

## GUIDE FOR GOAL SETTING

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We often want to make changes in our life, but we sometimes don't know where to start. Goal setting can help you to identify where you want to go and the steps needed to get there.

### How To Do It

#### STEP 1. Identify your goals

Take some time to think about the things that you would either like to do or that you want to change in your life. Try to identify some short-term goals (for example, things you would like to work on over the next couple of weeks or months), medium-term goals (for example, things you would like to be able to do in six months or a year from now) and long-term goals (for example, things you are hoping to accomplish in your life-time). Goals can be related to a variety of life areas such as:

- Relationships (Friends and Family)
- Career/School
- Finances
- Health
- Lifestyle
- Personal Development



**TIP:** People who suffer from anxiety problems will often limit their lives because of anxiety. When trying to think of your goals, imagine a life without anxiety. What would you like to be able to do? You can use goal setting as a way to help you practise your tools for managing anxiety, or to move forward with your life as your anxiety becomes more manageable.

Goals should be:

#### 1. Realistic

Make sure that your goals are *realistic* and *attainable*. If you set your goals too high, it will be too difficult to accomplish them and your motivation will drop.

- For example, if you have never worked out, expecting yourself to go to the gym for an hour four times a week is **unrealistic**. A more realistic goal would be to go to the gym once a week for 20 minutes. Your long-term goal may be to go to the gym four times a week, but you need to start with smaller goals and work your way up to the long-term goal.



**TIP:** People often have goals about never feeling anxious or making mistakes. However, these goals are unrealistic because it is normal to feel anxious, and everyone makes mistakes sometimes.

## 2. Concrete and Specific

You are far more likely to accomplish your goals if you make them concrete and specific rather than vague. If goals are too vague, it will be difficult to determine what steps you need to take to accomplish them. If your goals are specific, it will be easier to know when your goals have been met.

- For example, “exercise more” is not a very good goal, because it is too vague. How will you know when you are exercising enough? How often do you want to exercise? For how long? “Exercise two times a week for 30 minutes” is a better goal because it is more specific - you will know exactly when you have completed it successfully.

| Poor Examples of Goals   | Good Examples of Goals  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat Better</li> <li>• Go back to school</li> <li>• Meet new people</li> <li>• Save money</li> <li>• Travel</li> <li>• Be less anxious</li> <li>• Practise exposure exercises</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat at least one piece of fruit each day</li> <li>• Take a writing course at the community college in September</li> <li>• Sign up for a hiking course and have a conversation with a new person on every hike</li> <li>• Put \$100 in my savings account each month</li> <li>• Go on a trip to Paris for my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday</li> <li>• Practise relaxation exercises once a day</li> <li>• Complete exposure exercises weekdays between 7 and 9 pm.</li> </ul> |



**KEY:** Write down your goals! You are more likely to stay on top of your goals if you have made a list of them.

## **STEP 2. Break goals into smaller steps**

Many goals can be broken down into smaller steps. This is especially true of medium and long-term goals. For example, if your goal is to develop some friendships at work, an initial goal may be to ask two co-workers about their weekend plans on Friday afternoon. If your goal is to find a new job, a smaller goal may be to check the classified ads in the newspaper on Saturday.

## **STEP 3. Identify obstacles**

Once you have established a realistic and concrete goal, identify any obstacles that may be standing in the way of accomplishing your goal. For example, one of the obstacles for going to the gym may be finding childcare. So, if you have set a goal of going to the gym for 30 minutes after work on Wednesday, you will have to arrange for a babysitter.

## **STEP 4. Schedule your goals**

You are more likely to complete your goals if you are clear about what you are going to do and when you plan to do it.

- For example, your goal may be to practise relaxation exercises for 15 minutes on Saturday morning around 10 a.m.
- Use a day planner or calendar to help you remember to complete your goals.



**TIP:** It is important to be flexible. Sometimes things can get in the way of accomplishing your goals (for example, there is a rain storm on the day you wanted to go for a hike, or your son comes home sick from school the morning you were planning to practise driving). Be willing to come up with an alternative plan (e.g., go for a walk in an indoor mall or re-schedule your driving session for the next day).

## **STEP 5. Carry out your goals**

Now that you have picked a goal, you need to start taking the necessary steps to follow through with it. However, it can be hard to get started. In addition to writing down your goal (e.g., work out at the gym for 30 minutes after work on Wednesday), you can write out the steps that you will need to take to complete it (for example, call babysitter on Monday to arrange for her to pick up the kids after school on Wednesday, pack gym clothes on Tuesday evening, take gym clothes to work on Wednesday morning, head

straight to the gym after work on Wednesday). You are more likely to take the steps needed to achieve your goal if you write them down first.



The **key** to achieving your goals is to just DO IT! Don't wait for the motivation to come before you act; take action, and motivation will follow. For example, you may not feel motivated to start exercising, but once you have done it a few times you will start to feel more motivated to do it again

If you were able to accomplish your goal, **reward** yourself.

- It's not easy to accomplish goals. So, it's important to reward yourself when you do it.
- It may be helpful to use specific rewards as your motivation to achieve a goal. For example, plan to purchase a special gift for yourself (DVD, CD, book, treat) or engage in a fun activity (rent a movie, go to the movies, go out for lunch or dinner, plan a relaxing evening, watch your favorite television program) after you reach a goal.
- Don't forget the power of positive self-talk (e.g., "I did it!").

If you had trouble completing your goal you may need to **revise** it.

- Take a step back and see what got in the way. Retrace the steps for goal setting listed above.
- Make sure your goal is *realistic*. If you set the goal too high, try to scale it back.
- Make sure your goal is *concrete and specific*. If it was too vague, it may have been difficult to tell if you completed it.
- Try to *schedule* your goal, because this will increase your chances of accomplishing it.
- Find ways to get around *obstacles*.
- *Write down* the steps that you need to take to accomplish your goal.



**TIP:** As you complete goals, check them off your list. This can be a helpful reminder of all that you have accomplished so far.

## Helpful Hints:

- **Start Small.** Making small changes can have a big impact on your life. Don't try to do everything all at once. Instead, pick one or two goals to work on at a time.
- **Be Patient.** It can take time to meet goals, especially long-term goals. Hang in there and stick with it!
- **Don't think in "all or nothing" terms.** No one completes all of their goals all of the time. You have not failed if you don't accomplish all of your goals. Praise yourself for the goals you were able to meet and come up with a new plan for accomplishing the goals that you were unable to complete.