



New Year's Resolutions for Parents

The start of the New Year is often a time for reflection, and one of the things parents often reflect on is their children. It's common to think of all the blessings children bring, but also to think of things on which you want to improve. Here are some simple things to consider. Pick and choose those that are right for you and your family!

1. Find Ways to Help Your Children Feel Good About Themselves

Healthy self-esteem helps protect children against life's challenges. Children who feel good about themselves tend to enjoy life more readily, are generally optimistic, and have an easier time handling conflicts and resisting negative pressures.

Ideas:

- Be spontaneous and affectionate. Hugs mean a lot!
- Be truthful, but watch what you say. Reward effort and completion rather than the result.
- Help your children get involved in constructive experiences – emphasize cooperation rather than competition.
- Model positive self-statements.
- Show appreciation for your children and their positive behavior.

2. Slow Down and Really Listen to Your Children

Children return the respect they receive! Model good listening skills with your children, and you might be surprised when you observe them practicing the same skills.

Ideas:

- Engage fully with your children – stop what you are doing and give them your focus.
- Make sure they know you're listening by acknowledging their statements, asking questions, etc.

3. Give Each of Your Children the One-On-One Time They Deserve

Special time with each of your children is important to help maintain your bond, promote self-esteem, and have some fun!

Ideas:

- At Home: do an art project, cook a meal or bake cookies, read a story, play a board game, etc.
- Out and About: go to the playground, on a walk, to a movie, on a picnic, to the zoo, etc. Even a trip to the grocery store can be special if you use the time for quality interaction.

4. Spend More Time Together as a Family

Just as children need more individual time with their parent(s), they also need to spend time engaged with the whole family.

Ideas:

- The ideas in #3 can easily be modified to include the whole family!
- Eat dinner together, even if your schedules only allows for it a few nights a week.
- Plan an outing as a family and then put the plan into action.

5. Read With Your Children (Regardless of Their Reading Level)

Reading with your children (and letting them see you reading) will help to instill a love of reading that will last a lifetime. Reading even 15-20 minutes a day together will help bolster their reading skills.

Ideas:

- Pre-Readers: read simple stories – look at the pictures and have your child describe what is happening; talk about colors, shapes, etc; and practice vocabulary words (point to something and ask what it is *and* say a word and have your child point to the picture).
- Readers: have your child read a level-appropriate story to you and/or read a story to your child that is slightly more advanced than his/her reading level. With older children, take turns reading chapters. Ask comprehension questions along the way.

6. Encourage Healthy Habits

Whether it's related to eating, exercising, fiscal responsibility, etc., your children will benefit physically and emotionally from developing positive habits.

Ideas:

- Be a positive role model. You are your children's first and most important teacher.
- Set goals for the whole family.
- Encourage physical activities your children enjoy.
- Encourage your children to try new, healthy foods.
- Discuss the dangers of misusing drugs and alcohol.
- Help your children learn to manage their allowance (for example: save some, spend some, and donate some).

7. Share Your Beliefs With Your Children

Be specific about the things that you believe in and value, and talk about them often. Live the values in your own life and show your child why they are important.

Ideas:

- If religion or spirituality is important to your family, make it part of your family life, traditions, and rituals.
- Focus on basic values such as good judgment, self-control, respect, responsibility, and resilience.
- Let children do as much thinking for themselves as possible. Teach them your values, then allow them to make choices for themselves within certain contexts.

8. Reward Positive Behavior More Often

Positive reinforcement strengthens what children are doing right rather than what they are doing wrong. It increases the likelihood that the behavior will be repeated. It supports your child's positive deeds and qualities through enthusiasm, descriptive encouragement, and natural, logical rewards. A rewarded child learns, "When I do well, I'm appreciated and I feel good."

Ideas:

- Talk with your child about making good behavioral choices.
- Offer children a more appropriate solution when they are engaging in inappropriate behavior (instead of "don't throw the ball in the house," try "let's roll the ball back and forth").
- Comment on specific positive behaviors (such as picking up toys without being asked to do so).
- Don't link judgment to the reinforcement ("you're a good boy/girl because you did...").
- Tangible rewards (treats, money, etc.) should be used with caution. You do not want to teach your children that they should expect something every time they do well. While sometimes very effective, tangible rewards should be phased out so that, ultimately, children internalize their achievements.

9. Say "I Love You" More Often

Children need to know you love them, and parents should not assume they know that you do. Acknowledging how much you care is important at all ages – even teenagers need to hear it (although they may pretend they don't want to).

Ideas:

- Make "I love you" the first thing you say in the morning or the last thing you say at night.
- Write your children love notes and put them in lunch boxes, sock drawers, under pillows, etc.
- Send your children e-mails or text messages.
- Create a secret "I love you" sign (a wink, an ear pull, etc.) with your children.

10. Take Time to Nurture Yourself

You can't give your children your all unless you take care of yourself as well. Nurturing yourself not only feels good, but it also demonstrates to your children that you value and respect yourself.

Ideas:

- Wake up 15-30 minutes before everyone else so that you can have a few quiet moments to yourself. If you're not a morning person, try setting aside time at the end of the day.
- Start a gratitude journal.
- Treat yourself to a massage, pedicure, round of golf, etc. every now and then.
- Set aside time for your spouse/partner and/or your friends.
- Don't pressure yourself to be perfect!

Sources:

"Character Education Begins At Home" from Families.com
"Developing Your Child's Self-Esteem" from KidsHealth.org
"New Year's Parenting Resolutions" from BabyCenter.com
"Share Beliefs and Values" from Families.com

"Top 10 Ways to Help Children Develop Healthy Habits" from AmericanHeart.org
"Use Positive Reinforcement" from FamilyEducation.com
"Words to Use with Your Kids Every Day" from FamilyEducation.com