

## Setting Goals

All parents hold beliefs about how their children should behave in different situations. Parenting is more effective and nurturing when those beliefs turn into expectations that match their children's developmental level and skills.

You can encourage your child's growing sense of competence and confidence by setting goals with your child that are appropriate to their development. Set goals that are challenging but achievable. Experiencing success by meeting your expectations or by reaching a goal builds self-confidence and a sense of competence.

### Goal-Setting Guidelines

- **Set a goal.** A goal should be clear, achievable, and realistic.
- **Brainstorm.** Have your child come up with possible solutions to accomplish the goal.
- **Encourage your child's behavior** if they achieve the goal. For example: "That was a great idea using the stool to get the cereal." Not, "You are great."
- **Respond with empathy,** by putting yourself in your child's place, if your child doesn't achieve the goal. This sends the message that it is okay to fail and try again.
- **Don't solve the problem for them.**
- **Reevaluate.** Have your child come up with a new solution if they were not successful. For example, they could decide to work harder, try again, practice more, or do it a different way.
- **Avoid lectures.** Allow the consequences of their choices to do the teaching.
- **Try it all over again.** Starting again will help your child learn from experience.

**Unreasonable goal:** My 2-year-old will be able to tie her shoes independently before we leave the house every morning.

**Reasonable goal:** My 2-year-old will be able to find and put on her shoes in the morning. I will help her tie them.

*WHY: toddlers lack the fine motors skills needed for shoe tying.*

**Unreasonable goal:** My 3-year-old will sort, fold, and put away his own laundry.

**Reasonable goal:** My 3-year-old will put away folded piles of laundry into the correct drawers. I will sort and fold the laundry for now.

*WHY: Complex multi-step instructions are hard for 3-year-olds to remember.*

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