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Step Four Set Goals

It's important for people of all ages to have goals.

Goals give you direction and focus. Having a goal also helps you develop a plan of action. For example, if you want to go to college, there are certain things you need to do to reach that goal. If you're not in the habit of setting goals, now is the time to start!

Set short-term and long-term goals

Short-term goals are goals that you can achieve within days or weeks. Long-term goals are goals that will take weeks, months, or even years to achieve. Below are a few examples.

Examples of short-term goals:

- Get a B on my next history test.
- Have all of my chores done by Friday.
- Practice my soccer drills three times this week.



Examples of long-term goals:

- Get all As and Bs on my next report card.
- Make the basketball team next year.
- Go to college and become a lawyer.

Set goals that are specific, measurable, and realistic

Not specific - I will do better in math.

Specific - I will get a B in math this semester.



Not measurable - I won't be so shy in class.

Measurable - I will raise my hand at least three times today.

Not realistic - Even though I usually get all Cs on my report card, this semester I will get straight As.

Realistic - I usually get all Cs on my report card, but this semester I'm going to get Bs in at least two classes.

Set both academic and personal goals

At the beginning of each grading period, figure out what grade you think you can earn in each class. Think of these grades as your academic goals for the term.

At the end of the grading period, congratulate yourself if you were able to meet your goals. If you didn't achieve your goals, try to figure out why. Then set new goals for the next grading period.

Be sure to also set a few personal goals for yourself. Perhaps you want to get in better shape, improve your athletic skills, or earn some money. Come up with two things you want to accomplish that don't involve grades. Make those your personal goals.

Write it down

Once you've set a goal for yourself, write it down. Then write down the specific things you need to do to achieve your goal.



In the example below, Brooke set a goal for herself, and then she made a list of the things she needed to do to achieve her goal.

My goal is to have enough money to buy an iPod by the end of next month. To help me reach my goal, I will

- ▶ *find out where I can get the best price, and then figure out how much money I need to save*
- ▶ *ask Mom if she has any jobs I can do to earn some money*
- ▶ *save all of my birthday money*
- ▶ *baby-sit for my aunt and save the money I earn*

Successful people set goals and then work hard to achieve them. Having goals will help you become the person you want to be!

"For every class, I set a goal based on what grade I think I can get. This gives me something to work for." Chen

"I'm always setting goals for myself. For example, my new goal is to be able to run a mile in 8 minutes." Anna



Step Five Get Involved

Students who are involved in activities usually get better grades, and they like school more.

All middle schools have athletic teams, clubs, and music programs. In many schools, students can also work as an office aide or teacher's assistant. Find out what activities are available at your school and become involved in one or two. You'll make new friends, gain new skills, and you'll also have a lot of fun.

If you need additional information on an activity, go to the office or talk to your counselor. Also listen to announcements and check your school's website.



Reasons to participate in school activities

► Spend time with friends and meet new people

"Band is so much fun. We're all friends and we have a great time together." Hannah

► Try something new

"One of my teachers told me that I should try out for the school play. It turned out to be a lot of fun, and everyone said that I was really good." Mia

► Provide a valuable service

"I work in the office one period a day. I like working there, and I feel like I am doing something useful." Carlos

► Enjoy school more

"I didn't like school last year, but this year I'm on the football team. I know more people now, and school's more fun." Tyler

► **Become a leader**

“Being a class representative has helped me gain confidence. It’s also helped me develop leadership skills.” James

► **Relieve stress**

“Basketball practice helps me get rid of a lot of stress. It’s great to be with friends and forget about school for awhile.” Kate



► **Develop your skills and talents**

“I play the violin in orchestra. I’m not very good, but I’m getting better, and I’m having a really good time.” Tasha

► **Have fun**

“School activities are the best part of school.” Sophia

Get involved in activities outside of school

There are lots of wonderful programs outside of school for middle school students (sports programs, scouting, YMCA programs, church activities). Middle school students can also volunteer. Volunteering at a nursing home, animal shelter, or charity event is a great way to have fun and to do something that’s worthwhile.

Being with friends and participating in group activities is great, but it’s also important to have things that you enjoy doing by yourself. During the next few years, take time to develop some personal hobbies and skills.

Here are just a few things that middle school students can do on their own: cook, read, juggle, fish, dance, shoot hoops, make jewelry, build something, take pictures, write stories, knit, draw, sew, hike, start a collection (comic books, rocks, coins), play an instrument, garden, exercise, decorate a bedroom, listen to music, take care of a pet, make a web page, help an elderly relative or neighbor.

Find something that you love to do, and then do it!



Step Seven - Deal with Stress, Anger, and Bullies

In middle school, some students feel more stressed out, and some feel like they get angry more often. Unfortunately, a few students sometimes act like bullies.

Dealing with stress

In middle school, the classes are usually harder, there's often more social pressure, and life is more complicated. These things sometimes cause middle school students to feel stressed. When you're feeling stressed, try these relaxation techniques.

