Using SMART Goals with At Risk Youth

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Objectives

- Goal setting is an important facet of home, school and life planning. This presentation will present a strength-based interactive systematic approach to writing specific, measureable, achievable, realistic and timed (SMART) goals with at risk high school students.

- It will provide useful strategies in the formulation of academic and personal goals, and increase goal setting behaviors among high school students.

- The presenters will demonstrate how SMART goals can be useful in helping students organize their home/school life balance. Useful tips in implementing SMART goals will also be discussed.
Criteria for At Risk

- National Center for School Engagement (2014)
  - Homeless or transient
  - Involved in drugs or alcohol
  - Abused sexually, physically or emotionally
  - Mentally ill
  - Neglected at home or live in stressful family environments
  - Lacking social or emotional supports
  - Negative peer pressure

Referenced from: http://www.schoolengagement.org/index.cfm/index.cfm/At-risk%20Youth
SMART Goals

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Realistic
- Time-bound
Specific: Different Kinds of Goals

- Students should be aware that there are different types of goals:
  - Academic goals (ex: getting an A in a class)
  - Physical goals (ex: exercising 30 min a day)
  - Financial goals (ex: saving $100 a month)

- Aware of the difference between Long-term and Short-term goals
  - What are some short-term goals your students may have?
  - What are some long-term goals your students may have?
“Concrete goals represent something specific to be done and are the starting point of the behavioral process.”

(Lemos, 2010, p.387)
Specificity is Important

■ Why is it important to make goals specific?
  ■ Clear focus
  ■ Clear direction towards the goals
  ■ Makes it easier to identify the necessary steps to reach the goals
  ■ Makes that goals more attainable

■ After the students accomplish a specific goal, they can use that accomplishment as motivation towards another bigger goal, and so on.
Techniques to Use for Specific Goals

Using a solution-focused approach can help with setting concrete goals for students

- Use of scaling (1-10 ratings)
- Personalize the specific goals
  - Focus on what is important to your students
- Set short-term goals before long-term goals
- Identify what the students are capable of and what they are not willing to do in order to accomplish their goals
- Have students write down their specific goals
- If necessary, break down into smaller goals
Measurable Goals

- Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each goal you set.

- Negative vs. Positive goals

- When you measure your progress
  - Did you stay on track?
  - Celebrate small victories
  - Use it as motivation for future goals.

- To determine if your goal is measurable, ask questions such as……

- How much? How many?

- How will I know when it is accomplished?
Attainable Goals

- Breaking down larger goals to smaller goals will make the goal more manageable and thus increase likeability of success
  - Principles of behavioral contracting (Goldfried, 1980 as cited in O’Hearn & Gatz, 2002)

- GOAL program (O’Hearn & Gatz, 2002) teaches students means-ends problem solving, which helps with goal attainment
Techniques for Attainable Goals

- Identify roadblocks that your students will face on their way towards their goals

- Potential roadblocks for students:
  - Resources
  - Transportation
  - Support
  - Time
  - Stable environment

- After you identify the roadblocks, work to identify realistic solutions for your students
Techniques Cont.

- Having a contract with your students may help motivate them towards their goals

- Break down the goal into manageable tasks
  - Daily scheduling to complete small tasks

- Accountability
  - Check in with the students to make sure that they are completing their tasks
Means-Ends Problem Solving (MEPS)

- This approach teaches students to connect means to an end, anticipating the consequences of their actions, and applying interpersonal problem solving skills.

- Use of Goal Ladder to achieve specified goals
  - Sequence of necessary steps to reach the stated goals
  - Help students recognize potential obstacles at each step in order to reach the top
Realistic Goals

- To be realistic, a goal must represent an objective toward which a student is both willing and able to work.

- Value driven goals
  - Cultural filter

- A goal represents working towards substantial progress.

- Make the goal relevant

- Tie short term goals to long term goals (big picture thinking)
Realistic Goals

■ Whose goal is it?
  ■ Students
  ■ Parents
  ■ Teachers
  ■ Friends

■ Does the student have the means to complete the goal?
  ■ Example technology
  ■ Parents resources
    ■ Family system survival
  ■ Staff resources
Realistic Techniques

- Problem Solving “do it for me”
  - Cheerleading
  - Advocating
  - Reframing failure

- Resources, matching the resources the students need with those available to them.
  - GEAR UP
  - School
  - Community
Time-bound Goals

- Solution-focused approach emphasizes the attainment of concrete goals in a brief time period
  - This would be good for short-term goals which could be a step to long-term goals

- Having time frames for goal completion helps students stay on track and increase the likelihood of goal attainment
Techniques to Use

- Daily scheduling of tasks
- Be realistic about how long it will take to finish a task
  - This may depend on the student’s ability and capacity
- Create a timeline for task completion
  - Ex: writing an essay, studying for a test, completing a project
- Encourage students to schedule in breaks if they have difficulty with concentration
- Yes, it is okay to schedule in Facebook and Youtube time.
Example of Time-bound Goals

- GEAR UP College Application and FAFSA Day at Bryan and Rudder High School
  - Students given a check list of their tasks

- For the tasks not checked, students were asked to write down a concrete date and time that they have to finish the task by.

- Students were encouraged to start the task that day if they have not done so.

- Students were encouraged to ask for help from GU staff via phone, office visits, and emails.
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Case Study

Nick is.....
- African American
- Age 18
- GPA 2.9 on 5.0 scale
- Classified as a Senior
- Works at Walmart overnight
- Homeless
  - Is currently couch surfing/ living on and off with an older romantic partner because of an altercation with his step-father, due to physical abuse of his mother.
- Wants to go to college to become to do something with computers & building things like bridges
- Strengths: enjoys listening to rap, R&B music, can sing, has a sense of humor, is good at math, is sometimes quiet but has good social skills, hardworking, is “street smart”
- Values: family, friends, fighting for what he believes, taking care of the people he cares about
References
