

How to Set Family Goals

If you want a family that feels connected, supports one another, lives out its values, focuses on what really matters, and truly enjoys being together (at least most of the time!), then you need a plan to make it happen. It doesn't need to be complex, but it does require an intentional approach.

When you shift to a more proactive, purposeful parenting mindset, you avoid zooming through life on autopilot. By thoughtfully creating family goals, you no longer spend most days rushing your kids to finish their homework, chores and meals so they can dash to sports practices, music lessons, and enrichment classes. Instead, you can savor the positive vision you've created for your family, knowing that you're on the path to building a more meaningful family life.

Why Set Family Goals?

Setting family goals allows you and your family to dream together of what you want to become, what you want to do and what you want to accomplish.

Your family goals can be short- or long-term, fun or serious. Your goals might include volunteering together, becoming more physically active, enjoying nature more, spending more time together as a family, or saving money for a family vacation.

Family goals help you focus on your values and your priorities. Whatever you focus on will increase, so why not focus on concepts like responsibility, service, healthy living and joy? Doing so allows your family to live a more authentic life based on what you've determined *together* is important.

Setting family goals eases decision-making (and relieves a lot of stress) when you've got a plan in place. When you wing it, you're more likely to make mistakes and bad choices. When you plan, you're

carving out time in your schedule to focus on what you've already agreed matters most.

Another bonus — family goals help foster teamwork. When you all agree on a goal, your whole family must work together to make it happen. This builds in accountability, cultivates cooperation and creates a we-sink-or-swim-together philosophy.

Fringe benefit: Once kids see first-hand how to set and achieve family goals, they'll better understand what it takes to set and accomplish personal goals.

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Experts agree that writing down a goal is the first step toward achieving it. Some people can hit the ground running with a simply stated goal scribbled on a napkin. Others need some more structure to help them identify, step by step, what they need to do to transform their goal from a wish into reality. *Do what works best for you.* The idea isn't to complicate the process — it's to move you from dreaming to doing.

To help provide you with some structure (if you need it) and walk you through the goal-setting process, we've included a Family Goal Worksheet, along with helpful tips every step of the way. We've also included a Sample Family Goal so you can see an example of what the finished product might look like.

To help guide you, we offer these goal-setting tips:

- ♥ **Review this tip sheet and the worksheet** before you sit down with your entire family so you're comfortable with the goal-setting process.
- ♥ **Schedule a family meeting** specifically for the purpose of setting a family goal. Ignore the groans and eye-rolling from your teens. Provide tasty snacks to win everyone over.

- ♥ **Stay focused.** This is not the time to discuss behavior problems, homework issues, chores, allowance or anything else. Focus exclusively on goal-setting. (Depending on the ages of your kids and the depth of your goal-setting discussion, you might need to hold several family meetings to talk about goals, agree on one and map out an action plan.)
- ♥ **Involve the entire family,** from preschoolers to teens. Family members will be more likely to take ownership of the goal if they have a say in what the goal is and how the family can work together to achieve it. You might be very surprised at the ideas and insights your kids bring to the table.
- ♥ **Brainstorm and write down all ideas.** Don't dismiss anything at this point. Kids, in particular, want to feel that their opinions matter and their ideas have value. Simply record everything first and discuss it later.
- ♥ **Choose a few of the best ideas and begin discussing the pros and cons.** Keep comments constructive, not critical. Seek everyone's input, including the little ones in your family.
- ♥ **Dream big, but not too big.** To ensure you set a realistic goal, ask, "Do we have the time, resources and ability to accomplish this goal?" You want to set your family up for success by choosing a goal within reach.
- ♥ **When you can all agree on your family's top priority, describe exactly what you want to achieve.** Define your goal as specifically as possible to increase your chance for success.
- ♥ **Make your goal measurable.** If you want to save money for a family vacation, state the exact amount you want to save. If you want to spend more time in nature, include a specific number of hours/week or days/month. You can't gauge your progress if you set vague goals that are difficult to track.
- ♥ **Set a deadline.** Include both a start date and an end date for achieving your goal. This will help you track your progress and see if you're on target.
- ♥ **Talk about motivation.** What will inspire you to achieve your goal? List compelling reasons that will move you forward, even if you hit a roadblock. Refer to this list when you get stuck and need a push forward.
- ♥ **Prepare for obstacles.** Identify circumstances that might throw you off track, and list ideas for handling these pitfalls. Don't let a setback derail your efforts.
- ♥ **Map out a step-by-step action plan for achieving this goal.** Working backwards from the end date, you can create a monthly action plan, including weekly and daily steps to take as needed.
- ♥ **Line up your resources.** What will you need to help you accomplish your goal? Look for books, websites, people, products, workshops, etc., that will give you the tools, guidance and/or skills you need to achieve your goal.
- ♥ **Visualize success.** Vividly describe what success will look and feel like. It might help to make a poster, including images of your goal (such as families spending time in nature or eating a meal together), motivational words and phrases and a photo of your family.
- ♥ **Post your family goal and poster where everyone can see it** – on your fridge or family bulletin board. Writing your goal down and putting it in a highly visible place gently reminds family members what they're working toward.
- ♥ **Make adjustments.** As you work toward your goal, identify what's working and what's not working, then adjust your plan accordingly. Stay flexible with your approach, but stay committed to the end result.
- ♥ **Celebrate!** Once you've achieved your goal, celebrate in a meaningful way. For example, if you achieved your goal of eating dinner together at least once a week for six months, celebrate with a special meal. Cook your family's favorite dishes, get out the good china and silverware, light candles, play soft music, and ask everyone to dress up for dinner.