- ▶ Take a deep breath, and then slowly release it. Do this until you feel your body relax.
- ▶ Think of a place where you feel very relaxed and calm. Close your eyes and visualize being there.



Whenever you are under a lot of stress, spend time with your family and friends and talk to them about what's going on. Talking is good because it helps you sort things out. Also, try to figure out if there's anything you can do to reduce your stress level.

When you're feeling stressed, take good care of yourself. Get plenty of sleep, eat right, and get some exercise. (Physical activity can actually reduce stress.) Try to keep a sense of humor, and do things that have helped you feel calm and relaxed in the past (take a hot bath, go for a walk, play with a pet).

We asked our group of students what they do to relieve stress. Here are a few of their answers:

"To relax, I read a book." Sophia

"I just listen to music." James

"Playing sports helps me relieve stress." Darius

"When I feel stressed, I play video games." John

"I go outside and take a long walk." Jennifer



Dealing with anger

We all get angry sometimes. Some people, however, seem to get angry a lot. Sometimes people get so angry they think they're going to explode. If you ever get so angry that you don't know what to do, try doing one of the following:

- ▶ Close your eyes, breathe deeply, and slowly count to 10.
- ▶ Do something physical to get rid of the negative energy. Take a walk, shoot baskets, kick a ball, or lift weights.
- ▶ Talk to a friend, parent, or counselor.

Dealing with bullies

In middle school, you'll probably run into some students who act like jerks. You may also see a few students who are more than jerks - they are bullies.

The best way to deal with a bully is to stay away from that person. A bully is looking for a reaction, so if you're ever the target of a bully, ignore him/her and just walk away.



If you are having a problem with a bully, let your friends know what's going on and ask for their support. Also, tell a parent, counselor, or teacher. If a bully is causing you problems, chances are he/she is also causing problems for other students. When you tell someone what's happening, you're not only taking action to protect yourself, you're making your school a better, safer place for everyone.

Bullies want power and they like to have an audience. Since bullies are influenced by how other people react, students can help discourage someone from being a bully. Everyone needs to let bullies know that their behavior is "not cool" and that it is not acceptable. *Students are the key to stopping bullies!*

"Everyone gets teased once in a while. If you ignore it, it will probably stop." Emily

"If you're having a problem with a bully, make sure that you let someone know about it." Antonio



Step Eight - Get Along with Your Parents

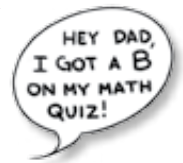
Getting along with your parents will make your middle school years a lot easier and a lot more fun.

In middle school, you're going to have all sorts of new experiences and challenges. Your parents, of course, are also facing a new challenge - they are now the parents of a middle school student.

During your middle school years, you and your parents will go through different stages, and sometimes you will disagree. For example, you may want more time to hang out with your friends, more freedom, or more privacy than your parents want to give you.

While you may not always agree with your parents, if you do the ten things listed below, you and your parents will probably get along just fine during these next few years.

1. Remember that your parents care about you, and that sometimes when you're out with your friends, they worry about you.
2. Talk to your parents about what is happening in school and about what you and your friends are doing. When you talk to your parents about what's going on in your life, they're less likely to think you're hiding things from them. Even telling them little simple things can make a big difference.
3. *Never* be disrespectful to your parents.
4. Bring your friends home so that your parents can meet them.
5. Make a real effort to do well in school.
6. Do chores without complaining.
7. Always tell your parents where you're going and when you'll be home. Check in with them often.



8. If you've done something wrong, don't lie about it. Admit what you've done and accept the consequences. Your parents will probably be more understanding if you tell them the truth.
9. When you and your parents disagree, first try to understand why they feel the way they do. Then, if you believe that what you want is truly reasonable, try to work things out by compromising. The following example will give you an idea of how this can work.

Taylor wanted to go to the mall with her friends from 4:00 to 9:00, but her parents said no. They said that the mall isn't safe and that there isn't anything she needs to buy.

Rather than get angry with her parents, Taylor said, "Mom and Dad, I know you worry about me, but really, we just look at the clothes and walk around. We never talk to people we don't know, and we always stay together. I promise to call you every hour to check in. If you're worried about me being there after dark, I'll be home by 8:00."

If Taylor's parents say ok, then Taylor will need to do exactly what she said she'd do. She'll need to call every hour, and she'll need to be home by 8:00.

If her parents still say no, Taylor needs to accept their decision, without getting upset. If Taylor is able to do this, her parents will be impressed with how mature she is being, and they may be more likely to say yes the next time.

10. Communicate. If there is something that you want or need, or if you have a problem, tell your parents. They aren't mind readers. You have to help them understand what you need from them.

Hint: When you're talking to your parents, try using "I statements." For example, rather than, "You don't trust me," say "I feel like you don't trust me."