

Goal Setting

In this section

you will learn to:

- 🗨️ Set goals that are important to you
- 🗨️ Make goals that are likely to succeed
- 🗨️ Move on to new goals

Goal setting is about moving from knowing what you should do to planning how you're going to make it happen. It's about taking action. You might have great ideas about how to solve a problem, but never get around to actually doing it: setting clear and realistic goals is the most powerful way to make sure that you actually do it.

When people become depressed, they find it hard to set goals or do them. They:

- 🌀 feel a lack of motivation
- 🌀 don't feel they have the energy to carry out goals and
- 🌀 often set goals that are too big.

Not only that, people who aren't very skilled at goal setting are less likely to solve problems or get into enjoyable activities, so they're more likely to become depressed.

Check the next few pages to see how you go about **setting goals to solve problems and **make your life more interesting****

1 Choose a goal for the next week

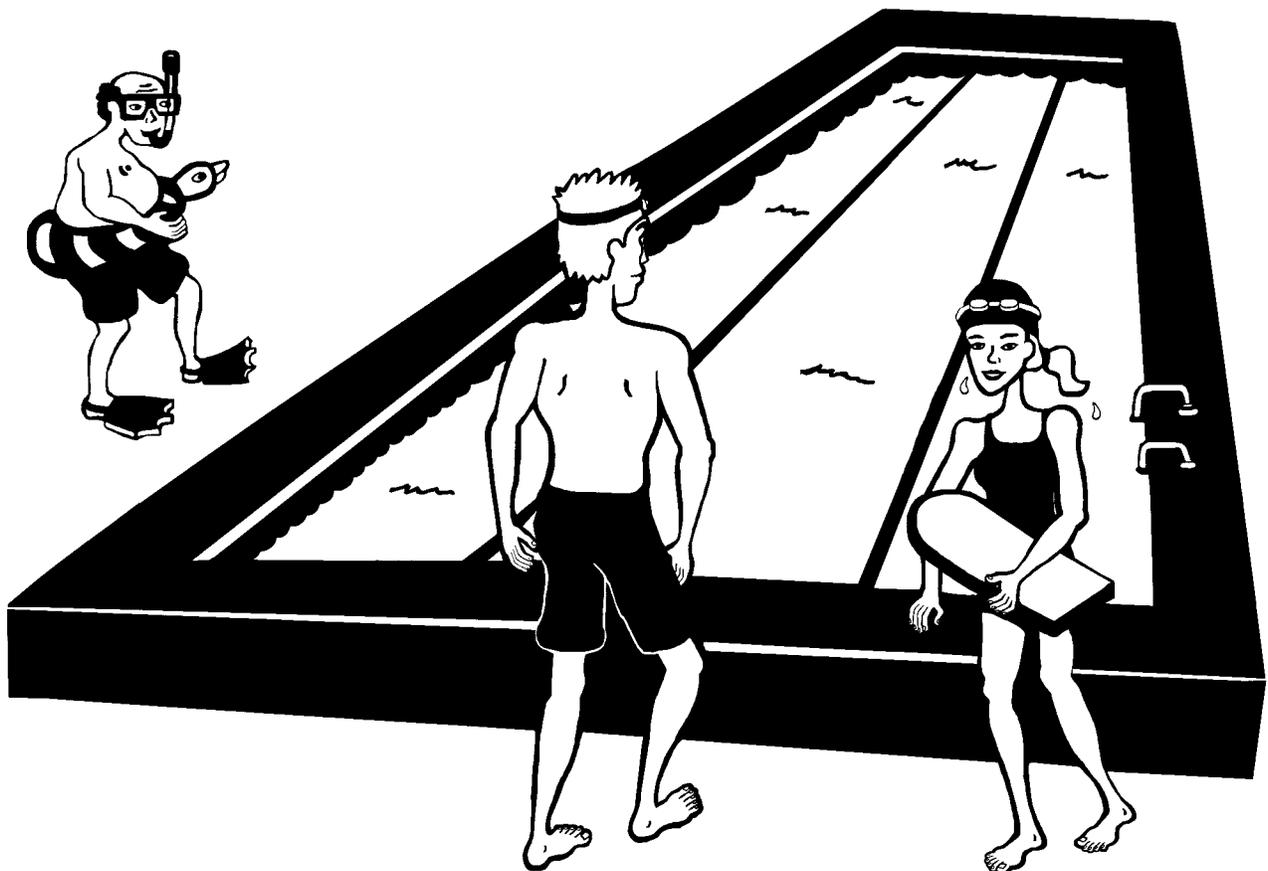
What would be a helpful action to try in the next week? Let's say you're having a problem with poor marks in English, and you decide that the best solution is to spend more time studying. So goal setting would involve deciding just how much time you want to study and when you'll do it.

