Goal-setting worksheet

Start with what matters, then define one change you could notice. Progress can include doing more while feelings remain.

Editable PDF: replace or delete the fictional examples. Blank PDF: print and write. Guidance follows.

What I want more room for in my life

e.g. More time with friends.

My everyday goal

e.g. Join a friend for a short walk.

How I will recognise progress

e.g. I attend, even if I feel anxious.

My smallest useful first step

e.g. Send one invitation.

When, where and the support I need

e.g. Text Alex on Tuesday; suggest a nearby park.

A smaller option if the step is too much

e.g. Start with a brief phone call.

Review date / what happened / next step

e.g. Review on Sunday: what helped me take a step?

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Using this resource

Goal-setting worksheet

What this helps with

'Feel better' is an understandable hope, but it can be hard to know where to begin. A useful goal describes something you would like to have more room for in life. You can then choose a small action that is within your influence. Feelings may change gradually. A goal can therefore focus on taking part, connection or routine, without making complete confidence a condition for trying. Your circumstances and resources matter when deciding what is realistic.

How to use it

1. Name a part of life that matters to you and what difficulties are getting in the way.
2. Describe an observable change you would value, in your own words.
3. Choose a first step small enough for your current energy and circumstances.
4. Decide when, where and what support or adjustment could help.
5. Set a review date. Use what happened to adapt the goal, rather than grade yourself.

A fictional worked example

Ellis wants 'to stop being anxious'. Exploring what this would allow reveals a wish to spend time with friends again. A useful goal is to join one short, familiar social activity during the next fortnight. The first step is to message a trusted friend about a 20-minute walk on Saturday. Ellis plans a route suited to their mobility and agrees a time. If the friend is unavailable, the alternative is to suggest another day rather than conclude the goal has failed. At review, Ellis will consider whether they took part and what they learned, not whether they felt calm throughout.

Keep in mind

Goals should be yours, not a demand from someone else. Do not make a target depend on enduring unsafe situations, ignoring disability or exceeding medical advice. A therapist can help adapt goals when low mood, trauma or other difficulties make planning hard.

Sources and attribution

Roth, A. D., & Pilling, S. (2007). The competences required to deliver effective CBT for people with depression and anxiety disorders. UCL competence framework.

NHS. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

Original material informed by the sources above. No outside organisation endorses this worksheet.

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