

Decision Making, Personal Problem Solving, and Setting & Reaching Goals Reading 25

[Decision Making & Personal Problem Solving Module](#)

The Importance of Being Able to Make Decisions, Solve Personal & Relationship Problems, and Set & Reach Goals

Making decisions, solving personal & relationship problems, and developing and reaching goals are essential for emotional, social, and physical well-being. However, these skills do not exist in isolation from the other SES competencies. We must be self-aware to make healthy decisions, solve personal problems, and set and reach our goals. We must be aware of our values, strengths, needs, weaknesses, personal and relationship problems, what gives us a sense of purpose and meaning, and the environments, activities, and relationships that generate pleasant feelings and those that create unpleasant feelings. We must be aware of and accept the full range and depth of what we are feeling and thinking and why we feel and think this way. The process of being self-aware is a prerequisite for making healthy decisions, solving personal problems, and setting goals that are consistent with our values and meet our true needs. We do not manage our feelings and thoughts, and we do not solve personal and relationship problems by pretending they don't exist or by holding them inside. We manage them by accepting them, making decisions, and setting goals to change ourselves, our situations, our environments, and/or our relationships. We will meet our needs if we make good decisions, solve personal problems, and reach our goals.

Levels of Decision Making, Personal Problem Solving, & Goal Setting

This document addresses four levels of decision-making, personal problem-solving, and goal setting.

Level 1 Decision Making/Problem-Solving/Goal Setting.

The easiest decisions require only a little analysis and/or exploration of alternatives. Examples include setting a goal to self-disclose more often or to start using "I Statements." The My Goals Learning Experience ([SES Projects Module](#)) and the My Goals Log ([SES Projects Module](#)) can help students develop competence in developing, implementing, and successfully meeting these types of goals. Most learning experiences on this website offer students an opportunity to develop and implement goals using the My Goals Log.

Level 2 Decision Making/Problem-Solving/Goal Setting: The D.E.C.I.D.E. Process.

The next level is for more complex decisions and personal problems that require extensive analysis and/or the exploration of alternatives and choices. The D.E.C.I.D.E. decision-making process to make tough choices and solve personal problems may be used. The steps in this process include:

- A. **D**efine the Problem, Issue, Choice, or Dilemma
- B. **E**xplore the Alternatives/Choices
- C. **C**onsider the Positive and Negative Consequences
- D. **I**dentify Short and Long Term Goals and Values
- E. **D**ecide and Act
- F. **E**valuate the Success of The Decision/Choice

See the **D.E.C.I.D.E. Decision Making Process for Making Tough Choices and Solving Problems** ([Decision Making & Personal Problem Solving Module](#)).

Level 3 Decision Making/Problem Solving/Goal Setting: The ABC Model of Behavior Change.

The next level is for starting a new behavior, being more consistent in applying a current behavior, or reducing or eliminating an unhealthy behavior or habit. Examples of these behaviors include exercising, meditating, practicing relaxation techniques, brushing and flossing, doing homework, practicing a musical instrument, setting aside time for personal projects, eliminating junk food from one's diet, and stopping procrastination. Because it can be challenging to start and maintain new behaviors, it is easier if the behavior becomes a habit. One can apply the Antecedent-Behavior-Consequences (ABC) Model of Behavior Change to develop positive habits and quit negative behaviors. The steps in this process to start and continue a new behavior include:

- A. Select a signal (**A**ntecedent) to cue your new behavior.
- B. Immediately perform the **B**ehavior after the signal.
- C. Provide a positive **C**onsequence (reward) for doing the behavior.
- D. Chart your progress
- E. Continue the sequence.

An example of the application of this model for starting an exercise program would be to select an Antecedent that will cue the behavior (e.g., doing the exercises at the same time of the day on the same days of the week), doing the exercises (the **B**ehavior) on the same days at the same time, and giving oneself a positive Consequence/reward (e.g., self-praise, listening to music, texting friends, etc.) following successful completion of the exercises. Chart one's daily progress and continue the sequence.

See the (**ABC**) Model of Behavior Change Reading ([Decision Making & Personal Problem Solving Module](#)) for a complete discussion of this model.

Level 4 Decision Making/Problem-Solving/Goal Setting: Interpersonal Conflict Resolution

The fourth level is when we need to work through a misunderstanding, impasse, or conflict in a relationship. Working through interpersonal conflicts may be the most essential skill for personal, family, and career success. It may also be the most challenging skill to learn and do well. To work through misunderstandings, impasses, and conflicts in relationships, we need to master the following skills:

1. Be aware of what we feel and think and why we feel and think this way, and understand our needs and values (**self-awareness**).
2. Be an effective listener to know and understand others (**passive & active listening**).
3. **Ask clarifying & inquiry questions** when we don't understand fully.
4. Speak in ways that will make others want to listen to us, understand us, consider what we have to say, and possibly change their behavior to help meet our needs (**I Statements**).
5. Have difficult conversations with others to work through misunderstandings, impasses, and conflicts (**interpersonal conflict-resolution skills**).
6. **Assertively say no** when being pressured to do something we don't want to do.

