

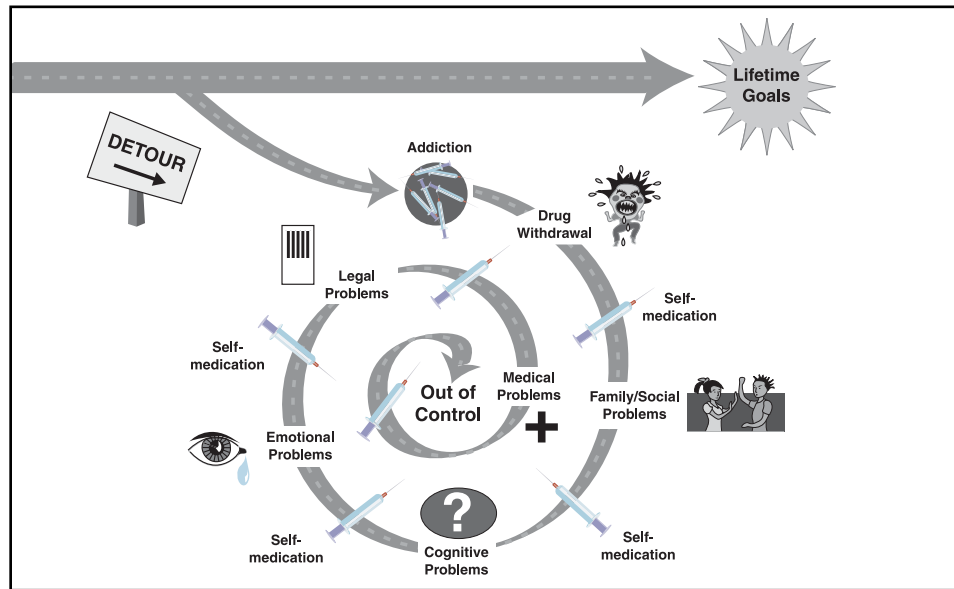
# REACHING YOUR GOALS

## Skills to Be Learned

- Improving Memory and Concentration
- Setting Goals
- Establishing Priorities
- Action Initiation

## Reaching Your Goals

Setting and reaching goals is like starting out on a journey. If you keep your eye focused on your destination, make it your highest priority, and work steadily towards it, you can reach whatever personal goal you set for yourself in life. Chances are there will always be some obstacles along the way, but most can be overcome. Drug addiction represents one of the largest barriers to reaching goals because it completely changes your focus and your priorities.



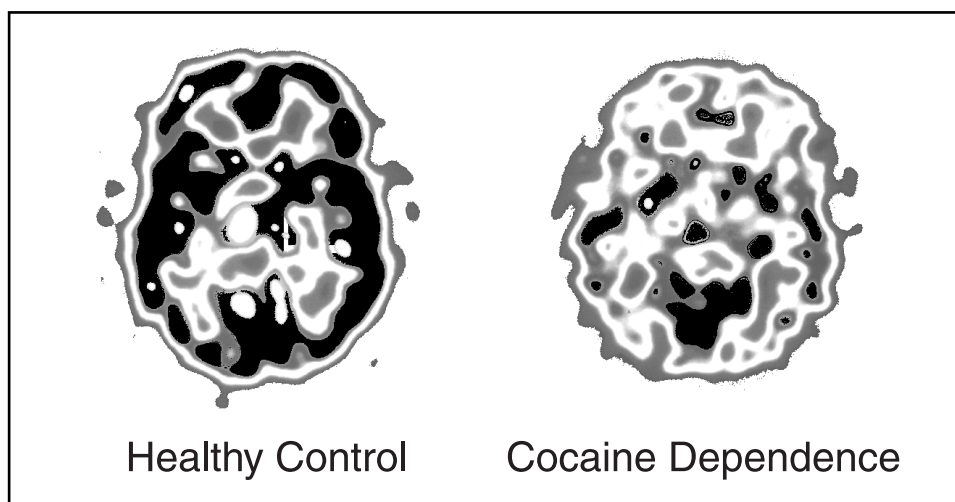
Imagine that the top arrow shown in the illustration represents your **life journey**—you set out on your journey, taking your first few steps towards discovering your purpose in life and identifying your lifetime goals. But then you start using drugs. Addiction is a major **detour** in your life journey. When you are addicted, your highest priority in life becomes getting and using drugs. That's #1. Nothing is more important than relieving symptoms of withdrawal and craving. Drug users who are HIV-positive may be even more focused on getting and using street drugs because they think that street drugs can provide some temporary relief from HIV-related symptoms or the anxiety and depression that may be associated with being HIV-positive. “Temporary” is the key word, however. Drug use creates its own set of problems that take you farther and farther away from your goals. Furthermore, both addiction and HIV-disease can have a detrimental effect on the very skills that you'll need to meet your goals. It can affect your memory and concentration, your ability to manage time and get organized, and your ability to take steps towards accomplishing some of the things that you would really like to do in your lifetime. As you can see in the illustration above, **addiction is a detour that makes you spin out of control in an endless cycle of self-medication.**

