

The Art of Identifying and Promoting Achievable Goals

Following are some success-oriented ideas for working with people and techniques for keeping on a positive track when things may not be going as planned.

Steps for Helping People Set Goals That are Achievable

1. Validate that the goals are actually the *person's* goals—something the person wants to accomplish.
2. Ask the person to indicate his or her level of confidence that the goals can realistically be achieved, using a 1-10 scale, with 7 or higher being the target level. For goals below a level of 7, discuss strategies for adjusting the goals for greater likelihood of success.
3. Help people choose one goal to start with.
4. Collaboratively write down a specific short-term (such as one week) action plan for achieving the one component of the goal. For example, if the goal is to “get a job” a one-week action plan may be to spend a half hour every day looking online for companies that need the skills the client has.
5. Discuss alternatives for what to do if the action cannot be carried out one day. For example, the person may decide to spend a full hour the following day.
6. Help clients identify a reward system. For example, the person may decide not to speak with friends on the phone until after the goal for the day is accomplished.

What to Look for When Goals Fail to be Achieved

- Help people determine whether too many goals are being set for the same period of time and, together, develop a strategy for prioritizing. (*See step 3*)
- If a person feels there isn't enough time in the day to work on a goal, share ideas for breaking the goal into better manageable chunks, always making sure that the goal itself is the *client's*. (*See steps 1 and 3*)
- Help the person determine whether they believe a particular goal is actually beyond reach or perhaps too unimportant for them to take action. In either case, help them redefine the goal or discard it. (*See step 2*)
- For people who are likely to be under the influence of a significant other who does not support the goal, brainstorm ways to work around possible obstacles. (*See step 5*)
- For people who are finding that fatigue or illness are getting in the way of achieving their goals, help problem-solve to first address medical issues with appropriate professionals and then see how their goals might be temporarily adjusted or possibly redefined. (*See step 5*)
- For people who say they are forgetting to follow their plans for achieving their goals, help them discover whether the goals themselves should be revisited and redefined. Brainstorm ideas for self-reminders such as notes in plain view or associating an activity with something they do regularly. For example, a client may decide to delay a morning cup of coffee until he has completed the first item on his daily “to do” list.

Note: It can be easy to fall into the trap of labeling clients as “unmotivated” or “noncompliant.” The techniques above may be used to help direct the focus towards empowering clients to self-manage and look for positive ways to move towards their goals.

Source: *Living a Healthy Life with Chronic Conditions: Self Management of Heart Disease, Arthritis, Diabetes, Asthma, Bronchitis, Emphysema and others* (Third Edition) by Kate Lorig, Halsted Holman MD, David Sobel MD, and Diana Laurent MPH (Paperback, September 1, 2006).