



Exploring Leadership

PLANNING & ORGANIZATION: GOAL SETTING

Some people like to take life one day at a time—and that can work for a while. But what happens when you miss an important deadline or a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity slips by? To stay on track and reach your potential, it helps to know what you want and start taking steps now to get there. That’s where goal setting comes in.

CONVERSATION STARTER:

We tend to consume ourselves in “busy” work, yet still don’t accomplish our goals. If you consume yourself in the simple tasks, how will you make time for the bigger ones that get you to your goals?

Setting goals—and following through—can help shape the person you want to become. It takes daily effort and discipline, but it’s a skill you can grow with practice. When you take charge of your time and choices, you’re more likely to reach the goals that matter most and unlock your full potential.

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Understand the importance of setting goals based on priorities.
- Practice identifying and organizing goals from most to least important.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Large empty glass jar
- Sand
- Pebbles
- Large rocks (3–5 per jar)
- Blank paper
- Pens or pencils
- Copies of Appendix A & B
- Tape

EXPLORATION ACTIVITY:

This activity shows how putting your most important goals first makes space for everything else in life.

- Start by asking participants what’s most important in their lives. Write their answers on masking tape and stick them onto the large rocks.
- Label the pebbles as “Next Important” and the sand as “Least Important.” Have participants list some examples of things they could list on the pebbles and sand.
- Pour the sand into the jar first, followed by the pebbles, and finally the rocks. Notice how not everything fits.
- Dump it out and repeat the process—but this time, start with the rocks, then add the pebbles, and finally the sand. Now it all fits!
- (Activity continues on the next page...)

FACILITATION TIPS:

- Encourage youth to reflect honestly about how they spend their time.
- Use Appendix A to guide participants through listing their own goals and sorting them into big rocks, pebbles, and sand.



EXPLORATION ACTIVITY: CONTINUED

- Pass out a blank sheet of paper. Have students draw a line down the middle. On one side write “Personal,” and on the other side write “Work.”
- Guide them through listing their big rocks, pebbles, and sand for both areas.
- Use this as a reference to help them complete their Goal Setting Worksheet (Appendix A).
- Pass out a copy of Appendix B, review it briefly, and have them take it home as a reminder and goal-setting guide.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Did seeing the jar activity help you think differently
- Were you surprised by what ended up on your list of big rocks?
- Are those big priorities getting enough time—or do they get pushed aside for smaller stuff?
- What are some ways you can let the “sand” (less important tasks) come last instead of first?

APPLICATION DISCUSSION:

- Are the goals you listed today realistic to do on your own, or will you need support?
- What’s a timeline you can imagine for reaching your goals?
- Do deadlines help you stay focused—or do they stress you out?
- Who are some people or resources that could help you reach those goals?



CONCLUSION:

The jar activity showed us something powerful: your life only has so much space. If you fill it with the small stuff first, there’s no room left for what really matters. But when you focus on your big goals first—your “rocks”—the rest can still fit. Planning helps, but learning to prioritize is what leads to a meaningful, balanced life.

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REFERENCES

- “Planning and Decision Making.” *What Teens Need To Succeed*, Free Spirit Publishing, 1998, pp. 256–263.



APPENDIX A:

GOAL SETTING WORKSHEET

1. Write down everything you'd like to accomplish in the next 10 years. Think big—include school goals, personal growth, career dreams, life direction, hobbies, passions, friendships, and fun. These are your long-term goals. Be specific and detailed.

2. Now look over your long-term list. Pick the 2–3 goals that matter most to you and circle or highlight them. These are your top priorities.

3. Write down what you'd like to accomplish in the next 3–5 years. These are your medium-range goals. Choose the top 2–3 that will help you reach your long-term goals.

4. Next, list what you want to achieve in the next year. These are your short-term goals. Choose a few that connect directly to your medium goals and highlight them.

5. Choose someone—a trusted adult or a peer—who can check in with you and help you stay on track. Who will be your accountability partner?

6. Keep your list close! Read it often—daily if you can, or weekly at least. When you complete a goal, write down the date. Don't forget: goals can change over time, and that's okay. Just keep moving forward.



APPENDIX B:

PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING

If planning is difficult for you, start simple.

1. Start with a daily “To-Do” list.
2. Number the items—put #1 next to the most important task.
3. Check off items as you go, starting with the top priorities.
4. Move any unfinished tasks to tomorrow’s list.

Now take it further with goal setting.

Making plans and sticking to them helps you reach what you want. Setting real goals—and taking action—helps you become the person you want to be.

5 BENEFITS OF BEING A GOAL SETTER

1. **You gain independence.** You’re not waiting for someone else to make decisions for you.
2. **You feel accomplished.** You’re not just doing what others expect—you’re doing what matters to you.
3. **You make things happen.** Instead of wishing, you’re working toward your dreams.
4. **You manage time better.** You get more done and free up time for fun and passion.
5. **You stay interested and interesting.** People who set goals don’t feel bored—and they aren’t boring either!

Lots of people dream about where they want to be in 5, 10, or 20 years. But not everyone has the daily discipline to get there. If you practice goal setting now—and do it for yourself—you’ll take charge of your future and grow into your best self.