

HOW TO HELP YOUR MENTEE SET AND ACHIEVE THEIR OWN GOALS



Setting and achieving goals can have a powerful effect on a young person's self-esteem, motivation and for those struggling with challenges in their home or school/work life, it can give them back a sense of control.

Goal setting also encourages young people to think about their future and what they want from life. Young people who know what they want in life, and who can see what they need to do to get it, have a much stronger incentive to think carefully about behaviour and decisions that could jeopardise their future.

WHAT DO YOU WANT IN LIFE?

If your mentee is new to goal setting they may find it a difficult concept at first, especially thinking about their future beyond next week or next month. In your normal catch-ups with your mentee it is a good idea to include discussions about what they want in different areas of their life – school, work, home, friends, sports, music – but if they are having trouble getting started:

- Ask them what they want to achieve or have by the end of the school term or school year.
- Ask them what they would ask for if they could have one wish for school/for home/for themselves.
- Ask them if there are people around them who have jobs/sporting achievements/qualifications/relationships/possessions that they would like to have and encourage them to explain what about those things appeal.
- Ask them what they see as the hurdles to getting the things they want and what first steps they can take towards them.
- Talk to them about making a plan to help them realise one of their aspirations – help them break it into manageable stages so they are motivated by a sense of achievement along the way.
- If your mentee is only talking very generally about what they want in life, for example "I want lots of money", try to get them to talk about what they would use the money for and what jobs interest them as a way to earn that money.

If your mentee is not in the habit of talking about what they want in life it may take a while for them to open up but focusing on their aspirations can be a powerful motivator for change once they have them in mind.

EXERCISE - FORWARD THINKING

If your mentee is still struggling to identify what they want in life, try this: ask them to imagine themselves as they would like to be at the end of the school year. What do they see that is different from how things are now? Start making a list of ideas: more close friendships, more involved in community activities, in the top school rugby team, passing science. These ideas can serve as a starting point for a discussion about what they really want to achieve.

SMART GOAL SETTING

When you have figured out some of the things your mentee wants for their future you can start to break these things down into manageable goals. A good model to use for goal setting when you are starting out is the SMART model as it provides a useful reminder of the different elements that need to be included in a goal to make it manageable.

S.M.A.R.T goals are:

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Realistic
Timely

If you started with the goal "I want to do better at school" and applied the SMART model, you would see the goal needs to become more specific, there needs to be some way to measure progress and it needs to have some timing associated with the goal.

“I want to do better at school” might become “I want to move from a C average to a B- by the end of Term 2 this year”.

It is also a good idea to detail the smaller, shorter-term goals that need to be achieved if your mentee is to accomplish their overall goal, so in this case the smaller goals might be:

- ✓ Spend 45 minutes doing my homework every night.
- ✓ Pay attention in class.
- ✓ Take better notes in class.
- ✓ Ask the teacher or a friend for notes on any missed classes.

These smaller goals make the overall goal seem less overwhelming and they also provide regular opportunities for you and your mentee to check whether they are on track and to celebrate their success along the way. If your mentee has stuck to their smaller goals for a fortnight or a month you could think about appropriately recognising their achievement.

Two more things to remember when you are starting to set goals:

- It's best to start out with only a handful of goals otherwise your mentee can easily become overwhelmed and discouraged.
- Goal setting is about helping your mentee realise their potential – if your mentee is passionate about sport or music or finding out about their cultural heritage then help them set a goal that captures their enthusiasm for those areas of their life.

SUCCESSFUL GOAL SETTING

TIP

Remember – if your mentee is not inspired by the goals you set together, they won't accomplish them and they won't get the sense of achievement which encourages them to set new goals. Make sure the goals you set with your mentee are things that will motivate them. It is easy to get carried away and push them to set goals that you would like to see them achieve but you are setting them up to fail if they haven't connected with the goal. Having a goal thrust upon them without their input does nothing to motivate a young person.

THE MENTOR'S ROLE IN REACHING GOALS: “BEST SUPPORTING MENTOR”

The hard work of chasing down the goal and achieving it can only be done by your mentee but you have a key supporting role to play.

Supporting your mentee through goal setting will ensure it is a positive experience. If they have a positive experience it is likely they will go on to use the process of setting and achieving goals to help them progress at school / university / work and throughout their life.

Plenty of praise

Lots of praise and positive messages about their specific strengths and talents will boost your mentee's self-esteem and make them more confident about their ability to reach their goals.

Celebrate achievements

Remember to recognise your mentee's success when they achieve a goal or make solid progress towards one – if they are made to feel good about their success they will be motivated to put in the time and effort needed to achieve their next goal.

Express faith in them

Don't be afraid to tell your mentee what you believe they are capable of – having someone who believes in them will boost their self-confidence and your belief in them gives them something to live up to.

Help them cope with “failures”

Be ready to support them if they don't achieve one of their goals – they will be disappointed but it is important you let them know nobody achieves all of their goals, all of the time at their first attempt. Success in this situation is being able to get over their disappointment and try again, try a different approach to achieving the goal or setting a new goal.

Help them re-evaluate goals and set new ones

If they don't reach one of their goals, help them identify what went wrong and how they could change that next time. If they reach a goal, get them to identify all the things they did to get them there, congratulate them and while motivation is high ask them what they want to achieve next.