

Mindful Minute

A Mental Health Resource for Parents

Communication Strategies for a Positive New Year

The New Year is a great time to adopt new goals for yourself and a great time to bring up what positive things you are hoping 2025 brings to you and your loved ones. Here is a friendly guide to handle that conversation with your child in a way that will bond you closer together and give you peace of mind knowing their headspace, versus a fight about conflicting ideas on what they “should be” or “ought to be” doing.

Ask in a kind way!

Ask your child about their goals in a selfless, non-judgmental way. Take genuine interest in what they are enjoying, and provide encouragement centered on them versus providing your advice or sharing your feelings. Set that foundation of supporting them regardless of whether you like that goal or not, and praise the healthy attribute you see them displaying.

- Example of a 5-year-old who wants to “dig up a new dinosaur” as a New Year’s resolution: “Wow, I’m so proud for you that you want to discover a brand-new dinosaur in the backyard! You are really letting your creativity and beauty shine!”
- Example of a 15-year-old who wants to “glow up” or have a big style makeover: “Honey I’m glad that you’re taking an interest in expressing yourself in a new way with your clothes and makeup. You’ll really let your creativity and beauty shine.”

Let your child develop their own goals and stay curious with questions.

If you are concerned about some of your child’s goals being actually helpful or healthy, it will be a lot easier to ask and get the truth about what they’re up to if you’ve already shown them through words and actions that you support and care for them. We can’t provide healthy criticism without a foundation of caring first. Staying curious and asking questions without judgement or trying to change them will help your child express themselves and develop a better trusting communication between you.

Remember, we want to be supportive of their independent decision-making skills; that’s what we’re training them for as adults! We want to allow them to come to the conclusion that either their goal is helpful and healthy for them, or to have their “ah-ha!” moment to change their mind and avoid the power struggle with us! Instead of shooting down ideas or steamrolling with criticism, ask these questions instead, and let your child take the lead:

- Example of a 13-year-old starting a concerning new diet: “I get that you want to make a dramatic change, and I really appreciate that you’re trying your best to take care of yourself. Is this really the healthiest way to accomplish your goal
- Example of a 17-year-old trying to navigate their busy schedule: “You are so smart and talented to be taking on all of these activities at once. But like you mentioned to me earlier, I can see you’re really stressed out. What’s the most helpful way we can edit your to-do list?”

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Self-Care in the New Year

Remember, caring for yourself isn't selfish. It models balance and resilience for your children.

1. **Take time to relax:** Relaxing activities vary for each person. Try turning on your favorite playlist or television show, or call a friend.
2. **Eat well:** Fuel your body with well-balanced meals to maintain the energy and nutrition needed to care for your family. Make your plate colorful. The more natural food colors on the plate, usually the more balanced the meal.
3. **Practice Gratitude:** Make it a habit to journal your gratitude throughout the year and revisit those entries on challenging days. Reflecting on the things we're thankful for can boost our energy and lift our spirits.

This year, make your mental, emotional, and physical health a priority. You deserve the same love and care you give your family.

Family Bonding Activity

Create a Family Vision Board:

Creating a family vision board is a fun way to come together to share your family's dreams for the year ahead. Family life can get busy and it's easy to feel like time is slipping by. By setting aside time to create a vision board, everyone gets a chance to share their goals and ideas for the family. This activity helps strengthen bonds and gives each family member a voice, while getting the family excited for the year ahead!

Here's how to create a family vision board:

- Set aside time – Plan for about two hours to brainstorm, discuss, and create.

- Gather materials – Notepad, magazines, photos, poster board, scissors, glue, and anything else you like.
- Make it fun – Play your family's favorite tunes and enjoy some snacks while you work.
- Set goals – What does your family want more of? Quality time? Home cooked meals? Time in nature? New traditions? Write your goals on the notepad.
- Share your family's vision – This allows each family member to hear what is important to each other and allows everyone to feel heard. Have different visions? That's okay! Find common themes and get creative with how to represent them. Differences can allow for great discussion and creative compromises.
- Start crafting – Cut out or draw pictures, words, and anything else that represents your family's goals and glue them on the poster board. Be creative – this is your family's vision, so make it fun!
- Keep it visible – Hang it somewhere the whole family can see and refer back to it when needed. Do the family habits you've created for the new year reflect your family's vision? Adjust as needed.

Helpful Resources



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Rediscovering Passion, Purpose, and Potential to Prevent Burnout

When children face challenges, the risk of parental burnout increases dramatically. Parents sacrifice a lot of their time and energy to provide for their children. When a child faces a challenge—a diagnosis, a disability, or a mental health struggle—a parent gives even more. However, when a parent puts themselves last repeatedly, it is neither good for them nor the child. When parents are so spent, they don't have the energy left to attend to their needs. Who cares for the parent? Parents also need sleep, nutrition, exercise, friends, creative outlets, hobbies, and everything that makes them who they are. Many of these things can be on the back burner for a bit, but when neglected continuously, it puts them at high risk of burning out.

So, how will you know if you are feeling parental burnout? Psychological research indicates three main dimensions of burnout: exhaustion, detachment, and a sense of ineffectiveness.

Symptoms include:

- Physical manifestations such as headache, poor sleep, and stomach aches
- Feeling drained of energy and creativity
- Unable to cope with minor stressors
- Cynicism • Irritability • Hopelessness
- Lack of concentration • Feeling worthless

When a parent experiences burnout symptoms, they can no longer care for their children or themselves optimally. Over time, parents can become fairly neglected, and their health can suffer. To all the parents reading this:

YOU MATTER TOO! Your children need you to be in the best mental and physical condition you can be in. Many have heard the caregiving analogy that parents need to put on their oxygen masks first before helping others. This applies in airplane emergencies and regular life - sometimes, doing what's best for your children means doing what's best for yourself first. This doesn't make you a selfish or less loving parent. It can make you a better parent. If you feel burnt out, here are four things that can help.

- Set and defend your limits. One essential way to reclaim your time and energy is to set limits. You are allowed to say "No." Even to your child.
- Delegate. It's impossible to do everything, and asking for help is ok. You can recruit your spouse, friends, family, and anyone willing to help. Sometimes we underestimate how others can step in to help.
- Find a creative outlet. Creative outlets like dance, art, photography, and music can reduce feelings of burnout and promote feelings of self-efficacy. Engaging in activities that bring you joy can increase positive feelings and crowd out the negative.
- Therapy. When stress overwhelms a parent's capacity to cope, it can lead to clinical depression or anxiety. Some struggling people will need the help of a doctor or mental health provider who can provide therapy, medication or a combination approach. Don't underestimate the benefit of having an expert on mental health support give you tailored advice, direct you toward specific local resources, and monitor your response to treatment over time.