about changing their plan—which makes them more prepared to handle disappointment and come up with a new one.

Help your child make their New School Year’s resolutions stick

We sometimes lose steam on our resolutions. Here are a few ideas you can keep in mind to help your child continue with their goals as the year goes on!

Measure up. When you and your child set a goal, keep in mind how you can keep track of how they can achieve it. When Arthur set a goal to do something nice for D.W. once a day, his goal was measurable and achievable!

Create visual reminders. Get crafty! Write or draw pictures that help you remember your resolutions, and put them in places they can be seen easily like the refrigerator, the bathroom mirror or even the front door. If your child’s goal is to remember all of the things they’re supposed to bring to school, put a checklist by the door that they’ll see on their way out. If you’re trying to stick to a new morning routine, create a schedule with pictures or words so your child knows what to do, and in what order, to get ready.

Goal set as a family. Show your children the importance of setting goals by doing it together. Share your own goals with your child. Consider some family goals, too! Maybe your family can resolve to take a walk after dinner three nights a week, or replace TV time with board games once a week. Figure out what works for your family and stick with it!

Celebrate the small things. Pick a time to revisit your resolutions and discuss your progress on individual and family goals. Do your goals need to be tweaked? Will a family discussion get you back on track? Don’t forget to praise your kids for sticking to their resolutions and accomplishing their goals. Your praise — plus that feeling of accomplishment — is a tremendous reward.

Happy New School Year! Here’s to embracing the excitement, backpacks that don’t weigh your little ones down, and resolutions that uplift your family.

Jodie Fishman works at the intersection of public health and communications. She currently serves as Chief Content Officer for Bright by Text, a non-profit that sends free, timed text messages to parents to promote their child’s healthy development and school readiness. Jodie’s writing on health and parenting has been featured in HuffPost, the Washington Post and more. Jodie holds a Master of Public Health with a focus in maternal and child health and is a Master Certified Health Education Specialist (MCHES). She has three young children and an iced coffee addiction.