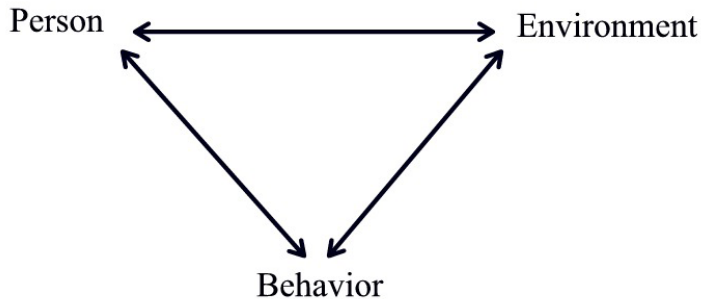


Setting Health Goals and Achieving Them*



This little diagram does a good job showing one of the major theories of what influences people's behaviors related to their health, such as eating and activity behaviors. It is called Social Learning Theory, and was developed by Albert Bandura from Stanford University. We have used it in many research projects to understand health behavior change, and to assist people to adopt or change a health behavior.

It shows the influence on each other of three crucial elements to consider when attempting to change or adopt a new health behavior. The person actively affects the behavior and is affected by the environment, and each one affects the others. Unless you deal with all three, attempts to change behavior will likely fail.

This is why you cannot just tell people to change health habits, people must be engaged in the process. It is also the rationale for changing the environment (more outdoor play space and healthy snacks) in order to increase children's activity and healthy eating.

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Action Plan

| | |
|---|--|
| The Goal | |
| How to reach the goal | |
| Who will be involved? | |
| When will I/we start? | |
| What resources will I/we need to make it happen? | |
| How can I get support (if needed) from: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Friends• Family• Work | |
| How will I/we know my/our progress towards the goal? | |
| Date goal reached: | |

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This will help you fill out the action plan:

Selecting the goal. The goal should be something you are really motivated to do. Ask yourself: why do I really want to do this? Your goal should be less than what you want to eventually do. For example, if you want to run a mile three times per week, and you are currently not even doing brisk walking once a week, brisk walking would be the place to start. Make the goal as specific as you can: “Briskly walk for 30 minutes once per week on Sunday.”

How to reach the goal. What will you or others have to do in order to make it happen? Think of things that keep you from doing the goal right now: is it time, equipment, safety, other responsibilities or weather? You may find that several strategies are required to result in a single act of walking 30 minutes once a week on Sunday.

Who will be involved? Think about those who are likely to be able to support you in this effort, and those who might need to change their expectations of you in order for this to happen. Be sure to tell someone about your intentions to carry out your goal. Once you have stated your intention out loud to someone else, you are more likely to succeed!

When will I /we start? It is good to set a specific time and date to begin your goal, not just “soon.”

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What resources are needed? This means both physical resources (e.g. a place, good walking shoes, comfortable clothes, rain gear if needed, and directions or maps) and encouragement from significant others, maybe even a walking “partner” who also wants to do more activity.

How can I get support?

Social support is one of the determinants of accomplishing your goals. If a family goal is set, each member of the family can devise a way to support another family member to help reach the goal. If your goal is to be able to use a breast pump at work in order to continue feeding your infant breast milk, you will need support from employers and co-workers.

How will I/we assess progress? Keep a written record of what exactly you do. If you don’t walk, what were the barriers? Use this information not to feel bad, but to come up with new strategies you may need to employ. Give yourself time to reach your goal, and allow for backsliding. If your goal is too difficult to achieve, it could be too ambitious, and you may need to revise it.

Date goal reached. This is generally a good time to congratulate yourself, and give yourself a reward that is likely to reinforce your aim, e.g. a new warm sweater to wear when it gets cooler during your walks. It also may signal a time to set another more ambitious goal, e.g. walking 3 times a week: twice during the week, once on Sunday.

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