The goal of this chapter is to provide you with some tools that can help you get back on track. The material in this chapter will help you to establish priorities and to take the first steps towards reaching your goals. We'll begin by teaching you some memory and concentration aids to help keep you on track.

## Prospective Memory

When we think of memory, we usually think of memory for past events. Prospective memory is different. **Prospective memory is the type of memory required to carry out actions in the future.** For example, remembering to take your medication this evening, remembering to attend your HHRP<sup>+</sup> group next week, remembering to go to your next doctor's appointment, remembering to use a condom next time you have sex, remembering to use a new needle or to clean your needle properly if you make the decision to inject drugs—these are all examples of prospective memory. This chapter concentrates on prospective memory because it is extremely important in maintaining your health and meeting your recovery goals. Unfortunately, many HIV-positive drug users have difficulty with prospective memory. This may be for any number of reasons. For example, it may be due to HIV infection, but it is probably more likely to be due to using drugs.

Remember the anti-drug public service announcement that used to be shown on TV that showed an egg going into a frying pan and said—"This is your brain... This is your brain on drugs." Well, here's the real thing. This really is the brain of someone not on drugs and the brain of a drug user.



The black areas depict blood flow to various parts of the brain. Notice that there are fewer black areas in the brain scan of the drug user compared to the non-drug user. It looks like this drug user has “holes in the head”.

So why is blood flow so important? Reduced blood flow can mean:

- Learning and memory impairment
- Problems with attention and concentration
- Problems just getting started and learning how to interpret feedback
- Mental inflexibility
- Poor judgment

The good news is that you can prevent further damage and even possibly reverse some of the damage if you stop using drugs. You should not assume that because you have any of these problems that it is due to HIV and that therefore it is out of your control. There are many things that you can do that are under your control. Being abstinent from drugs is very important, and you've taken a very important first step by getting into treatment. However, in order to gain the greatest benefit from this program and to prevent relapse, you will need to learn and remember a number of recovery skills that you will be taught in this HHRP<sup>+</sup> workbook. Therefore, one of the goals of this chapter is to help you compensate for any learning and memory difficulties you may currently be having.

## **External Memory Aids**

As you will see there are many ways to help improve memory and learning. One method is the memory book system. An example of a memory book is this HHRP<sup>+</sup> Workbook. This HHRP<sup>+</sup> Workbook has sections for keeping your personal information, emergency information, your schedules and appointments, to-do lists, important names and telephone numbers, and other information. Your HHRP<sup>+</sup> Workbook is an example of an external memory aid.

External memory aids are designed to store information externally and to cue you to take action. Here are some additional examples of external memory aids.

**Memory Book**

**To do list**

**Calendar**

**Alarm**

**Post-it note**

**Bulletin Board**

**Watch**

**Address book**

**Grocery list**

**Map**

**Appointment book**

**Item Placement**

## How to Use *Item Replacement* as an External Memory Aid

- An example of item placement as a memory aid is to place something you need to remember in a location that will trigger your memory. For example, near the front door, or in the same place you keep your wallet or keys.
- Placing your clock, calendar, and bulletin board in places that are easy to see will remind you to refer to them.
- Labeling shelves reminds you where items should be replaced.
- Putting instructions next to appliances provides you with immediate source of assistance.
- Keeping your environment organized can facilitate memory and reduce stress. Once the room is set up a particular way, don't change it. For example, don't rearrange your kitchen cabinets, or change the location where you keep your keys.

At the end of the chapter you will find an example of a “Safety Checklist” which is also an external memory aid that can help you remember to complete routine safety checks before leaving the house. Create a safety checklist suitable for your own needs and place it on or near your front door, so that you always see it before you leave the home.

