

January 2016 Podcast Script

Resolutions and Goalsetting...not an ADULTS ONLY topic

Welcome to the Science of Parenting a podcast dedicated to sharing scientific information with parents. I am Lori Hayungs, Human Sciences Specialist in Family Life Program for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

Eat better, Exercise more. Get organized. Learn something new. It's that time of year when adults set New Year's resolutions. But what about your children setting goals for the New Year? Have you encouraged them to set a goal? Have you helped them understand the steps to achieving a goal? Resolutions are helpful for adults to get and stay on track and potentially, goal setting can also be a powerful life skill for our children.

Educational research studies have demonstrated that children who are actively involved in their own learning and are encouraged to set their own learning goals are more self-directed and motivated. Schools and classrooms have adopted this approach. Maybe children could benefit even more, if parents, reinforced this strategy at home and helped our children identify some specific goals and what better time of year....that with the New Year.

Why do we want children to learn how to set goals? Why should we encourage them to set goals? In order to succeed in school and in life, our children need to develop the skill of self-determination. In other words, they need to be able to make their own decisions and guide their own behavior. Setting goals can facilitate this process because it helps kids make the connection between their own personal choices and the end results. As parents, we can participate in this process simply by helping our kids think about and set a personal goal, and then encouraging them to work toward it.

There is power in personal choice. Clearly, children who have a say in what they are learning are more motivated to succeed. Keep in mind that what matters is that your child see themselves making progress. This is far more important than what that specific goal is. Always try to avoid steering your child toward the goal you want him or her to achieve. Instead, trust that the experience of choosing a learning goal and making progress toward it will be a valuable growth experience for your child.

How can we help our children create goals? Begin the discussion of goal-setting simply by asking your child what he or she hopes to accomplish or learn this year. While you might have a few suggestions in mind, you'll want to let this idea develop over a few days. You may find that the expectations your child has for themselves are actually loftier than you would have imagined.

So what's the secret in achieving goals? According to researcher Angela Duckworth, PhD with the University of Pennsylvania is the key to student success both in academic and in life pursuits is "grit". Duckworth's definition describes grit as "pursuing very-long term goals with passion and perseverance" But teaching children "grit" is much more complicated. Typically goal setting strategies involve setting realistic time sensitive

goals that can be measured with quantitative results. But teaching grit...requires identifying and overcoming the inevitable obstacles that we meet when going full-throttle after a goal.

Parent can help by compassionately guiding their struggling children by discussing ways that they can move past the obstacles. Roadblocks don't mean failure. Slip-ups are actually part of the learning process as you retrain your brain into a new way of thinking. It may take a few tries to reach a goal. But that's OK — it's normal to mess up or give up a few times when trying to make a change. So remember that everyone slips up and don't beat yourself up about it. Just remind yourself to get back on track.

How do you help them develop a plan? Once your child picks a personal learning goal, you'll want to help him or her develop a plan for accomplishing it. This will most likely include defining the goal, setting a time frame, and making a list of steps necessary in working toward the goal. You'll also want to talk about how your child will realize that the goal has been accomplished.

Finally, make sure you acknowledge your child's progress along the way. Knowing that mom or dad noticed will increase your child's sense of accomplishment and fortify his or her self-determination. Celebrating successes and success points along the way is important.

Join us this month on the Science of Parenting blog as we discuss temperament traits and how they impact goal achievement. We will discuss establishing new habits and the time involved in making changes. We will discuss overcoming obstacles and how we can help our children learn perseverance and how to help enhance their grit. We will discuss strategies that will help your child set realistic goals and help you guide this process. We will reflect on our own goal setting and how we can be an example to our children. As always we will look forward to hearing you and your own ideas on the importance of goal setting your children.