

Ask the Pediatrician: Here are 8 parenting goals to start the new year strong

December 29 2023, by Steph Lee, MD MPH FAAP, American Academy of Pediatrics



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New Year resolutions are often sweeping and grand, but often you can reap the biggest rewards by building off the strengths already in place.

Helping to make your family safer, stronger and more harmonious in 2024 may not require a complete overhaul, but rather a few strategic tweaks.

"This is a great time to take a step back, take a breath and look at how we as a family taking care of ourselves and each other," pediatrician Dr. Steph Lee said. "What are we already doing right? Let's celebrate that first. Then, let's think about ways we can improve together and create a list of individual and shared family goals for the new year."

Here are eight goals for parents and caregivers:

1. Get everyone up to date on recommended immunizations.
Vaccines are the best way to protect yourself, your children, and other loved ones from dangerous viruses such as flu and COVID, which are spiking among children. Call your pediatrician to make sure your children are up to date on all recommended immunizations, and ask any questions you may have. And remind your children that good hand hygiene habits help prevent the spread of germs.
2. Do good digital. What are your kids watching on TV and online? Devote some time to researching age-appropriate media. Make a family media use plan and try to prevent gaming from becoming an unhealthy habit. Remember that screen time shouldn't always be done solo. Watch a show together and discuss what's happening. Play a video game together. Screen time can become bonding time when adults are active participants.
3. Read together. Set aside time for reading each day. For [younger children](#), build it into the bedtime routine. For [older children](#) and teens, share a favorite book by taking turns reading aloud or listen to audiobooks together. Reading has so many brain-boosting benefits for kids. Reading together also strengthens that special bond between you and your child.

4. Get outside and explore. Spending time outdoors can be a great mood booster, and help families get needed [physical activity](#) and vitamin D while enjoying time in nature. Spending time outside also give your child's eyes a healthy [screen-time](#) break and help them sleep better at night.
5. Check your car seat limits for safety. Kids grow so fast and they can easily outgrow car seats faster than parents realize. Keep children riding rear-facing as long as possible, up to the limits of their car seat, because it is the safest mode. This commonly includes children under 2 and most children up to age 4. See if there are any new car seat laws that may be going into effect in your state in the new year. Remind anyone who transports your child by car to abide by all safety rules.
6. Set aside time to cook as a family. Many families enjoy baking treats together during the holidays. Keep the fun going in the [new year](#). Schedule special times to cook together and get children involved, from choosing recipes to buying ingredients at the store. If your child is a fussy eater, this can get them more interested in trying new, healthy foods.
7. Make a [family](#) disaster kit. It's scary to think how disasters like wildfires, hurricanes or tornados could affect our communities, but [extreme weather events](#) are becoming more frequent due to climate change. Being ready is one way to be less afraid. Ask your children what they would want with them in a disaster and assemble necessities, like non-perishable foods, flashlights, and bottled water, for when a disaster strikes.
8. Mind your [mental health](#) and practice self-care. When was the last time you had a check-up? Got proper rest? Depression and anxiety can happen to both moms and dads during and after pregnancy, even up to three years after having a child. The National Maternal Mental Health Hotline is available 24/7 by calling 1-833-943-5746. And for non-emergency resources and support, you can contact Postpartum Support International: call

or text "Help" to 1-800-944-4773.

"Maybe this is the year you decide to join a parent's group for support or maybe it's [time](#) you said no to some things, if you've felt overextended in the past year," Dr. Steph Lee said. "Your pediatrician can help you with your child's health, but we care about parents too. We can give general guidance on self-care. Because when parents are feeling their best, they create a healthy environment for [children](#) to thrive."

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Citation: Ask the Pediatrician: Here are 8 parenting goals to start the new year strong (2023, December 29) retrieved 15 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-12-pediatrician-parenting-goals-year-strong.html>

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