

Mental Health Goal Setting for the New Year

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January 1st is a holiday celebrating a new start. This new start provides an opportunity to evaluate our and choices. It is also a reminder of the importance of living life with intention and purpose to enhance wellbeing.

In context of mental health, intentionality is about awareness of thoughts and emotions, recognizing without immediately reacting to them. Intentionality is also about development of positive habits. It's not just about avoiding negative patterns; it's about choosing to create positive ones. These could include practicing healthy sleep, self-care activities and hobbies that you enjoy, self-compassion, gratitude, and using coping skills to reduce intensity of overwhelming feelings.

New Years *resolutions* are often grounded in an underlining unmet need we are trying to achieve such as better physical health, increased sense of accomplishment, stronger connections with others, or financial stability. Although the need is identified, resolutions tend to be overly broad and traction on progress tends to fizzle out by February. It's more beneficial to set *goals*, which are more defined and measurable.

Mental health goals aim to address connections between thoughts, emotion, and behaviors – and the impacts on various aspects of your life. Mental health *goals* should emphasize the ongoing process of self-care and positive behavior change - while *resolutions* can sometimes focus too heavily on achieving a quick fix.

How to Set Mental Health Goals:

1. Spend some time to identify what you want.
2. Think about the 'Why factor'.
 - a. Why do you want to reach this goal,
3. What is your SMART Goal (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, and Timebound goal)?
 - a. Example might be "I will practice 10 minutes of mindfulness three days a week for 30 days to reduce intensity of stress."
4. Consider what you need to *begin* to make progress on this goal.
 - a. What is currently getting in the way? What do you need to stop doing to see progress?
5. What can you do to *stay* motivated to work on this goal?
 - a. What do you need to do? What thought processes are helpful?

Mental health is a journey, not a destination. When creating goals for our mental well-being, flexibility is key.

If this process feels overwhelming, remove pressure from "what you *should be doing*" (which can often contribute to a high failure rate of "new year resolutions") it may be helpful to consider a *NOT to do list* or an *anti-resolution*.

Anti resolution examples:

- **Not** trying to fix everyone else's problems
 - Recognizing you can't control others actions and focus on your own wellbeing.
- **Not** overcommitting
 - Learning to set healthy boundaries.
- **Not** using negative self-talk,
 - Replace with more helpful and accurate self-affirmations.

Seeking help is OK

Be compassionate to yourself and seek support when needed. Therapy can be helpful for supporting mental health goals and assisting in creating a deeper understanding of ourselves to help us break unhelpful patterns of behavior or allow us to give ourselves more compassion.