## Internal Memory Aids

Another word for internal memory is “mnemonics.” Mnemonics add something to the information to be remembered to make it more memorable. There are a number of different kinds of internal memory aids. Below are a few examples:

→ The first example is **Story telling**:

Some people find it is easier to remember a story than a series of unrelated words. Therefore, to remember a list of tasks, make up a story about them. If you make the story funny or bizarre it will help you remember better. Example: You have the following list of things to do tomorrow:

1. Go to the clinic for **methadone**
2. Fill out a **job application**
3. Go to the **bank** to open an account
4. Visit a **friend** in hospital
5. Buy **chicken** for dinner

So you have to remember methadone, job application, bank, sick friend, and chicken. Now make up a story: For example, how about this?

“When I was in line for **methadone** this morning, my **friend** told me about this really **sick** dude who dressed up in a **chicken** suit and applied for a job as a **bank** loan officer; figures, he got the job.”

→ The second example of an internal memory aid is **Organization**:

Categorizing information is an effective way to organize and remember information. Example: when trying to remember what you have to do tomorrow, list your activities under category headings, such as: appointments, chores, leisure activities. Then when you recall the category, it will cue you to remember the specific item.

→ The third example is called **First Letter Cueing**:

Make a word out of the first letters of the items to be remembered. For example: **H-A-L-T** is a word some people use to help them remember triggers for drug use and other risky behavior. **HALT** stands for **Hungry-Angry-Lonely-Tired**. (HHRP<sup>+</sup> stands for the Holistic Health Recovery Program.)

→ The fourth example is **Repetition**:

Information is easier to recall when it is “over-learned.” Therefore, repeat the information to yourself frequently, and even when you have learned it, review it frequently.

→ Last, but certainly not least, is **Relaxation**:

Stress and anxiety block learning and memory. When you have memory difficulties, it is easy to get frustrated and overwhelmed. These feelings can then further impair your memory and learning abilities. It is therefore extremely important to learn how to calm yourself. The relaxation technique you are encouraged to do at the end of every HHRP<sup>+</sup> chapter is a valuable memory tool for you for many reasons. If you have a mental block and just can't remember something, take a break from trying to remember, do a relaxation exercise, and then try again later when you are more relaxed. Whenever you get overwhelmed or frustrated, it is important to stop what you are doing, and calm yourself. When you “slow down the action” you can think more clearly.

## Practice Exercise

“Slowing down the action” and thinking clearly is essential for setting and meeting your goals. Please turn to the “Lifetime Goals Exercise” worksheet at the end of this chapter.

### Instructions

On your Lifetime Goals Exercise worksheet, list your lifetime goals **before** you started using drugs or tested positive for HIV? Think back. Write down whatever comes to mind, no matter how far fetched it may seem to you now. If you didn’t have any lifetime goals or can’t remember any, write down some lifetime goals that you think you **would have had**, if you could turn back time.

When you have finished writing down your lifetime goals, consider how you would prioritize your goals. To prioritize means to list your goals in order of importance.

Can priorities change? Yes, they can. For example, people who are facing health problems often quickly realize what is and is not important in their lives. What they thought was important when they were healthy may have low priority now, and what had low priority before becoming ill, may now have high priority. (Example: A man finds out he has heart disease. Prior to the diagnosis, attending to his work may have had a higher priority than maintaining good family relationships, and may have taken most of his time. After the diagnosis, his priorities change such that he now feels that it is more important to spend time with his family.)

### Questions for you to consider

- Have there been any changes in your lifetime goals since becoming addicted to drugs? Since testing positive for HIV?
- Can you accomplish your lifetime goals and still use drugs? Why or why not?
- Can you still accomplish your goals and be HIV-positive? Why or why not?
- If getting and using drugs used to be your #1 priority before entering treatment, what is your #1 priority now that you are “in recovery”?

## Review

Let’s review what we’ve covered so far. We talked about addiction as a barrier to achieving your goals. Addiction can also cause damage to your brain which results in learning and memory problems that, in turn, can also pre-

vent you from achieving your goals. We discussed prospective memory, which is memory required to carry out future events. We described tools that you can use to improve your prospective memory. We focused on external memory aids, such as your HHRP<sup>+</sup> Workbook, which is a memory book in which you keep your tools for recovery, personal information, to do lists, calendars, schedules, and important names and phone numbers. We also identified other external memory aids such as grocery lists, alarms, leaving post-it notes on the bathroom mirror or refrigerator, and arranging your environment to help you remember. We also explained why you need basic memory and concentration skills in order to meet your goals. You then wrote down some of the goals you had before you started using drugs and you began to consider what your goals are now that you are “in recovery”.

