

(An excerpt from *So, What Can Kids Do in the Summertime?* – *Keys to Practical Parenting During School Vacation*, available now from [www.sowhatcankidsdo.com](http://www.sowhatcankidsdo.com), [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com) or the BYU Bookstore)

## Chapter 2 – Setting Summer Goals and Rewards

*“Home ought to be our clearinghouse, the place from which we go forth lessoned and disciplined, and ready for life.” – Kathleen Norris*

### Summer Goals – Getting Started

As a mother, I felt that school vacation was valuable time with my kids and that I did not want to give too much of it to the TV, programs outside the home, or neighbors. My husband and I both wanted our kids to learn to work, to be responsible, and to learn to set goals and reach them. Why not incorporate these principles into a program and make this a season for fun and learning combined? And so the idea of the summer goals program was born. Our purpose was to have the kids work toward meaningful objectives and to celebrate their accomplishment with a reward. The program involves four fundamental steps which I followed as we approached each school vacation. If your school scatters its vacation time throughout the year, you will want to re-define your program at the end of each school year or session.

After careful reflection, I found that it was most effective for me to decide what I wanted each of my kids to accomplish and simply tell them what their goals should be. You may choose to have your kids more involved in setting their individual goals, but I recommend you first go through these steps by yourself and determine what is negotiable and what is not.

**1<sup>st</sup>** - I carefully considered each of my kids, their ages and their abilities. I did not want to underestimate their potential for learning, nor did I want to set them up for failure.

**2<sup>nd</sup>** - I made a list of fundamental “life management” skills that I wanted my kids to learn, such as:

- cleaning
- cooking
- sewing
- writing
- reading
- memorizing
- music
- quilting

The possibilities for skill development are endless. Your list may include seventy-seven items or just two. Here are some other ideas of skills you may want to tackle: drawing or painting, washing and ironing, learning words of a foreign language, maintaining personal hygiene, growing a garden, mowing the lawn, washing the car, woodworking (for an older child), or changing a tire (also for an older child).

Money management is certainly a fundamental life management skill and you may choose to include it in your summer goals. Our older kids have benefited from carefully writing down all their income and expenses for several months, helping them see where their money is going. However, we chose to address this issue separately from summer goals – see A Note About Allowances and Daily Chores later in this book.



On a farm, the work is often different. However, in a city household, we generally assigned tasks the same. Boys and girls both needed to learn responsibility and to be kept busy. Mowing the lawn seemed to us a job more for the boys, but the girls often took their turn. It certainly does not hurt a guy to wash the dishes, mop the floor, clean the bathroom or organize his drawers and cupboards. In today's world where husband and wife often both work outside the home, everyone needs to know how to help.

**3<sup>rd</sup>** – I set goals for each child suited to that child's potential and personality. In each area of interest, I listed how many times a task should be formally signed-off during the summer, both to assure that the child learned the skill and to help with the housework. That first year our kids ranged in ages from one to twelve, and of course, I had different expectations for different ages. The younger ones needed considerable help while the older ones were expected to learn more quickly and to perform the work more frequently.

**4<sup>th</sup>** – I selected an appropriate group activity to celebrate success. It is much more motivating to work toward a goal when you have a tangible reward in mind.

### **Mini-Classes and Sign-Off Sheets**

I decided that successful mastery of a skill would require a certain level of perfection. Daily chores could be acceptable, at least temporarily, at a slightly lower standard, so I kept these duties separate from the Summer Goals Program. For the kids to attain the higher standard that I wanted, I needed to show the kids what was expected in brief "mini-classes." A mini-class can be a quick explanation or a thirty-minute demonstration, depending on the needs and attention span of the child and on the time you have available. A short explanation is better than none. Some skills, such as cleaning or

cooking, require quite a bit of training and supervision, while others, such as reading or writing, require very little.

The kids understood the cleaning process better if it was written down, step by step, on a card and taped inside a cupboard or closet in the room involved. When the child was ready for me to approve their mastery of a skill, I inspected their work. If the task was completed to my satisfaction, I initialed their goal sheet. The younger children preferred to see a sticker or gold star at completion.

