

Group Application - Goal Setting & Future Orientation

Learning Objective:

- Help participants develop a future orientation and learn effective goal-setting strategies

Materials Needed:

- Large sticky notes or index cards
- Regular paper
- Pens/markers
- Whiteboard or flip chart
- Timer

Part 1: Icebreaker – Moments Forward (10 minutes)

"Before we begin, I want to acknowledge that thinking about the future can bring up different feelings for each of us. Some days it might feel impossible or not worth planning for, and that's completely valid based on what many of us have experienced. Today, we're not focusing on distant futures or making big predictions. We're just exploring small moments of possibility. There's no right or wrong way to participate in this activity. You can share as much or as little as feels comfortable, and you can always pass.

We're going to do an activity called 'Moments Forward.' It's about noticing small positive things we can look forward to. These don't have to be big achievements or life-changing events. They can be as simple as looking forward to a favorite song, a moment of quiet, or seeing someone you care about. Sometimes when the big picture feels overwhelming, focusing on these small moments can give us something to move toward."

- Round 1: Tomorrow's Moment
 - "Let's start with something very close: tomorrow. Take a moment to think about one small thing you might look forward to tomorrow. It could be as simple as a meal you enjoy, a moment of rest, a favorite TV show, or a brief conversation with someone. What's one tiny thing about tomorrow that could bring you a moment of okay-ness, even if it's brief?" Give participants 30 seconds to think.
 - "If you feel comfortable sharing, let's go around and each mention what we came up with. Remember, you can always pass." Facilitate sharing, acknowledging each contribution with respect.
- Round 2: Next Week's Moment
 - "Take a moment to think about one small thing you might look forward to next week. What's one thing about next week that could bring you a moment of peace?" Give participants 30 seconds to think.
 - "If you feel comfortable sharing, let's go around and each mention what we came up with." Facilitate sharing, acknowledging each contribution with respect.
- Round 3: Strength Reflection
 - "Now, think about something difficult you've already gotten through in your life. It could be big or small. What strength or ability helped you get through that moment? Maybe it was patience, determination, creativity, the ability to ask for help, or simply the strength to endure." Give participants 30 seconds to think.
 - "If you're willing, share the strength you identified. This strength is something you already have, something you can bring with you into tomorrow and beyond." Facilitate sharing, again with option to pass.
- Closing
 - "Thank you all for sharing. What's powerful about what we just did is recognizing that we already have strategies and strengths that have helped us survive until today. And we can identify small moments worth moving toward, even if just for tomorrow. Planning for the future doesn't always have to mean thinking years ahead. Sometimes it's just about finding one moment worth moving toward, and then another, and then another. And you already have strengths to help you get there. As we move into our discussion about goals, remember that goals can be about these small moments too—they don't have to

be grand life plans. Sometimes the most important goal is just finding the next moment worth experiencing."

Part 2: Understanding Future Orientation (10 minutes)

Facilitator Script:

"First, let's talk about what we mean by 'future orientation.' Having a future orientation means being able to think about, plan for, and believe in your future. It's about understanding that what you do today can affect what happens tomorrow, next month, or years from now. Many times when life gets tough, we can get stuck in survival mode, just focusing on getting through the day. That's completely understandable, and developing the ability to look forward can actually help us get through current challenges."

Discussion:

- What makes it hard sometimes to think about the future?
- Have you ever set a goal for yourself, but weren't able to achieve it? What got in the way?
- What motivates you?
- Can you share about a goal you achieved?
 - Or one that someone else achieved? How did they do it?
 - Was there someone that helped you? How did they help?

"It can be hard to think about the future when the present is challenging. Planning for the future can help us to feel more motivated, make better choices in the moment, feel more hopeful, and be more resilient when facing setbacks. Future orientation is a skill we can develop and one of the most powerful ways to develop it is through effective goal setting."

Part 3: Goal Setting Fundamentals (10 minutes)

Facilitator Script:

"Now let's talk about how to set effective goals. There's a difference between just having a wish and setting a real goal. A wish might be 'I want to be successful' but a goal would be 'I will graduate high school with at least a B average.' Effective goals share certain characteristics. We often use the acronym SMART to remember these characteristics:

- **Specific:** Clear and detailed rather than vague
- **Measurable:** You can track your progress
- **Achievable:** Challenging but possible
- **Relevant:** Meaningful to you and your values
- **Time-bound:** Has a deadline or timeframe

Let's see how this works with an example. Instead of 'I want to get better at school,' a SMART goal would be 'I will raise my English grade from a C to a B by the end of the semester by completing all homework assignments and attending after-school tutoring twice a week.'

Another important concept is understanding the difference between short-term and long-term goals:

- Short-term goals: Can be accomplished in the near future (days, weeks, or months)
- Long-term goals: Take longer to achieve (months or years)

The key is to connect them. Long-term goals are achieved by accomplishing a series of short-term goals. For example, a long-term goal might be to become a nurse. Short-term goals that support this could include passing biology this semester, researching nursing programs, or volunteering at a hospital this summer."

Part 4: Goal Setting Activity (10 minutes)

Facilitator Script:

"Now let's put this into practice. I'm going to give each of you an index card. We're going to start by identifying one meaningful long-term goal and then map out some short-term goals that will help you get there. First, think about something important you want to achieve in the next 1-5 years. This should be something meaningful to you, not what someone else wants for you. Once you've identified your long-term goal, write it at the top of your index card. Then, let's break it down:

- What are 3 short-term goals that would help you move toward this bigger goal?
- What's one action step you could take this week toward one of these short-term goals?
- What resources or support might you need?
- What obstacles might come up, and how could you handle them?

Take about 7 minutes to work on this. I'll be walking around if anyone wants help."

"Now, find a partner and share one thing from your goal map that you're comfortable talking about. It could be your long-term goal, a short-term step, or a potential obstacle. Give each other feedback—is the goal specific enough? Is it realistic? Are there other steps that might help?"

Part 5: Closing Activity – One-Step Commitment (5 minutes)

Facilitator Script:

"We've talked about the importance of having a future orientation and how setting SMART goals can help us create the future we want. Now let's end with a commitment. Look at your index card and the action step you identified for this week. On a new sticky note, write down:

1. The specific action you commit to taking this week
2. When exactly you will do it (day and time)
3. One person you will tell about this commitment (accountability helps us follow through)

For example: 'I will research three potential career paths by searching online this Wednesday at 4pm. I'll tell my cousin about what I find.' After you write this down, I invite anyone who feels comfortable to share their commitment with the group."

Allow time to complete activity and encourage volunteers to share their commitments.

"Thank you all for your participation today. By setting clear goals and taking small, consistent steps, you're building your future one day at a time. Remember that setbacks are normal in any journey—the important thing is to keep adjusting and moving forward. Before we end, I want to emphasize that having goals doesn't mean your whole worth depends on achieving them. Goals are tools to help us grow and move forward, not measurements of our value as people. For next week, I encourage you to follow through on your commitment, notice what helps or hinders you, and come ready to share your experience. Keep your index card somewhere you can see it daily as a reminder of what you're working toward."

Facilitator Notes

Extension Ideas:

- Weekly goal check-ins at the beginning of subsequent sessions
- Goal buddy system for accountability between sessions
- Future session on identifying and overcoming obstacles to goals
- Maintaining a goal journal to track progress and reflect on the process