



SETTING GOALS FOR RECOVERY

THE GOAL SETTING PROCESS IS ABOUT HELPING YOUR LOVED ONE THINK ABOUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THEM AND DEVELOPING A VISION OF WHAT THEY WOULD LIKE THEIR LIFE TO BE. RESEARCH SHOWS THAT WORKING TOWARDS ESTABLISHED GOALS PROMOTES HOPE AND ENHANCES MOTIVATION.¹

WHAT ARE RECOVERY GOALS?

Recovery goals are objectives that a person sets that are related directly to their recovery (mental health-based goals), and that may have been put on pause due to their mental health condition (work, family, physical health, social life, etc.) Recovery is not one size fits all. It is important to have a discussion with your loved one about what is most important for them. For instance, one person's goal may be to live independently once they have reached a certain point in their recovery, while another person may be content to live with a roommate or caregiver.

It is important to remember that you are not there to do the work for your loved one as a caregiver. Goal setting should be a collaborative process as you assist your loved one through setting specific and challenging, yet attainable, goals. Once goals have been set, being supportive and encouraging of the choices that your loved one has made can help them stay on a path to recovery.

CAREGIVER TIPS FOR GOAL SETTING

When trying to help your loved one come up with goals, think about the steps they will have to take in order to achieve their long-term objectives. Consider smaller actions and short-term goals that could be related or require the same skill set—anything you can think of that is realistic for the *now*. For example, if your loved one has indicated that receiving their GED is a long-term goal, suggest they start reading 30 pages per day of material from a topic that interests them and go from there. Furthermore, finding a topic that interests them may be a short-term goal in itself.

FINDING OUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR LOVED ONE MAY BE DIFFICULT AT FIRST. HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLE QUESTIONS TO GET THE CONVERSATION GOING:

- > What would you like to be different about your current situation?
- > What do you like about your life now?
- > What is your greatest achievement?
- > What do you miss about your life before recovery?
- > What makes you feel better, if only for a second?
- > What do you hope to be doing one year from now?

BEING SUPPORTIVE

Here are some tips for being a supportive caregiver during the goal setting process.

- > **Do it together.** Find out what is important to your loved one and ask questions. Revisit what may have been put on hold because of their condition - such as their employment status, social or family life, dreams or aspirations. To get down to the core of a goal and make it more engaging and exciting, ask follow-up questions about what it would mean for them. The more you know, the better you can help them arrive at goals that are meaningful.
- > **Set short- and long-term goals.** For a person recovering from mental illness—especially when they are beginning treatment—the idea that their life could someday be different may seem out of reach. Achieving smaller, more immediate, measurable, and realistic goals can help generate momentum in the recovery process. Goals like getting out of bed at a certain time can help one stay motivated and focused so that they are able to work towards long-term goals, such as reconnecting with family.
- > **Keep your loved-one accountable.** Caregivers can support ongoing and long-term goals by holding their loved one accountable through tracking goals and celebrating progress along the way. Gentle check-ins can be useful to monitor progress. It is important not to make the loved one feel guilty if they are not reaching goals as quickly as anticipated, however. This can make the process more difficult, potentially prompting the person in recovery to be untruthful about their recovery progress.
- > **Be flexible.** The road to recovery is not linear. At times it may feel like your loved one is taking one step forward and two steps back, but even slow progress is progress. Priorities change, life happens, and you may have to make some adjustments along the way. Periodically revisit goals to ensure that the benchmarks you are focusing on still fit your loved ones needs and values at the time.
- > **Remember your place.** The ultimate goal of being a caregiver is to help your loved one experience recovery. They will be most successful in their recovery when they have a degree of control and are actively involved in the process. This fosters the self-determination and independence needed for sustainable recovery.
- > **Be prepared for times of crisis.** Part of your discussion around your loved one's needs should focus on what happens when they are in crisis so that you are prepared to move forward together when you are the only person to act on their behalf. If you must make decisions for your loved one or act without involving them, it should only be done as temporary crisis management. Once they have stabilized, you should help return them to pursuing their recovery goals.

CARING FOR YOURSELF IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF BEING A CAREGIVER

Did you know that caregivers tend to experience higher levels of stress² and frustration³ than those who are not caregivers?



Being a caregiver can be hard, so it's important to check in on your own mental health from time to time.

Visit mhascreening.org to take a free, anonymous, and confidential screen.

SOURCES

¹ Clarke, S. P., Oades, L. G., Crowe, T. P., & Deane, F. P. (2006). Collaborative Goal Technology: Theory and Practice. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 30(2), 129-136. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2975/30.2006.129.136>

²Pinquart, M. & Sorensen, S. (2003) Differences between caregivers and noncaregivers in psychological health and physical health: A meta-analysis. *Psychology and Aging*, 18(2), 250-267.

³Center on Aging Society. (2005). *How Do Family Caregivers Fare? A Closer Look at Their Experiences*. (Data Profile, Number 3). Washington, DC: Georgetown University.