

SMART Goal Setting with Our Children



Setting goals can be a valuable tool for our children as they walk through life. It helps them plan, dream, and achieve. However, creating dreamers who never seek God’s plan, don’t work toward their goals, or can’t break down their dreams into actionable steps often causes children (and adults) to feel frustrated, defeated, and shameful.

Hopefully, the ideas outlined here will help us help them become champion goal-setters with hearts focused on God willing to try new things, work towards goals, and see failures as lessons.

With toddlers, we usually just begin with helping them choose between two choices, not truly set goals. However, once children are school-aged and aware that they can make plans and work on those plans, implementing these steps can be helpful in guiding children to make attainable, measurable goals with wisdom.

First steps for goal setting:

G – Give God Glory



We start here because we want our children to understand that our plans may or may not work out, but God's plans always do. That doesn't mean we can plan or work towards goals. It does mean we acknowledge that God is God, and we are not. It means that we bring our hopes and dreams to Him and pray about what He wants us to do. It also helps open the discussion for when children choose to make plans that are clearly outside of God's will. We can help them pray about it and see what God may have in mind instead.

Scriptures to share and discuss (and maybe memorize):

Matthew 6:19-21, 33

Jeremiah 29:10-14

Psalms 37:3-5

Psalms 138

Proverbs 16:1-3, 9

Proverbs 19:20-21

O – Offer Open-Ended Options



The power of asking open-ended questions is tremendous. They open up conversations and get the creative thought processes running. We can ask fun questions such as:

“What if you could accomplish any dream, what would you do?”

“What would make this the best year ever?”

“If you could try or learn anything, what would it be?”

“How could you make a difference in someone’s life?”

“How can you show God’s love to someone this year?”

“How can you help our community?”

“What do you see God doing around you or in your life?”

“If I said you could try anything you ever wanted to do, what was the first thing you thought of?”

“What is God putting on your heart to pray about or do?”

Just reading through these, don’t you wonder what your child will answer?



I heard an idea from a successful business owner interviewed on a channel I listen to on YouTube. When she was young, she decided to try a hobby each year, choosing a new interest, skill, or activity to invest her time in. Then, at the end of the year, she would do a recital or whatever fit with her year’s activity, and she would pray about whether this was something God wanted her to continue. Sometimes she continued while adding another new item the following year, and sometimes she left that activity behind.

I love this idea! For instance, if a child wants to try playing the violin, we can give them the freedom to try it for one year. But they are not required to continue after that year if it is not God’s plan for them. This idea allows children to

experiment and try creative activities without feeling like a failure if they abandon it after that year. It's doable. It allows them to try new things. It gives them freedom to fail without shame.

You can watch the interview on YouTube at https://youtu.be/_f8s4NUi5Xs?si=PZv0O3cfShMfWrGT

A – Allow for Adaptations



Allow for updates and changes. Sometimes, it seems that God “fine-tunes” our goals through the process of reaching them. Sometimes they may be long-term goals that cannot be reached in the timeframe we’ve set. Sometimes God has something a little different in mind than what we originally thought. It’s a valuable lesson to teach our children that goals are not set in stone but, as any plan progresses, changes and fine-tuning is a part of the process. Learning that now will serve them well throughout their lives.

The terminology I’ve used over the years with my children is to hold on to a goal loosely – hold tight enough to keep working on it, but not so tight that God can’t change it if necessary. We are seeking God’s plan, after all. He is the One who is directing our paths. We may not see the whole picture, but He does. So, we don’t need to be afraid of change. It is not failure – it is fine-tuning.

This attitude helps build resilience and lessens fear. For some, it may be uncomfortable, especially if your child is a very conscientious personality. Helping them grasp that ducks rarely stay in a row for long can help them find ways to learn to accept the changes and unpredictable situations that arise in life.

L – Lead in Logical Lessons



Leading our children to create SMART goals that are Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant, and Timely will help them prepare for success.