We are now going to describe how to meet your goals. The first thing you need to do is to determine which goal has highest priority.

### **Practice Exercise**

Now please turn to the “Prioritizing Lifetime Goals” worksheet at the end of this chapter.

### **Instructions**

As you can see on your “Prioritizing Lifetime Goals” worksheet, we listed “living a healthy lifestyle” as an example that we can work on in this chapter. Look at your own list of personal lifetime goals and enter the three that are highest priority to you in the spaces on your handout for goals No. 1, No. 2, and No. 3.

### **Getting started**

Once you have determined which goal is your highest priority, you need to determine the specific steps or actions necessary to meet this goal. For purposes of demonstration, we have said that “living a healthy lifestyle” is your highest priority. But that is an extremely large goal with so many possibilities that it may seem overwhelming and unobtainable. We have selected this goal because it is typical of the kinds of non-specific goals that people set for themselves. Therefore, as you will see on your worksheet, the very first thing we do is to take this large, complicated goal and break it down into smaller, manageable tasks or activities.

### **Sample Goal: To live a healthy lifestyle – List of Activities**

- Take medications as prescribed
- Stay in this treatment program



- Eat healthy foods
- Remain abstinent from illicit drugs
- Take vitamins
- Use condoms
- Keep doctors' appointments
- Do relaxation techniques
- Exercise regularly
- Think positively
- Engage in drug-free leisure activities
- Other

But what if you still feel overwhelmed? Perhaps the activity “eating healthy foods” is not one step and needs to be broken down into even smaller steps, such as “eat a green leafy vegetable every day.” You need to prioritize the activities needed to reach your goal and to make a plan for exactly how you will begin. We'll do this next.

### **Practice Exercise:**

#### **Identify an Activity That Will Get You Closer to Your Goal**

##### **Instructions**

You've identified your goals and prioritized them, but remember every journey begins with a single step. What is your **first** step? You need to select something relatively small, something manageable, something that you can do **this week** that will begin your journey toward your goal. In the space provided on your “Prioritizing Lifetime Goals” worksheet, write in what you can do **this week** that will get you closer to your goal of “living a healthy lifestyle.” Be very specific. The more specific you are, the more likely you are to do it. Use the word “**do**” not the word “don't.” Many people may be tempted to write “this week I won't use drugs.” That is certainly an understandable goal, but you will be more likely to accomplish it if you write down an activity you can actually **do** that can help you not to use drugs.

Some examples are going to an NA meeting, getting an NA sponsor, and engaging in a drug-free activity with a non-drug-using friend or family member. Identify the most important thing you can do **this week** to move you towards your goal of living a healthy lifestyle. Write this activity on your “Prioritizing Lifetime Goals” Worksheet. If you think of several activities, prioritize them and write them on your “Step-By-Step Planning” Worksheet also located at the end of this chapter. We'll be working with this Worksheet later in the next exercise.

## Action Initiation

Some people find that it is easy to identify the activity necessary to accomplish the goal, but find it difficult to get started with the activity, and therefore never reach their goal. Remember the journey towards your goal begins with the very first step. Summarized below are several things you can do that will help you take that first step.

The first thing to do is: **Schedule the activity by writing it on a To-Do list**

### Practice Exercise: Schedule the Activity

Let's do this now. Turn to the "Step-By-Step Planning" Worksheet at the end of the chapter and write down what steps you need to take to engage in the activity that you identified in the previous exercise that you are going to do **this week** towards the goal of "living a healthy lifestyle." For example, if the activity is to go an NA meeting, write down that you will check the NA schedule and go to a meeting.

Keep your "To-Do List" do-able:

- set priorities for what is to be accomplished.
- check the list every morning to see what needs to be done first
- at the end of each day check off what was completed that day, and write what was not completed on the next day's "To-Do" list.

You cannot expect to reach your goal in a single day; however, it will motivate you to see it on your "to do" list every day, and to see how the steps necessary to achieve the goal are being checked off as completed.