Setting family goals, working toward them and celebrating your cooperative effort will deepen your family's connection and help you focus on what truly matters to your family.

SPARKparenting.com aims to help parents create a simpler, slower-paced, more meaningful family life. We offer practical ideas, tips and resources that will inspire parents to embrace the **Smart, Purposeful Approach to Raising Kids**.

Family Goal Worksheet

What is our top one-year family goal?	<i>Decide precisely what you want. Make your goal specific & measurable.</i>
What is our deadline for achieving our goal?	<i>Working backwards from this deadline, you can create a monthly action plan.</i>
Why are we committed to achieving our goal?	<i>List compelling reasons that will motivate you, especially when you face obstacles.</i>
What (if any) obstacles do we need to overcome?	<i>Anticipate possible pitfalls & ways to deal with them, but stay focused on your goal.</i>
What is our 12-month Action Plan? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January: • February: • March: • April: • May: • June: • July: • August: • September: • October: • November: • December: 	<i>You need more than desire to achieve your goal — you need to take action. Outline a course of action that moves you toward achieving your goal. Monitor your progress, identify what's working & what's not, and change your approach until you achieve what you want. Use this monthly action plan to create weekly priorities & daily focal points, as needed.</i>
What resources can help us achieve our goal?	<i>List resources that will bring you closer to success (books, games, movies, websites, etc.).</i>
What will it be like when we achieve our goal?	<i>Visualize success. Imagine how you'll feel & what your results will look like.</i>
How will we reward ourselves when we achieve our goal?	<i>Celebrate your success in a meaningful way that ties into your goal.</i>

Sample Family Goal

What is our top one-year family goal? *To give back to our community by investing our family's time, talent and treasure, specifically by volunteering one day/month at our favorite charity.*

What is our deadline for achieving our goal? *December 31, 2010*

Why are we committed to achieving our goal? *We believe that serving others is a key element to achieving our long-term family vision. We appreciate our own blessings more when we help those less fortunate.*

What (if any) obstacles do we need to overcome? *Problem: We're fairly busy already. Solutions: Weed out low-priority activities. Schedule volunteering on our family calendar as a recurring monthly appointment.*

What is our 12-month Action Plan?

- **January:** *Conduct family meetings to discuss what issues are important to us (i.e., homelessness, the environment, animals, etc.). Identify family talents we can offer, such as painting, cooking, gardening, tutoring, etc. Discuss scheduling constraints.*
- **February:** *Research our selected issue to find potential charities to support. Consider local vs. national vs. global impact. Identify charities that welcome family volunteering.*
- **March:** *Contact our chosen charity to learn about specific funding needs and volunteer opportunities. Consider age-appropriateness of available volunteer opportunities.*
- **April:** *Designate one day each month as Family Volunteer Day and schedule it on our family calendar. Contact charity to explain our commitment.*
- **May:** *Review expectations, etiquette, etc., with family members prior to volunteering. Begin volunteering! Hold family discussion afterwards to talk about our experience and our impact.*
- **June:** *Evaluate how Volunteer Day is going and make adjustments as needed. (What's working? What's not working? How can we make more of an impact?)*
- **July:** *Discuss additional ways we can support this charity. Consider kids donating some allowance while we match their donations.*
- **August:** *Set up automatic bank withdrawals to make monthly financial contribution to our charity.*
- **September:** *Review charity's Wish List. Identify items we can buy, donate or collect from others.*
- **October:** *Identify any fundraising events we might like to participate in to further support our charity.*
- **November:** *Research any special holiday/seasonal needs of our charity. Consider enlisting help from neighbors and friends to meet this special need.*
- **December:** *Evaluate our volunteer efforts to date. Review our impact. Consider continuing with this charity vs. helping a different charity. Celebrate our success in achieving our family goal!*

What resources can help us achieve our goal? *SPARK Parenting website, "The Busy Family's Guide to Volunteering" book and our local United Way office.*

What will it be like when we achieve our goal? *We'll be living our lives based on our family value of service. We'll feel grateful knowing that we truly make a difference in the world. We'll feel more appreciative of our own blessings. We'll see first-hand how our efforts positively impact the person/group we are helping.*

How will we reward ourselves when we achieve our goal? *We'll celebrate by creating a scrapbook to document our volunteer efforts and help us remember all the new friends we made and the fun we had in the process.*