

Successful Psychology

Make Resolutions A Family Affair—Year Round

by Lawrence Kutner, Ph.D.

(NAPS)—New Year's resolutions can be wonderful gifts—not only to yourself, but to your family as well. The problem is that despite all our good intentions, our resolutions often melt along with the winter snow.



Dr. Kutner

By doing things a little differently, you may find that this time-honored tradition can be an ideal way for families to pass on important lessons to children—lessons about planning, decision-making, the importance of accepting responsibility and of keeping one's word all year round.

The key is to have a new type of resolution. This clever approach is outlined in the program known as "Tony's Time," which was developed to help parents teach school-age children about such important matters as taking responsibility and resolving conflicts peacefully.

Realistic resolutions

To make successful resolutions, you'll have to do three important things:

- Make commitments as a family instead of as individuals;
- Focus on the process instead of the results; and
- Keep your goals practical, specific and realistic.

Shared resolutions are an important way for family members to demonstrate how much they care for each other. This kind of teamwork brings your family closer together, and provides the extra support you may need to stick to your resolutions. Besides, if several of you have a vested interest in success, you're more likely to make it happen.

Remember to focus your energies on things you can control, and break big goals down into little pieces. For example, instead of just saying you intend to spend more time with your children, come up with a definite plan—say, spending 10 minutes a day with

each child when you won't be distracted or called away.

Rules, repairs, reinforcements

The "Tony's Time" Web site and booklet take all of this a step further by analyzing several dozen challenges faced by young children and their parents, and giving examples of how to approach them. Each challenge, which is a potential New Year's resolution, is addressed in three ways: a Rule, one or more Repairs and a Reinforcement. The Rules are straightforward and simple; the Reinforcements are things parents can say to their children to encourage the behavior they want.

It's the Repairs—the things that parents and children can do together when there's a problem—where this system gets creative. A child is asked to describe what good manners "sound like," or to create a chart to keep track of the things needed to keep a pet healthy and happy. Parents, of course, can come up with their own creative Repairs that meet their family's needs.

The "Tony's Time" program was developed as a public service by Tony's pizza in cooperation with Stand for Children, a non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring that all children have the opportunity to grow up healthy, educated and safe. On the program's Web site (www.tonystime.com) you can enter a contest that rewards you for keeping your resolutions throughout the year. To learn more, and to receive a free copy of the "Tony's Time" booklet, write to: Tony's Time, P.O. Box 6079, Stacy, MN 55078.

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