

SETTING SMART GOALS WITH CHILDREN

Getting ready to go back to school should involve more than just going through a checklist and making sure that your child has all of the right supplies in their backpack. It also involves making sure that your child has the right mindset and some idea of what it is that they wish to accomplish during the school year. Setting back to school goals is an activity that can help your child to become a more self-directed learner and improve their motivation and independence. It is also a good way to bond with your children at the beginning of the new school year¹.

Every family is different and therefore has needs and challenges that are as unique as the people within them. Anxiety, special needs, behavioural issues, a lack of structure for homework or a lack of confidence and self-esteem are but a few of the challenges that families are faced with.

Whatever your situation, the use of a goal setting framework can benefit children and parents in many ways. Some of these benefits may include: working towards changing undesirable behaviours, helping children to achieve the things that are important to them, and developing important life skills that children can take through to adolescence and adulthood.

Setting goals is not about creating expectations that put unnecessary pressure on children, or attempting to perfect children, rather, goal setting is aimed at encouraging children to do their best by creating a climate in which learning and effort is valued. The benefits of goal setting are not restricted by age and even young children can benefit from setting goals².

Setting SMART goals encourages parents, teachers and children to consider what they want to accomplish and what it will take in order for them to achieve their goals.

SMART Goals are:

Specific – Goals which are well-defined and focused.

Measurable – How will you be able to measure progress and goal achievement? You should be able to ask questions such as “How much?”, “How long?”, and/or “How many?”.

Achievable – Don’t set unrealistic expectations. Goals need to be challenging, but not beyond reach.

Relevant – Are you motivated to achieve this goal? Who are you setting this goal for? Relevant goals are goals you truly want to achieve.

Time-targeted – Be specific about the time-frame you have to achieve a goal. If a target date is not set to accomplish a specific goal, then there is no urgency to start taking action towards accomplishing that goal.

Following the SMART approach, goals have to be relevant, so brainstorm with your child, and help them to come to up with their own goals. They may need help with setting realistic time-frames to achieve their goals. It may also be necessary to break their ultimate goal into smaller steps to get there. To boost their confidence, make sure the goal is challenging, but not unattainable. Most of all, remember to guide your children to set *specific* goals³. For example: A poorly defined goal would be “to get organised”. A SMART goal would be described as follows: “After school on Monday, I will organize my backpack by creating a folder or binder for each of my classes with places to keep my assignments, notes, and homework. After my backpack is organized, I will spend 10 minutes each day when I get home (during the school year when school is in session) going through the items in my backpack to make sure they are in the proper location. I will then dispose of any items I do not need or that do not belong in my backpack”.

For a list of references and links to more information on this topic please visit <http://www.christinedarney.co.za/Psych-Ed/psych-ed.html>

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