

Resolutions

December 31, 2009



It's that time of year again, when we take a look at our lives over the past year and realize we may need to hide the chocolate a bit more cleverly, cut up the credit cards, and call friends more often. Oh, and maybe get another hour of sleep each night.

But parents aren't the only ones who can find ways to do things differently or better in the new year. Why not get the kids involved, too? Goal setting is a great way for your young ones to learn about responsibility and establishing positive new habits.



Kids generally enjoy making New Year's resolutions. Making a promise to themselves and striving to keep it can be challenging and rewarding. And there may be some benefits for you, too, if your kids learn how to keep their promises.

When To Do

New Year's Eve or New Year's Day

What To Do

The key is to make resolutions that are realistic, positive, and achievable. You can help your kids by explaining what it takes to make a successful resolution.

Consider these tips:

1. *Be realistic.* Kids will, as you might expect, earnestly tell you they can give up TV or eat everything on their plate at every meal for the entire year. (Yeah, right!)
 - a. With younger kids, help them choose a simple resolution that is part of daily life and within their reach in the near future (how about, say, brushing their teeth at least once a day?).
 - b. For kids to feel successful, they need to experience success, so it's best to pick resolutions with results that can be seen fairly soon. For example, you could suggest that instead of giving up TV altogether, they cut out one favorite TV program a week. Try replacing it with reading, playing outside, crafts, or another pleasurable activity.
2. *Don't force resolutions.* You can suggest some goals for your kids, but ultimately it's important that you allow them to choose for themselves. This will encourage them to form their own ideas about how to handle many aspects of their lives.
3. *Write it down.* Encourage your kids to write down their resolutions, embellish them if they'd like, and post them as declarations on the refrigerator or in other prominent places as a constant reminder of their goals. In fact, you can make a family 2010 resolution chart:
 - a. Remind your kids every evening before bed to mark off the areas in which they followed their New Year's resolutions.
 - b. Make sure your resolutions are on the chart too! Good role modeling can go a long way.
4. *Take small steps.* Your kids might propose giving up candy or packaged snacks, but stopping cold turkey will probably fail. Suggest instead that twice a week they go for a crunchy apple instead of after-school chips.
5. *Encourage and support.* If your kids slip up and sneak in the TV show they were supposed to skip, tell them setbacks happen; don't be discouraged, but try, try again.

Some ideas that work well for elementary age kids:

1. *Picking stuff up.* Kids have short attention spans and often have a difficult time picking up after themselves without being told. This is a good goal for your kids to work toward.
2. *Helping others.* If your kid's not an only child, pitch the idea of helping siblings helping each other with everyday things.
3. *Sharing.* This is an area that is often tough for young kids. Remember to praise your kids when they do share and play nicely.

Talk about it

Because this is a year-long project, you can check in with your kids once a month — or oftener — to see what they think about this keeping resolutions business. Are they feeling good about what they are doing? What have they learned so far? Would they like to change anything?