

New Year's Resolutions

Every year people mark January 1st as the day to set New Year's resolutions. As New Year's resolutions tend to be broken after the first week or month, just ask any gym for confirmation, I tend to set goals for the year instead. As the mother of three, those goals include my family as well. 2016 was a challenging year. In February, our youngest was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. It came as a shock since it does not run in either side of our family. Fortunately, we were well-versed in IEPs so walking into the school with a medical plan to set up a 504 Plan was not so difficult. Learning about T1D did consume us physically, mentally, and emotionally as our oldest son's diagnosis of Autism had many years ago, but as with the Autism diagnosis, we had to work as a family to keep moving forward. It is time to set our goals because 2017 is going to be a great year.

Goal 1 - Keep the parents healthy. The saying goes that you cannot fill anyone's cup unless yours is full. As parents, if we are sick, we can't care for our children. This means we need to get plenty of sleep every night, eat as healthy as possible, exercise, and find ways to remove stressors. While my primary daily focus is on my family and my job, it is good to occasionally take a break to read a good book, take a nap, or visit with friends. My husband and I try to incorporate the occasional date night where we can go to dinner alone and have conversations that do not involve Legos or vacuums (the obsessions of our youngest and oldest). It can be a challenge to find time for ourselves. When our oldest was younger and having meltdowns, we had to find trusted, patient people to keep him. Now that our youngest has Type 1 Diabetes, trusted people have to be trained in the medical issues. Although we are very lucky to have grandparents available to babysit, hubby and I also work together to give each other needed breaks.

Goal 2 - Build independence in our children. While it would be easier to be helicopter parents, our children will not always have us so one of our goals is to build their skills for independence. The abilities to cook, clean house, and advocate for themselves are extremely important. Although it would be easier for me to always clean my own house or speak for my children, that won't help them when they are adults. As parents, we are constantly looking at their current abilities and considering what is the next step in achieving the independence goals. My honorary nephew is 4 years old and has Down's Syndrome. While he is not old enough to clean out a kitchen cabinet by himself, he is old enough to help me take the cans out of the cabinet and put them in a box for temporary storage while the cabinet is cleaned and organized. This takes a lot of encouragement and celebration for each can he moves, but it is an important step in his skill development. We do it together so he builds the language and social skills which he will need to speak for himself in the future. While it is important for him to be able to clean out and organize the entire cabinet on his own when he is older, it is more than just that one task. It is the ability to communicate with another person to work as a team through a project. It is also the ability to advocate for himself and give his opinions about how a project should be handled. It will take time and patience, but it is the basis for a valuable life skill.

Goal 3 - Have children set their own goals. Each of our children is a unique individual. They all have extremely different personalities and preferences. While we as parents set goals that we know they will need to be productive adults, it is important to have them set goals based on their own hopes and

dreams. Our middle child is gifted and she loves art and music. We provide opportunities to practice these skills and we discuss what it takes to perfect these skills. She is learning that in order to be a good musician, she needs to take time to practice her instruments and to practice her sight reading. While she may never be a professional musician or a professional artist, she is learning to set goals and work towards them, even when it would be more fun to skip the practice and play a video game or watch TV. Also, she is currently in beginner band which is teacher her to work together with others to create a performance. Almost any field she enters will require her to work as a team.

Goal 4 - Building the tribe. We are unique individuals and our children are also unique. Over the years I have found people that work well with my family and people that inspire me to be the best person I can be. My friends and I call these people our tribe. They are the ones who encourage us to grow and who we support in return. A goal for 2017 is to continue to teach my children to build their tribe and to be the best tribe members they can be. It starts at home with my three children working together as a team to rake leaves in the yard, clean a bathroom, or just find that missing backpack that is needed to walk out the door for school. They learn to be a team and to support each other. We branch out to having them do something for someone else such as helping a friend with her house and yard or just opening the restaurant door for a stranger and using good manners. When my oldest son was diagnosed with Autism, a good friend gave me some advice. She said if I kept him at home in his comfort zone, when he grew older, that would be the only place he knew and would be the only place he would want to be. A goal for 2017 is to continue to get them out in the world meeting new people and being productive citizens. Sometimes this is a challenge. We meet people who don't understand or who are very negative. Sometimes, it is very rewarding and we meet people who inspire us.

Give them roots and give them wings - New Year's is a time to reflect on the past year and to make a fresh start with the New Year. 2016 has been a challenge and we look to 2017 as a year of promise and growth. We have a lot of fears. We can strengthen our children, build their roots, so their futures can be bright, even after we are gone. We can build their tribes and teach them to work together as a team to continue to grow their communities and use their wings to fly.

Happy New Year!

Joy Brown