



EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONNECTION

MOVING LIVES FORWARD

NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

Keep them simple, and WITH your family

I know, I know. After the year we just had, you don't want to make resolutions for yourself let alone with your kids. If you approach it the right way, though, you can set them and yourself up for good goal-setting habits in the future. And as a bonus, setting the example for your kids might be the motivation you need to finally strengthen your own determination.

We like to call them "resolutions" this time of year, but a resolution without a plan is just asking for failure. Resolve to "eat better" with no real roadmap to get there, and you'll be back into the cookie jar by Friday. But if you set a goal to live healthier with specific incremental changes, such as talking walks in the morning and choosing a few new healthy recipes to work into your regular meal plans, even small improvements can feel like victories.

It's the same for kids. If they resolve simply to "listen better," they'll be tuning you out before the sun sets tonight. New Year's resolution time is a really just a good chance to talk to your kids about goal-setting and how good it feels to make a plan to improve on something that has been challenging for you. Even small children can start to make goals no matter how small, it will pay off big time when they are older and understand the concept more!

Make it a family affair. Turn off the TV and gather around the dining room table. Come armed with your own goal/resolution, along with the steps you'll take throughout the year to meet it. For example, if you have struggled to find enough time for yourself this year (um, all of us?), your resolution might be to carve out a small chunk of time each day to do something you love. You can make a list of ideas: Take a relaxing bath, call a friend, do some yoga, or take a walk through your favorite park. Ask your kids for any suggestions they have to help you meet your goal.

Then, ask them if they have a something they'd like to work on. If they don't have any ideas, you can prompt them with

broad suggestions, like school goals, behavior goals, friend goals, or goals for helping more around the house (age appropriate) It could be as simple as learning to tie their shoes.

Jennifer Kolari, child therapist and author of *Connected Parenting*, told Parents.com that the parent's agenda should not be the conversation-driver. Your kids may start with goals that are more "material goals," such as collecting a certain type of toy. That's okay! "Don't say, 'that's not a good goal, be open to what's important to them.' "It's a great way to have a meaningful conversation with your kids and see what they're thinking."

If individual resolutions seem too daunting for your kids, you could also come up with a family resolution. Talk about the time of day that is most challenging for your family. Maybe transitioning from breakfast time into work/school time has been a struggle every day. Or maybe you've all found yourselves losing your cool during the usual bedtime routine. Identify a family challenge and talk about the steps each person can take to help ease the frustration. Another option is to identify something you want to do more of together as a family in the coming year, such as a weekly game night or a monthly hike.

Just keep it simple and positive!

Cheryl's Corner of Caring

"Concentrate on counting your blessings and you will have little time to count anything else."
Woodroll Kroll

As you check in during the year, if someone isn't doing well with a particular resolution (and that someone might be you), there is no need to shame or punish. It's an opportunity to brainstorm how to adjust the goal or the baby steps for better success. This helps kids learn that goals aren't written in stone; they're fluid and meant to be tweaked as necessary over time.

We all know that 2020 was a very different and difficult year. Let's take control of 2021 and make some simple, positive, personal and family goals that you can be proud you worked towards this time next year. Whether you hit your goals perfectly is not the point. It's setting them and giving them effort is what matters. Doing this as a family together could be a great brand new tradition. You got this!