

# Self-Management SEL Activity: Goal Setting for Elementary Students

## Why should everyone, including children, set goals?

It might seem pointless to set goals while we're all dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. But the fact is, goals are more important now than ever. At a time when so much of what's happening in our world is beyond our control, it's good to take stock of just how many things we can do to give our lives direction.

Goal-setting should become a habit early on in life. When elementary students learn how to set goals, they're taking the first steps in developing a growth mindset. Learning how to set goals is an important life skill that can empower our children to plan for the future, encourage them to problem-solve, and increase their self-awareness, confidence, and perseverance.

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning ([CASEL](#)), working toward personal and academic goals aligns with the core SEL competency of self-management relating to:

- Impulse control.
- Stress management.
- Self-discipline.
- Self-motivation.
- Organizational skills.

While goal-setting doesn't necessarily come naturally, a young person's intrinsic desire to achieve sets them up for success when they're given the proper tools and strategies. Hana, a fourth-grade student who uses [Kuder Galaxy](#)® to learn about careers and education pathways, says, "A goal is something that you're gonna achieve. You won't do it this second; you want to plan it." Hana attends a Leader In Me® school in Iowa, where the 7 Habits of Health Kids curriculum teaches students the importance of planning. "A goal is basically a plan," she says. "I write goals down in a notebook. My last goal was 'Read 100 pages of a chapter book by the end of the week.' Don't set a goal that's too easy or too hard."

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## Making goal-setting as easy as ABC.

Here's a simple way to introduce students to the free downloadable goal-setting activity at the bottom of this post. Use the following script (in italics) to lead a class discussion.

### [A] Ask students to consider, and answer, these questions:

- *What is a goal?*

- *Why is it important to set goals?*
- *Do you know what a goal is?*
- *What are some things you would like to improve in your life?*
- *What are your goals for this month?*
- *How will you reach your goals?*

*When you set a goal, you're making plans for what you want to achieve or improve on. It can be anything that you want to do better at. Think of all the things you do at home, at school, in your sports or hobbies, and with friends. Chores, reading, good eating habits, writing daily entries in a journal, even things like playing board games or doing puzzles, or getting exercise can be goals. Later on, you will set goals at work. Goals help us be successful.*

*Imagine a two-story house without a ladder, staircase, or elevator. That is what a life without goals would be like. How do you get to the next level if there is no way to get there? Every time you reach a goal, you are stepping up a ladder to the next level in life!*

### **[B] Back them up by offering encouragement and help along the way.**

- *Set it: Decide what you want to achieve.*
- *Break it down into small steps.*
- *What are some of the obstacles that might make it hard for you to reach your goal? How will you overcome those obstacles?*
- *Make a deadline. How long will it take you to complete your goal?*
- *Track your progress. I will be here to help you do that. We will check in on your goals on a regular basis.*

### **[C] Celebrate their successes!**

- *What are some positive outcomes that you can achieve by completing your goal?*
- *What are some "rewards" that might motivate you to do the hard work to accomplish each step needed to reach your goal? A punch on your punch-card? An award certificate you can decorate? A star on our bulletin board? Other ideas?*
- *Challenge yourself with a new goal. What will your next goal be?*
- *If you set and achieve just one goal a month, how many goals will you achieve in a year? How about if you set a new goal each week?*