

# Small Steps, Big Goals

*Teach children **how** to think rather than **what** to think by asking questions and offering choices.*

## What we know:

You can help your child move from “what do I want to be?” to “how can I be that?” by helping them identify simple steps that can lead to their long-term goal. Even young children are capable of thinking about the steps to solving a problem. As early as age 4, children can offer many solutions to a problem. And, by age 8, children can think of the steps needed to reach a goal and the problems they might have along the way.

How did Barack Obama become president? Why is Serena Williams such a good tennis player? We often look at the end of the story—the A+ or the star athlete—and think that success came without effort. Instead, success often takes great effort and planning. Parents and teachers build children’s goal setting and problem solving skills by talking about the little steps needed to reach large goals. Here’s how to do it.

Parents can teach children how to think rather than what to think by asking questions and offering choices. For very young children the questions are simple: “Would you like the door open or closed?” “Would you like one book or two books?” By elementary school, the questions can be more complicated: “What could you do differently?” “How did that make you feel?” “What can you try next?”



## Try this:

Help your child set and achieve big personal goals by reading picture books that show how lots of little steps are needed to reach a goal. (The We Are Teachers website has [a list of books about reaching goals](#) to check out from your library.) While you are reading, ask questions about how the character become successful like: “Was she always good at playing the violin?” “How did he become a better runner?” “What happened when she made a mistake?”

## For fun:

Watch Dr. Becky Bailey’s TedX Talk “[Wiring the Brain for Success](#)” for an entertaining look at the brain science behind how our mental state prepares us to reach goals.