

# A New Beginning

Written by Julie M. Armenta, M.A. Education & Family Specialist

With each New Year, we have the opportunity to reflect on our lives and make adjustments to our life goals and objectives. These adjustments are usually expressed as New Year's Resolutions. Self-reflection, goals, and objectives sound like adult concepts; however, this New Year, as you begin the journey down a new path, consider the benefits of sharing this new beginning with your child. Children have numerous opportunities to better themselves and the society in which they live. Listed below are a few ideas.

1. **Eat Healthier:** Studies have shown that children between the ages of six and twelve only eat one half of the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Dole Foods' website ([www.dole5aday.com](http://www.dole5aday.com)) has suggestions on how to implement good eating habits and it also gives great information on vitamin content of fruits and vegetables. Try some healthy recipes from Del Monte's website (<http://www.delmonte.com/livingahealthylifestyle/>). Your child will feel, act, and think better on a healthy diet.



2. **Become More Physically Fit:** With the increasing popularity of computers, and continual preference for watching television, many children are becoming sedentary. Physical exercise will improve muscular development, reduce stress, and will help your child to better focus on school studies. Also consider the benefits of organized sports, which help teach children discipline and teamwork. The point is not to make physical activity an unwelcome chore, but to make the most of the opportunities you and your family have to be active. Children and adolescents, like adults, should participate in vigorous physical activity on a regular basis—at least a half hour, three or four times a week. The best kind of exercise is one your child will do regularly. Help him or her find activities that are fun and rewarding. Baseball, walking, soccer, jumping rope—anything is OK if it is enjoyable and done safely. Preaching or pushing kids into activities they do not like is likely to backfire. Youngsters who learn that exercise is a chore all too often become inactive adults. Remember, too, that exercise need not be organized. Encourage your child to take the active option in daily life: Walk instead of ride, take the stairs, not the elevator, develop an interest in hands-on activities like building a snowman (well, perhaps not here in Orange County). Short bursts of activity tend to add up in a good way. Check out [www.KidsGrowth.com](http://www.KidsGrowth.com) for many useful tips and ideas on exercise and other areas of health.



3. **Read More Books:** The advantages of reading are endless. By encouraging your child to read for pleasure and enjoyment, you will help to increase his/her vocabulary and use of the English language, both verbal and written. I recommend 20-30 minutes per night. If children are too young, then be sure to read out loud to them. Check out interactive websites like Reading Rainbow (<http://pbskids.org/readingrainbow/>), World of Reading ([www.worldreading.org](http://www.worldreading.org)), and KidsReads.com ([www.kidsreads.com](http://www.kidsreads.com)) to help get your children involved and excited about reading.



4. **Start A Journal:** I cannot stress enough the importance of writing a journal. It is a wonderful self-reflection tool, and it helps to keep your child focused on daily/weekly goals and events. Journal writing will also improve your child's writing skills. I encourage children to have a private journal where they have a safe place to explore their feelings, thoughts, ideas, and dreams. I valued this as a child. It was wonderful not having my mother read my mail or my journal and having that freedom and privacy of expression and thought. Or perhaps you could keep a family journal for everyone to share in and read. Help your child to become a writer at an early age. Try introducing your child to new ways to express themselves online like with the Open Diary website (<http://www.opendairy.com/>), where children can choose to keep their journal/diary open to the public, or closed tight.



5. **Volunteerism:** Volunteerism is a great way to teach young children responsibility, not only to a particular task at hand, but also to the community in which they live. We even have volunteer programs here at our academy. In general, volunteering is a great way to get children involved. They can work with animals, other children, technology, etc. There are a variety of opportunities out there. This not only helps the community, but the child as well. Here are some informative websites for you and your family to check out:



Kids Care <http://www.kidscare.org/kidscare/index.htm>

Digital Charity <http://digitalcharity.com/>

Just Give Kids' Corner <http://www.justgive.org/html/kidscorner/>

FamilyCares <http://www.familycares.org/>

President's Student Service Challenge <http://www.student-service-awards.org/>



6. **Creative Outlet:** It is important for children to express themselves through music, dance, theatre, art, etc. Statistics show that students who are more confident, happy and well-balanced individuals have an outlet of expression. My personal favorite creative activity in elementary school was painting ceramics, especially as gifts for my family and friends. I also enjoyed (and still do) writing poems, and making cards and gift certificates, to name a few. Be creative and have fun. For some online creativity, try [www.TouchPaint.com](http://www.TouchPaint.com), [www.CyberCones.com](http://www.CyberCones.com), [www.Crayloa.com](http://www.Crayloa.com), and Kaboose's Kid's Domain (<http://crafts.kaboose.com/index.html>).



7. **Quality Family Time:** No phones, no television, no friends, no distractions; have a family only night. Or, perhaps set aside a particular time daily. Dinner is a great time to talk about everyone's day and special events coming up. Try playing family board games, taking walks or 20 questions games. When spending quality family time, there needs to be set limits and parents should not let family rules slide during this time. For the most part, children feel more secure and happier when rules and routines are maintained. Quality family time does not need to have a specific agenda or planned activity. This time can be spontaneous and varied in length from a few minutes to several hours depending on the situation. Spending quality time as a family is important not only when the children are young but also as they get older. There are many activities that are enjoyable and can be of benefit to both you and your child. There are endless activities to share with children. It is important to take advantage of quality time with your child. Take time to enjoy your family. Some great family geared websites include [www.childslife.com](http://www.childslife.com), [www.momexchange.com](http://www.momexchange.com), and <http://familyfun.go.com/>.



8. **Study and Organization Time:** Get in the habit of studying each night even if no tests are coming up. Review and reinforce always! Get a head start on work and ask teachers for assignment to get ahead or do for extra credit. Some teachers take extra credit, some do not. Do it for the sake of learning. Elementary should work one-hour minimum, middle school 1.5-2 hours, and for high school 2-3 hours daily. After you're all fresh from studying, arrange a time, try the same time every day, to get organized. This is usually a short break after school, or before/after dinner, but get started before you get too relaxed. Most importantly, do a schedule that works best for you and your family, so that you can continue to be a good student. Try checking out BJ Pinchbeck's Homework Helper (<http://school.discoveryeducation.com/homeworkhelp/index.html>).



When helping your child create goals and objectives, it is important to stress realistic New Year's resolutions. This advice also pertains to you, the parent. Your child will be looking up to you as a role model as you both share your new journey. Soon, I will be asking my own students if they have any New Year's resolutions, why they chose them, and how they will achieve them. Here's to the New Year—a new beginning for you and your family!

Happy New Year!

**Armenta Learning Academy**

26041 Cape Dr., Suite #270

Laguna Niguel, CA 92677

Phone: 949-367-WISE (9473)

Fax: 949-367-0171

[academicsuccessnow@yahoo.com](mailto:academicsuccessnow@yahoo.com) | [www.academicsuccessnow.com](http://www.academicsuccessnow.com)

