

# Families Aim For Improvement by Setting Goals

by Sylvia W. Lee

**January** 1 marks the beginning of a new year and a time many of us make annual resolutions.

As Ellen Goodman once wrote in her column, “Across the country there are millions of cigarettes waiting to be stomped out, tons of fat waiting to be lost, miles to be run, lives to be organized, and selves to be improved.”

It is time to make positive changes in our lives, to learn from our mistakes in the previous year and view them as missed opportunities. It is our sincere attempt to have a happier new year.

However, halfway into the year, we often find our best intentions fading, then joining others from years gone by on the shelf for “things to do later.” Perhaps one way of making our resolutions become realities is to look at them in a different way and make them known to others who will support and encourage us.

In an article for *The Christian Science Monitor*, Caryl Krueger suggests an alternative to resolutions—personal and family goals. She relates an anecdote about a family she knows that prefers goals to resolutions because resolutions are too intimidating, referring to formal pledges achieved only with determination and willpower. “Goals are better since they are desired objectives achieved with creativity,” Krueger writes. “Youngsters like that idea—it frees them from being locked into an outlined plan. And what fun it is to live adventurously!”

A “Looking Ahead” supper is planned in January, during which they reminisce about the good things of the past year: a family trip, a new pet, a morning with Grandpa, feeding the birds, sledding on a slippery hill, sharing a game on a winter afternoon, the day they walked home in the rain, what was best about the holidays. Then they set their family and individual goals for the new year.

When helping children make goals, Krueger says, parents can balance easily attainable ones (to hang up towels when finished bathing) with others that require more work (to earn \$100 for a new bike); specific ones (to practice playing the violin 15 minutes each day) with others that are more general (to be helpful around the house.) Children should be encouraged to make goals for character and lifestyle improvements as well as for material “wants.”

An insight Krueger shares is that children sometimes are unaware of areas that need improvement, and if the idea is presented attractively (“We could appreciate and enjoy what you were saying if you shared your stories after swallowing your food.”), a child readily accepts the challenge.

She gives families the following suggestions:

## **FAMILY GOALS**

To take an after-supper walk regularly.

To save electricity by turning off unnecessary lights and appliances.

To plan a summer camping trip.

To start seedlings indoors.

To never say “shut up.”

To get to know a new family.

To plan family activities that are easy on the pocketbook but high on fun for the whole family: hikes, picnics, round-robin storytelling, visits to a zoo or museum, a ride on a bus to somewhere new, a tour of the fire station with a sack of cookies being your entrance fee.

### **GOALS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN**

To learn to tie bows.

To save for a skateboard.

To feed the dog each day.

To always tell the truth.

To be a good sport at soccer.

To clear the dishes every night.

To get along with sisters and brothers.

### **GOALS FOR OLDER CHILDREN**

To get a driver’s license.

To learn to play the guitar.

To be in the school play.

To smile more often.

To hang up clothes once a day.

To be more even-tempered.

### **GOALS FOR PARENTS**

To be home four nights a week.

To read a book a month.

To express appreciation daily.

To become a “B” tennis player.

To learn a new skill or hobby.

When the family is ready to set their goals, Krueger’s advice is that parents begin by discussing their own aims first. The children, then, will be less shy in talking about their own desires and ideas for self-improvement. But the rule is that suggestions to others should begin with the phrase, “Would you like to have as a goal...?” (to raise your spelling grade from a “C” to a “B,” or to earn money for camp.)

Each list should be a compilation of what family members want and what parents or a sibling can inspire a child to accomplish. Keep these lists and bring them out the first of each month to talk about them again—or even change them. Offer hoorays and plenty of praise for progress and refrain from making derogatory comments about unachieved goals. Hints on the “how to” of achieving are far more helpful.

By the time the next year arrives, family members can look at their lists and feel proud knowing what goals they have accomplished, rather than guilty for not carrying through with resolutions.

May you all enjoy a year of learning, laughter, love and good health!

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