

How to Teach Kids Perseverance and Goal-Setting

To encourage perseverance, teach preteens how to set goals and work to meet them.

7 Goal-Setting Strategies

In early elementary school, Zach Shugart tried every sport but nothing clicked. "He just didn't want to practice to really develop his skills," says his mom, Candy, of Colorado Springs. It was a similar story with schoolwork. "He had the potential to be a great student but wasn't willing to focus on his studies," Shugart recalls.

All parents share that sense of frustration when their child doesn't try hard enough to accomplish something they know he's perfectly capable of. What can you do? One way to foster a can-do attitude is to help your child learn to set goals and meet them, one small step at a time.

Don't get too excited: You probably won't be able to get your child to start aiming for straight A's right away. That kind of goal would be a major challenge for most preteens. But experts say this is an ideal time to introduce your child to the concept of establishing targets and working toward them.

figure skate is your kid's dream, you're going to have to help her set and achieve her targets. "If parents find they're nagging or getting angry that their child isn't working hard enough to meet a goal, that's a signal they need to back off," warns Edward L. Coyle, PhD, a clinical psychologist in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Be Alert to Possibilities

If your child says, "I wish I could win a prize in the science fair this year," use it as an opportunity to assist him in creating a plan. "Help him write down specific action steps and a timetable for accomplishing each of them," says John Bishop, author of *Goal Setting for Students*. Then check in with him from time to time to help keep him focused on his targets.

Show Them How

"Adults have a much greater sense of what it takes to accomplish goals," says Virginia Shiller, PhD, author of *Rewards for Kids! Ready-to-Use Charts & Activities for Positive Parenting*. So include your child in your own goal-setting to show her how the process works. Say you want to create a garden. Get your child involved in everything from researching plants to turning the dirt. "Adults know how to break a goal down into steps, and that's something kids need to learn," Dr. Shiller says.

So your child wanted to improve in math, but he got another C on the latest test. Now what? Try these steps.

- Review the goal with your child. Maybe it was too vague or too ambitious.
- Ask your child for suggestions. Children are more likely to follow through on their own ideas about what else they can do.
- Help envision the benefits. Ask: "What do you think it will feel like to do better on the next test?"
- Share your childhood frustrations. Your child might feel better when you tell him about your difficulties learning fractions.
- Compliment him. Even if your child doesn't get the A he hoped for, make sure to praise him for trying ("I'm so proud of how hard you studied!").
- Don't use threats or bribes. Offering a video game in exchange for an A, or a punishment for a D, won't help your child's follow-through in the long run.

Just Do It! A Five-Step Plan

Jim Wiltens, author of *Goal Express*, outlines steps to set -- and meet -- any target.

1. **Write it down.** Become a better baseball player, for example.
2. **Make it specific.** "I want to be able to get a base hit once each game."
3. **Consider Pros and Cons.** *Pros:* It will be much more fun and much less embarrassing to be on the team. *Cons:* I already have practice twice a week. Extra practice will cut into my free time.
4. **Define small steps by asking the Three W's.**