

# Goal-Setting and Academic Success

## 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. discuss Hope Theory and how it connects to students' ability to set—and achieve—their goals.

## DEFINITION

A goal is a desired outcome or target that motivates individuals to take focused actions. Goal setting is an executive function that involves the ability to prioritize objectives, engage in disciplined execution, and hold oneself accountable for results.

## TRY THIS!

### 3 Ways to Grow Students' Ability to Set and Achieve Goals

**1. Focus on the process of goal achievement.**

Invite students to share ideas for how they can accomplish their goals. For example, ask them how often, how long, and/or where they will study in order to pass an upcoming exam. Empowering students to actively participate and contribute to the goal setting process fosters a greater commitment and motivation toward achieving those goals.

**2. Engage in future thinking.**

Foster future thinking by asking students to visualize and articulate their personal future goals while also identifying potential barriers or difficulties they may encounter. Once these goals and obstacles are identified, prompt students to express how they will overcome or adapt to these challenges through drawing or writing. Finally, ask students to share with one another to create an opportunity for them to learn from each other and gain valuable insights and strategies for navigating their own challenges.

**3. Write a hero story.**

Begin by prompting students to reflect on their personal struggles or challenges. Then, encourage them to adopt the perspective of an unbiased observer and narrate the story of their struggle from that point of view. Afterwards, have students re-read the narrative, this time from their own perspective, and identify the instances in which they stayed true to their values despite the obstacles. Finally, instruct them to rewrite their story, emphasizing and amplifying the moments where they exhibited their values in the face of adversity.

## RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE

- [You 2.0: Your Future is Now](#)  
In this episode of Hidden Brain, Shankar Vedantan interviews psychologist Hal Hershfield who shares compelling research about goal achievement and provides strategies for helping students connect better with their futures.
- [Teaching the Hope Recipe: Setting Goals, Finding Pathways to Those Goals and Getting Motivated](#)  
This article outlines how hope is essentially goal-directed thinking and lays out the dos and don'ts of helping students achieve their goals.
- [The Importance, Benefits, and Value of Goal Setting](#)  
This article provides a high level overview of the importance, value, and benefits of goal setting.