The second thing to do is: **Set a deadline for the completion of the activity.**

### Practice Exercise: Set a Deadline

Set a deadline for the completion of the activity. Be realistic. Don't set yourself up for failure. Do this now. On your "Step-By-Step Planning" Worksheet mark your deadline for the completion of the activity you identified as your first step. Because you have agreed to engage in the activity some time during the coming week, your deadline is one week from today's date.

The third thing to do is: **Block out time on your weekly schedule.**

## Practice Exercise: Block Out Time

Block out time on your weekly schedule to **engage** in the activity during the coming week. Select times that are best for you. If others are involved, make sure the scheduled time is convenient for them too.

Turn now to your “weekly schedule” at the beginning of your HHRP+ Workbook. Select a convenient time for the activity you have selected to engage in during the coming week and block out that time on your “Step-By-Step Planning Worksheet.”

So now you have your activity scheduled, how will you get started?

- Leave yourself reminders to engage in the activity
- Use self-affirmations (say to yourself “I can do it”)
- Tell someone else what you are planning to do so that they can encourage you. Don’t keep it a secret.

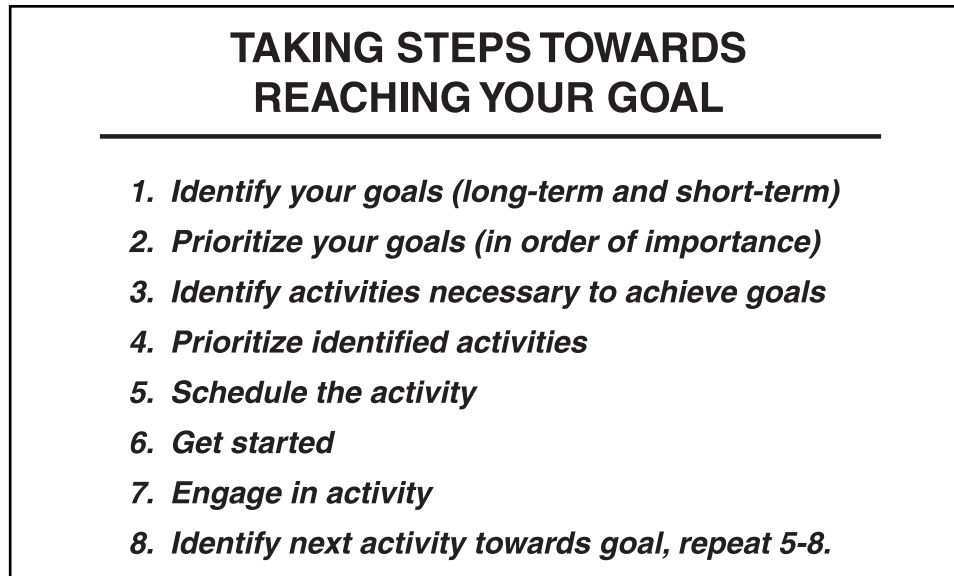
What if the time for the activity arrives and you just can’t get started?

- Set a time limit (contract with yourself to engage in the activity for just 5 minutes)
- Relax and visualize yourself engaging in the activity
- Pretend you are an actor playing the role of a person who can engage in the activity
- You don’t have to start at the beginning, start anywhere
- Remind yourself that it doesn’t have to be perfect

The **last step** is to **engage in the activity**. During the week engage in the activity you selected. Then, after you have engaged in the activity do the following:

- **Congratulate yourself.** Acknowledging your accomplishments at each step gives you confidence for the next step. There is no such thing as an insignificant accomplishment. Each step, no matter how small, is absolutely essential for reaching your goal, and therefore of importance.
- **Cross it off your to-do list** and begin the next activity you identified that will help you reach your goal. You can duplicate the “Step-By-Step Planning” Worksheet so that you have one for each activity and goal on your list.

The steps we just covered are summarized in the illustration below:



## Quiz

- 1. Which of the following is an example of a memory aid?**
  - a. a relaxation exercise
  - b. a grocery list
  - c. your client workbook
  - d. all of the above
  
- 2. When you schedule an activity that will help you accomplish an important goal, you should:**
  - a. write it on your "To Do" list
  - b. set a realistic deadline
  - c. block out time on your calendar
  - d. all of the above
  
- 3. Establishing priorities means listing goals in order of importance.**
  - a. True
  - b. False

- 4. When you have several large goals to achieve, you should do the following:**
  - a. combine all your goals
  - b. keep your goals a secret from others in your life
  - c. motivate yourself by setting deadlines that are difficult to meet
  - d. break down each large goal into small, manageable tasks
  