See the [Conflict Resolution Skills Module](#) for learning experiences that facilitate the development of these skills.

Tips For Developing and Successfully Meeting Goals

Setting Goals is Important Because:

1. Goals give direction and meaning to our lives
2. Goals give us something to strive for
3. We gain a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment when we meet our goals
4. Goals help us become the person we want to be
5. Accomplished goals can serve as guideposts to measure how far we have grown physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, financially, and spiritually.

Healthy Goal

We can increase our chances of successfully meeting our goals if our goals meet the criteria for healthy and effective goals outlined below.

Healthy Goals Meet the Following Criteria:

1. The goal matches/helps me reach most of my short-term goals.
2. The goal matches/helps me reach most of my long-term goals.
3. The goal is consistent with my personal values and rules.
4. The goal is consistent with my family values and rules.
5. The goal is emotionally, socially, and physically healthy for me.
6. The goal is emotionally, socially, and physically healthy for others.
7. The goal is ethical.
8. The goal is legal for me to do.
9. I have all the facts and information I need to develop this goal.
10. This goal is good for me, and I have the facts to support it.
11. I feel this is a good goal for me.

Criteria for Setting Effective Goals: An effective goal is:

1. **Believable & Achievable:**

You must believe you can achieve your goals with your given strengths and abilities and within your set timeframe.

2. **A Stretch for You.**

Goals should neither keep you in your comfort zone nor push you into your panic zone.

3. **Controllable.**

If your goal involves anyone else's involvement, you must obtain that person's permission.

4. **Measurable.**

Your goal must be stated in measurable terms of time and quantity. For example, if you want to get better grades in several or all of your courses, you need to state precisely what your grades will be in those courses.

5. **Specific.**

If you want to get an “A” in math, English, and Health, you need to state precisely what you will do (or do differently) to get an “A” in those courses. For example, I will complete all assignments to an A standard and turn them in on time. I will review class work, readings, and notes from that day every night. I will study for at least 30 minutes for each test, starting at least 4 days before the test.

6. **Desirable.**

Your goal should be something you really want to do.

7. **Growth Facilitating.**

Your goal should never be destructive or dangerous to yourself, others, or society.

8. **Avoid Goals You Do Not Have Control Over or Depend on Others To Reach the Goal.**

Examples include winning a championship, scoring many goals or baskets, or some other accomplishment you cannot completely control. Instead of setting a goal of how many goals or baskets you will score, develop a goal for a specific skill you will work on, how many minutes you will work on that skill, and how many days per week you will work on that skill.

For Goals That Involve Doing The Same Behavior Regularly, Apply The ABC Model of Behavior Change

1. When Possible, Do Behaviors on the Same Days of the Week at the Same Time of Day

When performing regular behaviors such as homework, exercising, practicing a musical instrument, meditating, etc., it can be easier to do them on the same days of the week at the same time. That way, the day of the week and the time (an antecedent) cue the behavior, making it easier to develop a habit.

2. Rewarding Your Successful Behavior When You Stick to Your Plan

It is easier to stick to our plan and thus meet our goal if there is a reward (a positive consequence) every time we successfully implement a behavior. Anything that gives us pleasure and motivates us to stick to our plan can be used as a reward. The easiest rewards are those behaviors we do most days or every day, such as taking a shower, snacking, texting a friend, listening to music, watching TV, using the computer for fun, positive self-talk, playing video games, etc. These behaviors can be **withheld** until we do our target behavior. That is, commit to not giving ourselves the reward behavior until we have successfully done the behavior.

3. Getting Social Support from Friends and Family (Social Support) Can Help You Meet Your Goals

Friends and family have a powerful influence on our behavior. It is easier to change our behavior when we have the support of family and friends. Friends and family can encourage, support, and praise us when we do the behavior or use the skill. Consider asking a friend or family member to help you by reminding you to implement the behavior or use the skill, and by supporting you as you make progress toward meeting your goal.

4. Use a Self-Monitoring Chart to Record Your Behavior

When trying to change your behavior, it is essential to monitor your progress daily. Using a self-monitoring chart will provide information on when you are doing well and when you aren't, and help you understand why you are successful and when you aren't. Seeing your progress visually can be highly motivating and help you stay on track. When you are unsuccessful, you can determine why and make the necessary changes. See the [Self-Disclosure, I Statements](#), and [Listening & Inquiry Projects](#) in the [Social-Emotional Skills Projects Module](#) for examples of self-monitoring charts and directions for how to use them.