Or, let's say you've been feeling lonely and bored, so your goal is to spend more time with other people doing something fun. A good starting goal would probably be to collect some

information about the kinds of group activities available in your school or community. Activity goals are important for people who are dealing with depressed mood: depressed people often withdraw from social activities, stop doing sports, or stop going to movies and concerts. Their world becomes smaller and emptier, worsening the depression. Activity goals increase your involvement in social or other rewarding activities and make your world a larger, more rewarding one.

Here is an example of a goal:

Exercise more – start swimming at the community centre



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Now **you** pick a goal to start working on:



Make this goal specific, realistic, and scheduled

Researchers have studied which kinds of goals are most likely to be carried out.

They have found that effective goals are:

specific

Be very clear about what you are planning to do. Unclear goals are much less likely to be carried out: a goal like "study my Math textbook more" likely won't make a difference in your studying. You probably won't set aside a specific time for it and you won't know when you are meeting your goal. People who set unclear goals often feel like they're failing even when they're doing well: after all, no matter how much you're studying, you could always be studying "more". A better goal would be: "study Math Monday and Wednesday evenings for 1 hour".

realistic

Teens often set goals that are very ambitious, like someone who hasn't been doing any exercise sets the goal of "working out every day for an hour" starting next week. This goal is not realistic and almost nobody makes that kind of change so quickly. Even if she does it for one or two weeks, she will soon stop exercising every day, get angry at herself for "failing" and then might stop exercising. If you set goals that are too big, you're setting yourself up for discouragement. It's also worth remembering that depressed people have more difficulty carrying out goals and have to set modest ones to begin with. The goal you set should be easy enough to carry out even if you feel depressed over the next week. At first your goals must be small ones, and they can gradually become more ambitious as you have success.

scheduled

You have to know exactly what you're going to do, where you're going to do it, for how long and when. The more exact you are in stating your goal, the more likely that you're going to carry it out. So, a poor goal would be "go swimming"; a better goal would be "go swimming at the community center Thursday around 5 p.m. for 20 minutes". The best way to schedule goals is to write your goal into a planner; when you complete the goal, check it off. Then, you know exactly what you've done and what you plan to do.

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2 Make this goal specific, realistic, and scheduled, continued

Here's an example of how to write a goal:

My Goal	How often?	When exactly?
Swim at the community centre, 20 minutes	Once a week to start	Thursday after school

Now write **your** goal:

My Goal	How often?	When exactly?
		

Think of your goal as an appointment with yourself. Treat it as carefully as you would an appointment with your doctor. If you must



cancel this appointment with yourself, reschedule immediately and then don't miss it.

3 Carry out your goal

After you've completed your goal, remember to check it off in your planner or notebook. Also, remember to congratulate yourself for having carried out the goal — it's important to recognize what you've accomplished. When people are depressed, they have trouble recognizing their own accomplishments. Instead, they see what they've done as ridiculously easy or unimportant: but the fact is that *carrying out any goal when you're depressed is very difficult* and takes a lot of determination. Don't ignore small victories or think they don't count. They *do count*, especially during depression.

It's often helpful to share your goal with a friend or trusted adult. When you've done the goal, check-in with that person.

But what if you didn't complete your goal? Give yourself credit for trying and for what you have

learned. What got in the way? What can you do to make the goal easier? You might find yourself starting to get into self-blame. But that's not very helpful and it's not fair — there are different reasons why you might not complete a goal. Sometimes it's because the goal is set too high. Sometimes it's because you need more help to carry out the goal: for example, maybe you need to arrange for a friend to swim with you. Sometimes it's because there was an unexpected obstacle: maybe there was a family crisis the night you planned to study. Whatever the reason for not completing a goal, reset the goal for next week or change the goal so that it's more likely to happen. Generally, think about reducing the goal (e.g., start with half an hour of study) or having someone else help you with it (e.g., arrange to study with a friend or join a study group).

4 Review your goal

Some goals are one-time things. After you've found out the fitness schedule at your Community Center, that goal is finished. But most goals involve ongoing activities, like changing study habits, meeting new people or starting fitness programs. When you've completed a goal, keep it at the same level for a few weeks. Then decide whether you want to increase the goal a little or keep doing it at the same level until it seems easy. This is your choice. But once the goal feels easy and you've been doing it for at least a few weeks, increase the goal or maybe add a new one.

If you're adding a new goal, write it into your schedule along with the continuing goal. Remember, check off the goal as you do it and praise yourself for doing it. It's not usually a good idea to work on more than three goals: that gets confusing and it's hard to focus your effort.

After awhile you get used to doing these goals and they become habits. Then, they're not like goals at all, just things you're used to doing.