- 5. If you can't get started on an activity, you should do the following:**
  - a. aim for perfection
  - b. always start at the beginning
  - c. relax and visualize yourself engaging in the activity
  - d. decide not to stop until you have completely finished

### **Practice Exercise: Stress Management/Relaxation**

We recommend that you conclude each chapter by doing a 10-minute relaxation exercise. Use this time to practice meditation or deep breathing, or to play an audiotaped relaxation or visualization technique. Dim the lights, get comfortable in your chair, uncross your legs, and sit quietly with your eyes closed. Remember that learning to relax is a skill that takes practice, so if you feel restless at first, just remind yourself that this is a ten-minute gift of quiet time that you give to yourself. With practice, you can use meditation and relaxation in many areas of your life. For example, in this chapter we talked about how learning to calm yourself can help your concentration and memory and can therefore help you take the steps necessary to reach your goals.

## Safety Checklist

- \_\_\_\_\_ Turn down heat
- \_\_\_\_\_ Turn off stove/oven
- \_\_\_\_\_ Turn off lights
- \_\_\_\_\_ Turn off television
- \_\_\_\_\_ Turn off stereo
- \_\_\_\_\_ Turn off iron/hair dryer  
and other small appliances
- \_\_\_\_\_ Close windows
- \_\_\_\_\_ Take your watch
- \_\_\_\_\_ Take your wallet/purse
- \_\_\_\_\_ Take your house keys
- \_\_\_\_\_ Take your HHRP<sup>+</sup> emergency plan
- \_\_\_\_\_ Take a condom/bleach kit
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lock the door
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Lifetime Goals Exercise

**Instructions:** In answering the question below, write down whatever comes to your mind, as quickly as possible; don't be afraid to list things that may seem far-fetched. List everything that you think you would really like to have done with your life.

What were your lifetime goals prior to using drugs and testing positive for HIV?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

## Prioritizing Lifetime Goals

**Instructions:** Select your three most important goals and write them in order of importance below, with No. 1 being the most important of the three (a sample No. 1 has been completed for you).

**Sample Goal** Living a healthy lifestyle

List activities necessary to accomplish this goal:

*Examples:*

Take prescribed medications	Always use condoms/latex
Stay in HHRP <sup>+</sup> treatment program	Keep doctor appointments
Eat healthy foods	Do relaxation techniques
Remain abstinent	Exercise
Take vitamins	Think positively
Drug-free leisure activities	Other _____

Activity I can do during the next week towards my goal:

Stay in HHRP<sup>+</sup> treatment program (Write on To-Do List)

**My three most important lifetime goals are:**

**Write Goal No. 1 here** \_\_\_\_\_

List activities necessary to accomplish this goal:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Activity I can do during the next week towards my goal:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Write on To-Do List)

**Write Goal No. 2 here** \_\_\_\_\_

List activities necessary to accomplish this goal:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Activity I can do during the next week towards my goal:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Write on To-Do List)

**Write Goal No. 3 here** \_\_\_\_\_

List activities necessary to accomplish this goal:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Activity I can do during the next week towards my goal:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Write on To-Do List)



## Action Initiation

# HHRP<sup>+</sup>

### Schedule the Activity

- Put the activity on your to-do list.
- Set a realistic deadline for completing the activity.
- Block out time.

### Getting Started

- Leave yourself reminders.
- Use self-affirmations such as “I can do it”.
- Tell someone so that they can encourage you.
- Set a time limit (e.g., contract with yourself to engage in activity for just 5 mins.)
- Relax/visualize yourself engaging in activity.
- Pretend you are an actor: Act “as if” you are someone who engages in this activity.
- Start anywhere, not necessarily only at the beginning.
- Don’t expect perfection.

### Engage in the Activity

- Cross it off your to-do list.
- Congratulate yourself.
- Remind yourself that because of your effort and commitment you are now one step closer to your goal.

## Step-by-Step Planning Worksheet

**Goal:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>To Do List</b>	<b>Date</b>
1) _____	_____
2) _____	_____
3) _____	_____
4) _____	_____
5) _____	_____
6) _____	_____

### Block out time

Work on Step 1: \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_  
(time) (time) (date)

Work on Step 2: \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

Work on Step 3: \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

Work on Step 4: \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

Work on Step 5: \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

Work on Step 6: \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_



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