

# Initiative

## SUMMARY

In this episode of *Change Starts Here: Research Conversations*, cognitive neuroscientist Dr. Eve Miller, Ph.D and former educators Dr. Jennifer Chevalier, Ed.D, and Kim Yaris, M.Ed. delve into the research on initiative and discuss how it informs what educators can do to develop it in students.

## DEFINITION

Initiative is the ability to take independent and proactive action without external prompting. It requires important executive functions, such as planning, organization, and goal-directed behavior. Developing initiative in students helps them to actively engage in learning, set academic goals, show autonomy, and act responsibly—all factors connected to improving academic outcomes.

## TRY THIS!

The following strategies can be helpful in developing initiative in others:

- **Chunking**  
Breaking a goal down into its smallest achievable parts can help one see progress and feel more motivated to take greater initiative.
- **Modeling**  
Sharing both your victories and your setbacks as you work towards achieving a goal helps others grasp the messy process of goal attainment, ultimately inspiring them to take greater initiative.
- **Normalizing Failure**  
Creating cultures of trust where people can openly discuss mistakes and what they did to overcome them can help to minimize overwhelm and serve to jumpstart initiative after experiencing setbacks.

## MORE INFORMATION

- [How to Break out of a Rut](#)  
In this *Hidden Brain* podcast, Shankar Vedantam talks with Adam Alter about his research on what causes people to get stuck and what they can do to overcome their “stuckness.”
- [Anatomy of a Breakthrough by Adam Alter](#)  
This book teaches us that being stuck is not a flaw but an essential part of progress, and by making necessary adjustments, we can achieve even our most ambitious goals.