

Supporting Goal-Setting Development in Adolescence

Summary of findings and recommendations from a longitudinal study of goal-setting and self-regulation by Pathways to Education Canada.



Scaffolding helps ease students into the goal-setting approach.

Determine Priorities

It is important to acknowledge that students who are focusing on personal goals know how to prioritize, even though they may not be concentrating on school responsibilities. This may indicate a need to discuss possible adjustments with students in favour of long-term benefits.

- Recognize goals that are outside of academic responsibilities. If students have new goals in these areas of their lives, help them plan and work towards them.
- Start conversations about long- vs. short-term goals and priorities to help students understand how their goals impact their future. Use their existing skills as a scaffold for academic and long-term goal-setting.



Exposure to feedback and the resulting conversations are crucial for behaviour change.

Invest Time

Dedicating one-on-one time with younger students who are new to the program helps them adjust to the goal-setting approach and assists with a better understanding of student needs, challenges, and how they approach goal-setting.

- Take the time to discuss the value of setting goals and give practical, real-life, and age-appropriate examples that resonate with youth.
- Set smaller more manageable goals so that students can experience success faster and feel a sense of accomplishment that will encourage them to set more ambitious goals.
- Consider increasing the number of brief check-ins or nudges to track student progress.



Position accomplishments as examples of competence to build confidence and offer encouragement.

Continuous Feedback

While some students may be acknowledging feedback out of politeness, ongoing conversations about goals and contexts will, over time, become absorbed as actionable advice and lead to behaviour change.

- Consider having diplomatic conversations about the difference between polite agreement and building on the feedback you provide.
- Ask students to identify tangible outcomes of the feedback you provide. Demonstrate that outcomes follow action.
- Brief check-ins can be helpful to students as reminders of the feedback they received and the need to implement it.

Supporting Goal-Setting Development in Adolescence

Summary of findings and recommendations from a longitudinal study of goal-setting and self-regulation by Pathways to Education Canada.

The importance of goal-setting in adolescent development

- Setting goals makes it possible for young people to manage their focus, delay gratification, control impulses, and stay on task as they work toward a meaningful objective¹.
- Goal-setting enables youth to have better relationships, health habits, and general success in life^{2,3}.
- Goal-setting has been identified as one of four foundational components crucial for effective and meaningful relationship-building, civic engagement, health, and successful transition into further education and adulthood⁴.



Evidence of self-regulation and goal-setting abilities in youth



- Interest in one's health, fitness, or mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being, especially when it translates into generating and observing well-being habits and behaviour
- Prioritizing school responsibilities, including non-academic ones such as clubs, teams, or volunteer work (e.g. a young person chooses to stay home to study for a test instead of hanging out with friends)
- Stable and meaningful relationships with adults and peers
- Increased self-control: decreased impulsiveness and negative emotional responses, improvement in de-escalating conflicts
- Ability to self-monitor progress
- Awareness of one's strengths and shortcomings

Work Cited

¹ The Committee for Children. (2011). Early learning review of research. Seattle, WA: Author.

² Bowers, E. P., Geldhof, G. J., Schmid, K. L., Napolitano, C. M., Minor, K., & Lerner, J. V. (2012). Relationships With Important Nonparental Adults and Positive Youth Development: An Examination of Youth Self-Regulatory Strengths as Mediators. *Research in Human Development*, 9(4), 298–316.

³ Weiner, M. B., John Geldhof, G., & Gestsdottir, S. (2015). Intentional Self-Regulation in Youth: Applying Research Findings to Practice and Programs. In *Promoting Positive Youth Development* (pp. 21–36). Springer, Cham.

⁴ Nagaoka J., Farrington C. A., Ehrlich S. B., Heath R. D., Johnson D. W., Dickson S., Turner, A.C., Mayo, A., & Hayes K. (2015). *Foundations for young adult success: A developmental framework*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago Schools Research.