



# Strategies for At-Risk Youth Achieving and Avoiding Distal Goals

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## Introduction

- Considering long-term goals can help prevent psychological distress and improve retention in interventions (Cairns., Kavanagh, Dark, & McPhail, 2019).
- Adolescents are more susceptible to stress than adults because their decision-making capabilities are not fully developed (Tottenham, & Galván, 2016).
- Considering future goals may be particularly challenging for low-income youth due to stressful life events (Reynolds, O'Koon, Papademetriou, Szczygiel, & Grant, 2001).

## Research Question

What are the long-term goals of at-risk youth and what strategies do they use or implement in order to achieve those goals?

## Sample

187 youth from low-income households aged 15-19, (74% female, 26% male) participating in the *Champaign Area Relationship Education for Youth (CARE4U)* program

## Possible Selves Task (Oyserman, 2004)

**next >> year**

Who will you be next year? Think about next year -- imagine what you'll be like, and what you'll be doing next year.

- 1) Write in the boxes below what you expect you will be like and what you expect to be doing next year.
- 2) Circle **X** if you are not currently doing something to achieve this goal, or circle **✓** if you are doing something to achieve this goal.
- 3) If you circled **✓** - use the space in the arrow to write what you are doing this year to achieve your goal.

	X ✓	→
	X ✓	→
	X ✓	→
	X ✓	→

## Academics

<b>Goals to Achieve</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Graduate high school”</li> <li>• “Start applying for colleges”</li> </ul>
<b>Goals to Avoid</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Not finish school”</li> <li>• “Slack off”</li> </ul>
<b>Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Keep up with my work”</li> <li>• “Showing up daily”</li> </ul>

## Self-Improvement

<b>Goals to Achieve</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I’ll be more responsible”</li> <li>• “Happy”</li> </ul>
<b>Goals to Avoid</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “A hypocrite”</li> <li>• “Stressed”</li> </ul>
<b>Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Practicing every day”</li> <li>• “Reflecting on my actions”</li> </ul>

## Health

<b>Goals to Achieve</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Working out”</li> <li>• “Eat better”</li> </ul>
<b>Goals to Avoid</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Get fat”</li> <li>• “Not exercising”</li> </ul>
<b>Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Work out every day”</li> <li>• “Eat healthy”</li> </ul>

## Risky Behavior

<b>Goals to Achieve</b>	*This category only appeared in goals to avoid*
<b>Goals to Avoid</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Get pregnant”</li> <li>• “Doing drugs”</li> </ul>
<b>Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Staying out of law enforcement’s way”</li> <li>• “Avoid dangerous things”</li> </ul>

## Relationships

<b>Goals to Achieve</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Make new friends”</li> <li>• “Good relationship with my family”</li> </ul>
<b>Goals to Avoid</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Losing boyfriend”</li> <li>• “Arguing”</li> </ul>
<b>Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Cut toxic people off”</li> <li>• “Stay away from drama”</li> </ul>

## Lifestyle

<b>Goals to Achieve</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I want my license”</li> <li>• “Have my own apartment”</li> </ul>
<b>Goals to Avoid</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Spend over budget”</li> <li>• “Be lazy at home”</li> </ul>
<b>Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Save \$10 each paycheck”</li> <li>• “Job searching”</li> </ul>

## Discussion

- Low-income youth understand the danger of risky behaviors, suggesting that programming should focus more on supporting youth in navigating or changing risky environments rather than merely emphasizing the dangers (Jackson, Henderson, Frank, & Haw, 2012).
- Most goals and strategies students generated were neither specific nor measurable, suggesting the need for school psychologists and other professionals to teach youth goal-setting skills and strategies for making progress on goals (Cozemius, & O’Neill, 2005).
- Socio-emotional education interventions may hold particular promise in helping youth, in this case low-income youth, achieve goals and successfully implement strategies across the domains identified (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Durlak, 2017).

Note: Responses were analyzed and categorized using constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2015)

## Contact Information

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