

Don't Call it a Dream. Call it a Plan.



EFR EMPLOYEE & FAMILY RESOURCES



Guidance on setting - and keeping - sustainable resolutions.

Many of us view the new year as a clean slate, a chance to wipe off all the messy mistakes of the past 365 days and prepare for a brand new year full of possibilities. New Year's represents an opportunity to grow, change, and mold the future to our dreams and desires.

For many, that means creating resolutions to break unhealthy behaviors such as giving up smoking or quitting a compulsive spending habit and establishing new healthy behaviors like exercising more or practicing meditation. Do any of these resolutions sound familiar? You may have made similar ones last year! As easy as it is to create new resolutions, following through with them isn't quite as easy.

Thankfully, research shows that every effort you make towards reaching a goal matters, and setting resolutions is a first step to making lasting change.

Do old habits really die hard?



nail biting is a common habit

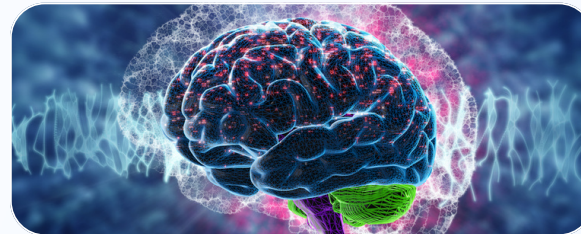
***Your habits fulfill
the emotional
need for comfort
and familiarity.
Habitual
behaviors often
become hardwired
into your brain.***

At their core, resolutions are about establishing behavioral changes. Humans are creatures of habit and once established, these patterns of behavior, whether good or bad become increasingly difficult to break because they fulfill our emotional needs of comfort and familiarity.



Hacking habit formation

We form habits by repeating an action frequently until it becomes an automatic, unconscious behavior that doesn't require much thought, motivation, or attention. This happens because habits become embedded within our procedural memory, which is a type of long-term memory involving how to perform different actions or skills such as riding a bike or cooking an omelette. This type of memory mainly operates below our conscious awareness.



Our brains actively try to convert our routines into habits because habits require less energy and allow the brain to run more efficiently. Actions that are not yet habitual require much more attention and effort, making them harder to establish. However, we can form new habits that override unwanted patterns of behavior- it just takes a little more effort.

What's your "why"?

Have you thought about the “why” behind your goal-setting? How we stay motivated can be a predictor of future success. Too often we’re motivated by pressure from peers or societal expectations and propelled by negative emotions such as fear, shame, guilt, and regret. Long-lasting change is much more likely when it’s self-motivated and reinforced by positive thoughts, feelings, or emotions.



Reasons to make

Resolutions



Peer pressure



Societal expectations



Guilt or shame



To give meaning and purpose



To enrich your life



To provide a roadmap for your future

Golden rules of goal-setting

The first step to making a change is to set realistic, sustainable goals. Setting SMART goals will help you start off on the right foot:

S **Specific:** Your goals are your roadmap, so you need to know exactly where you want to end up. Vague or generalized goals can cause you to lose direction. Write your goals down and put them in a visible place where you can see them every day.

M **Measurable:** Clearly define your goals so you know when you have achieved them. Instead of saying, "I want to save more money," set a specific amount such as, "I will save \$5,000."
Setting specific measurements to mark your successes, like saving \$500 in one month, can help you track behaviors and reinforce your progress. Create a check list with small steps you plan to take to achieve your goals.

A **Attainable:** Goals that are too far out of reach can cause frustration and erode confidence, and goals that are too easy don't always allow for the potential of growth. Find the sweet spot in-between where you can challenge yourself and grow.

R **Relevant:** Set goals that align with the direction you'd like your life to take. Goals that are inconsistent with your dreams can send you down a bunny trail where you'll end up wasting time and effort to achieve something that won't contribute to your overarching life plan.

T **Time-Bound:** Give your goals a deadline. This creates a sense of urgency and prevents you from putting them on the back burner.



Failure is success in progress

Setbacks are a guaranteed stop on your journey to success. It's important to view these slip-ups as speedbumps rather than roadblocks. Research suggests there are 6 stages of change:

- 1. Pre-contemplation:** you are unaware of the need to change.
- 2. Contemplation:** you think about change and weigh the pros and cons.
- 3. Preparation:** you plan steps to facilitate change.
- 4. Action:** you put your plans into practice.
- 5. Maintenance:** your new behavior becomes habitual and part of daily life.
- 6. Relapse:** you return to older, unwanted patterns of behavior.

Nearly everyone working towards behavior change will cycle through these stages, and you should note that people rarely move through the stages in order. Awareness of this cycle can help you get back on track when you lose direction.

Remember, setbacks provide opportunities to learn what didn't work and make plans for the next time around.