

Goal setting

You (hopefully) have now identified some areas in your life where you are not yet being your “best self” or doing the things that really matter to you. You can use this to start setting yourself some goals for making changes.

There’s usually more than one way of approaching it

For example if you want to work on being a loving and caring partner then think about how you can act this way more. A goal might then be to spend 30 minutes a day focused on listening to your partner in a caring way, cooking them their favourite meal or taking them a cup of tea in bed. There can be any number of different ways you can be a more loving and caring partner.

Long term versus short term

Goals can be either long term or short term and it can be helpful to set yourself a combination of both. Long term goals can then be broken down into smaller steps or short term goals to help you know where to start.

What are you capable of right now

It is important to consider your starting point so that the goals you set are realistic. For example, if you want to be more active you need to consider what you are physically capable of doing now. You might set yourself the goal of walking for 30 minutes daily. However, if currently you are only able to walk for 2 minutes then it may take some time to progress up to 30 minutes daily. So this could be a longer term goal to achieve in 6 months’ time.

Your short term goals might include getting some comfortable walking shoes, planning out your route. Then you could start by walking 2 minutes a day for the first week, then 2 minutes 15 seconds the second week, then 2 minutes 30 the third week and continuing to increase gradually (by up to 10%).

Life-affirming and positive

Whilst giving up smoking and trying to lose weight are valid things to do for your health we would encourage you to focus on the things that you *are* going to do rather than the things that you are not. So every time you have the urge to have a cigarette, have a glass of water instead or put the money you would have spent into a jar to save for a holiday or new clothes. Similarly with weight loss, try to focus on your fitness levels or introducing healthier foods into your diet.

This shifts the focus away from the thing you are doing less of or giving up and helps you to concentrate on the things you want more of in your life.

SMART goals

It can be helpful when setting goals to use the acronym SMART:

Specific: specify the actions you will take, when and where you will do so, and who or what is involved. Example of a vague or non-specific goal: “I will spend more time with my kids.” A specific goal: “I will take the kids to the park on Saturday to play baseball.” A non-specific goal: “I will be more loving towards my wife.” A specific goal: “I will ring my wife at lunchtime and tell her I love her.”

Meaningful: The goal should be personally meaningful to you. If it is genuinely guided by what’s important to you as opposed to trying to please others or trying to avoid something, then it will be meaningful.

Affirmative: The goal should help you to focus on the things that you *are* going to do rather than the things that you are not. For example if your goal is weight loss, try to focus on your fitness levels or introducing healthier foods into your diet and not on eating less or giving up on sugar. This will help you to shift the focus away from doing less of or giving up on something and helps you instead to concentrate on the things you want more of in your life. It should also help you to move towards doing the things that are important.

Realistic: The goal should be realistically achievable. Take into account your health, competing demands on your time, financial status, and whether you have the skills to achieve it. There may be goals that are realistic long term but need to be broken down into achievable short term steps.

Time-bound: to increase the specificity of your goal, set a day, date and time for it. If this is not possible, set as accurate a time limit as you can.

Example

Now we will look at how ways to set goals to work on these areas. For this we will return to the example of George. Here are his answers to the goal setting sheet.

1. What areas of my life do I want to work on?

Health and wellbeing

2. What characteristics of my “best self” does this link to?

- a) *Active*
- b) *Self-compassionate*

3. What is my goal in this area? (remember to make this specific, realistic and time framed)

- a) *Be able to walk to the shop and back without having to sit down to rest by next June*
- b) *Do something nice for myself at least once a day
Every time I notice myself being self-critical to practice being self-compassionate*

4. What are the steps I need to take to achieve this goal (short term goals)?

- a) *Work out what my baseline is for walking*
- b) *Make a list of self-caring things and buy anything needed – ideas are favourite drink, listening to my favourite song
Find Loving Kindness meditation on the website*

5. What step towards my goal will I work on between now and next week?

- a) *Continue to practice Tai Chi every day
Working out what my baseline is for walking is*
- b) *Making list of self-caring activities*

6. What might get in the way of me achieving this goal?

- a) *If it is raining I don't want to walk outside
Feeling lacking in motivation*

7. What could I put in place to make this easier for me to achieve? (e.g. support/ reminders)

- a) *Seeing if someone can give me a lift to the shopping centre to practice walking inside if it's raining
Telling other people about my plans – committing to the group and my family what I am planning on doing*

Now it's your go

1. What areas of my life do I want to work on?
2. What characteristics of my "best self" does this link to?
3. What is my goal in this area? (remember to make this specific, realistic and time framed)
4. What are the steps I need to take to achieve this goal (short term goals)?
5. What step towards my goal will I work on between now and next week?
6. What might get in the way of me achieving this goal?
7. What could I put in place to make this easier for me to achieve? (e.g. support/ reminders)