Requiring my kids to master the skill gave me hope that they would remember it when they grew into adulthood, and I required them to pass off some skills more than once. I was careful to mark the completion of a goal and to offer a warm "well done." This is very important since kids note the way you follow through with what you say. If you don't provide recognition and encouragement, the kids will lose enthusiasm for the program. Every year builds on the prior one and you will want your kids to carry a positive outlook into each new school vacation.

## Rewards

As each of my kids completed his/her summer goals they were pleased with themselves and looked forward to celebrating. Because we did not eat out much, the reward for reaching summer goals that first summer was a family trip to *Wendy's* for dinner. That may not seem like a big treat now, but at the time it was for us. We made "I did it" buttons for everyone to wear. That was a bit cheesy, looking back, but we all felt that we had worked hard for that day. The kids were pleased because they had accomplished a list of goals and I was pleased because as a family it had been a very productive summer.



As the years went by, our celebrations grew and included a daylong visit to the city's water park, an afternoon at a skating rink, and a day bicycling several miles through a city park. Each outing was carefully planned and included special treats and activities.

I preferred to celebrate as a family rather than individually. This encouraged the kids to help each other if one was lagging. To show flexibility, I allowed the kids to participate in the event if all but one goal was completed. There still were occasions when a child was excluded because they did not complete enough of their goals. While this is not easy and can usually be avoided with extra encouragement and planning, the reward is not real if it cannot be lost. Kids need to learn to handle consequences, a lesson taught harshly by the world if not learned in the home.

One of our daughters, now the mother of six, prefers individual rewards so they can be personalized. One year each of her kids had a one-on-one “date” with Mom or Dad, and each chose a reasonable destination. An individual approach allows parents to celebrate sooner for the early finishers and allows the slower kids more time. The slower ones are motivated to finish when they see their siblings celebrating their success. Personalized celebrations will work best for some families while group rewards are better for others. Assess your situation and do what you think is best for your kids.

While having a tangible reward is important, especially to younger children, remember that the most important results are by-products. Besides the skills learned, the summer goal process also teaches kids how to work with those in authority, how to complete a personal objective, appreciation for the results of work, patience, and many other life management skills. It also helps parents and children to better understand one another and draws them closer together.

*The reward of a thing well done, is to have done it.*  
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

## **Sample Sheets**

## Summer Goals for Girl (age 15)

How Many Times	Item	Completed
4	Clean drawers (her own)	
2	Clean drawers (family)	
6	Wash and dry laundry (family)	
3	Clean windows	
Help	Make a quilt	
2 blouses + skirt	Sew article of clothing	
4	Clean bathroom	
1	Clean closet (her own)	
1	Clean closet (family)	
2	Clean cupboard (family)	
4	Vacuum the floor	
2	Clean car	
1	Bake cookies from scratch	
1	Bake cake from scratch	
1	Bake sweet rolls from scratch	
1	Bake dinner rolls from scratch	
3	Bake bread from scratch	
2	Make dinner (family)	
2	Make breakfast (family)	
20 pages	Write in journal	
5	Learn new piece on piano	
1	Learn new piece on violin	
1	Learn new vocal solo	

Summer Goals for <u>Boy (age 9)</u>		
How Many Times	Item	Completed
2	Clean drawers (his own)	
2	Clean drawers (family)	
2	Wash and dry laundry	
2	Clean windows	
Help	Make a quilt (family)	
	Sew article of clothing	
2	Clean bathroom	
1	Clean closet (his own)	
1	Clean closet (family)	
2	Clean cupboard (family)	
4	Vacuum the floor	
2	Clean car	
Help	Bake cookies from scratch	
Help	Bake cake from scratch	
Help	Bake sweet rolls from scratch	
Help	Bake dinner rolls from scratch	
Help	Bake bread from scratch	
Help 1 + 1 alone	Make dinner (family)	
2	Make breakfast (family)	
1 page	Journal	
3	Learn new vocal piece	
2	Learn new piano piece	
50-100	Read children's books	
once a week	Study math facts	

(Clues to success, notes for working parents, additional sample sheets and testimonials from our children can be found in the book.)