Help them set goals that they can check off when completed or can measure how close they came to reaching them.

Create smaller objectives where appropriate.

A helpful tool, especially if your child is having trouble planning an actionable goal is to work backwards from the goal to today. This helps them see how to move toward their goals throughout the year. This will also prevent us and them from giving “Sunday School answers” to goal setting. “God wants me to love everyone” is not a goal. It is an ideal, a value, a belief, but it is not a goal. “God wants me to build a friendship with the new girl in class. I will start by asking her to play four-square at recess this week.” That’s a goal.



This tool is helpful even on short, daily plans we have on our “to-do” lists. A business leaders group I’m in calls it the turkey sandwich. That’s where we have an item on our list that we think will take 15 minutes to accomplish without realizing it’s a turkey sandwich. Have you ever thought, “I’ll have a turkey sandwich for lunch” - you have the turkey, but before you can use the turkey, you need to get the bread. But you’re out of bread, so you run to the store and get bread. Now, you put the bread on your plate, but you need mayonnaise before you can put the turkey on the bread. You realize your mayonnaise jar is empty, so you look for the new one which is hiding behind something in your pantry. After taking several minutes to find it, you add mayonnaise to your turkey sandwich, but you need tomato and lettuce before you add turkey. So, you pull those out of the fridge, wash a knife because you didn’t get the dishes done last night, and you like to use

your sharpest paring knife to slice the tomato – it will save time (LOL). So, you wash the knife, slice the tomato, add the lettuce, and now, finally, you can put turkey on your sandwich and eat. So, what should have taken 15 minutes has now taken half your day, and you’ve become “hangry” in the process.

Turkey sandwiches happen with our goals, our to-do lists, and even when running simple errands. Life is full of turkey sandwiches! Our children should learn this early in life.

S – Set Up Sensory Signalers



Children (and adults) need ways to keep track of progress, reminders of the goals they’ve set, and prompts to enjoy the small victories along the way. Creating a visual prayer chart for each child, colorful journal, fun magnets for the fridge, or cute notes on the bathroom mirror as reminders about the goals and reminders to pray about them and work toward them can help children to focus on what they are working toward. Find a way for them to track their progress and celebrate the small goals they’ve achieved along the way.

Children are often visual, and having something they can see to pray about each day can help. Set up a prayer list of some kind whether visual or simply a list

they see daily, so they can keep praying over these goals and keep them in their hearts and minds.

Other considerations:

1. Make sure the goals are theirs. It is tempting as parents to set goals for our kids, but this is an exercise helping them plan their own goals. We can help, but we want them to own their own goals.

2. Consider thinking through different areas of life such as Luke 10:27 suggests. Heart, soul, strength, mind, neighbor.

What are my goals in my family and friendships? (neighbor as yourself)

What are my goals in my education and work? Reading goals? Workshops or learning events I may want to attend? (mind)

What are my physical and health-related goals? Losing weight? Getting in shape? Walking around the block each day? Giving up sodas except for once a week? (strength)

What are my spiritual goals? Read the Bible through in 2022? Memorize 100 verses this year? Spend an hour in prayer each day? (soul)

What are my emotional goals? How can I learn to control my temper? What are some actionable steps for learning to be more loving and kind? Get creative and specific with how to help ourselves become healthier emotionally. (heart)

3. Even though we may consider several areas for making goals, limit how many goals each child will make. One goal, well-planned, that stretches a child in working toward it can teach more life lessons than several small goals that don't require much thought or frustrate a child into wanting to quit.



My Goals!



My Prayer, Praise, and Thanks to God:



Verse(s) I want to memorize this month:



Brainstorm ideas (list or draw ideas of things you want to try, do, or create from the silly to the serious, the easy to the difficult)



Choose:

How many goals will you set for now?

Write them out on the lines below.

