Goal Setting Activities

Goals and Motivation: Five Short Exercises for Better Goals

These goal setting activities are five short exercises, and each one practices a single skill for setting and reaching goals. They draw on goal-setting research by psychologists Edwin Locke and Gary Latham and on if-then planning from psychologist Peter Gollwitzer. Each one takes about five to ten minutes. You can do them on your own, with a partner, or in a group.

1 Sharpen a vague goal

Rewrite each vague goal so that anyone could tell when it is done. Then add a few of your own in the empty rows.

Vague goal	Clear goal
Get healthier	*Eat a vegetable with dinner on five nights a week this month*
Be better with money	
Read more	

Why does this work? *Each activity practices something research links to reaching goals. Clear, challenging goals tend to lead to better results than "do your best." Small goals you can reach soon help you see progress and build confidence. If-then plans tie your next step to a moment in your day, and checking your progress, especially in writing, makes you more likely to get there.*

2 Find the right stretch

Pick one goal. Write three versions of it, then choose the stretch version. A goal that is hard but possible usually brings out more effort than an easy one, as long as you still believe you can do it.

Easy (I could do it without trying):

Stretch (hard, but I can see how to do it):

Too much (I would probably give up):

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

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3 Climb in small steps

Break your stretch goal into smaller goals you can reach in the next few weeks. Reaching each one shows you that you are moving.

Smaller goal	By when	Done
Read for 10 minutes before bed on three nights	*End of this week*	

4 Write if-then plans

Think of two things that could get in your way. For each one, decide now what you will do when it happens.

If this happens…	then I will…
If I am too tired to read after a long day,	*then I will read just one page.*

5 Check your progress

Choose a day each week to look at your goal and answer these three questions in writing.

What did I do toward my goal this week?

Am I on track? How do I know?

What is one thing I will change next week?

You can repeat any of these activities with a new goal. In a group, try sharing your clear goals and if-then plans with a partner.

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