Is it countable? (I want to read 100 books by August – not, I want to read more books this year)

Is it measurable? (I want to build a 2-foot-tall Lego tower next week – not, I'm going to build the tallest Lego tower ever)

Is it reachable? (I want to learn to play a new song on the piano by next month – not, I want to climb Mount Everest next week or I want to take a trip to the moon).

Specific - What do you want to accomplish?

Measurable - How will you know when you've accomplished it?

Actionable - What steps will you take to accomplish it?

Relevant - How will this make your life or someone else's life better? Is it worth spending time and energy on?

Timely - How long will it take you to accomplish this goal? Can you do it in a year, or do you need to make yearly goals to reach it in three years or five years?

Goal: _____

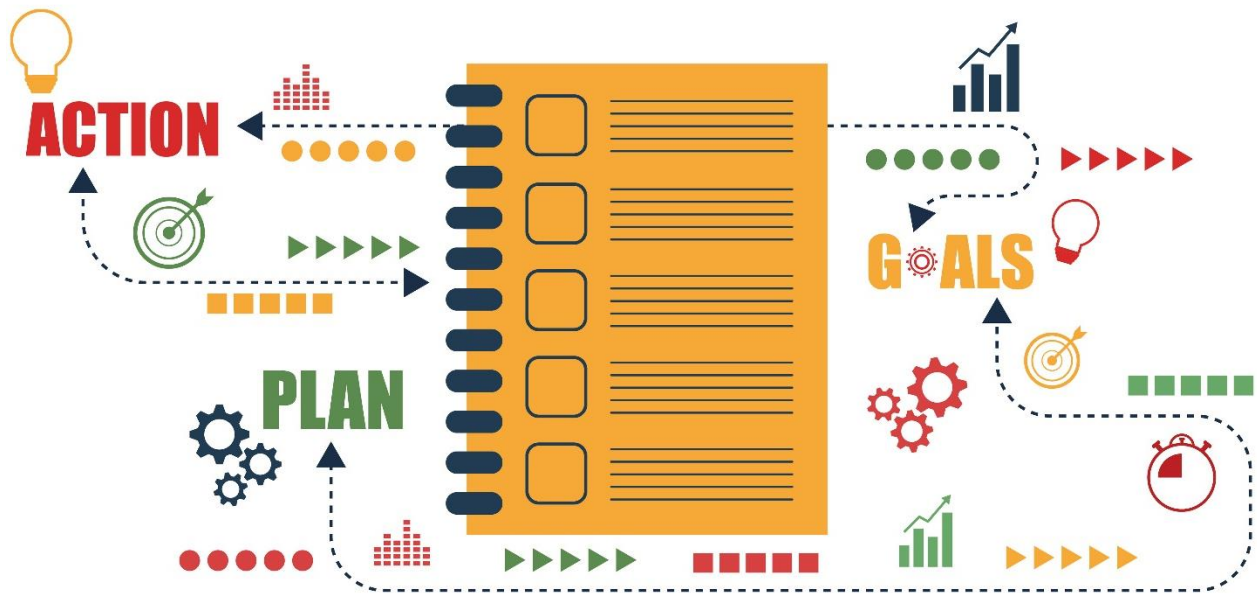
Time (by what date do I plan to reach this goal?): _____

Steps (what steps will I make to reach this goal – list as many as you need. Does this goal require a daily activity? If so, list it):

Victories (list any milestones you want to reach along the way, how you will celebrate each victory, and your final results you hope to see when this goal is achieved): _____

(copy this page for each goal you are making)

- 1. Create a chart or a way to keep track of your progress.**
 - 2. Leave room on your goal page to adjust or change anything as needed.**
 - 3. Do you need help to get started or someone to help you with part of your goal? Ask your parents for help.**
 - 4. Pray for God to help you and show you what He wants you to do.**
- With God, you can achieve anything He wants you to do!**



Commit your actions to the LORD, and your plans will succeed.

(Proverbs 16:3, NLT)