

GOAL SETTING & MOTIVATION COMPLETE GUIDE (YOUNG ADULTS 18+)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Autistic young adults struggle with goal-setting not because they lack motivation, but because executive function differences make planning, prioritizing, and sustaining effort on long tasks harder. Vague goals like "be healthier" or "be more social" create anxiety—they lack clear action steps and ways to measure progress. This guide builds a system where goals are self-chosen, broken into micro-steps, and embedded in daily routines with visual supports and rewards. The result: goals become habits, not stress.

WHY GOALS FEEL HARD FOR AUTISTIC ADULTS

Executive Function Challenges

Planning difficulty:

- Hard to see the path from "goal" to "action"
- Brain struggles to organize multiple steps in order
- Time feels abstract (how much effort will it take?)

Prioritization issues:

- Everything feels equally urgent or unimportant
- Hard to distinguish "start now" from "someday"
- Multiple goals create paralyzing overwhelm

Task initiation problems:

- Starting is harder than continuing
- Emotional response to "big task" is avoidance
- Perfectionism blocks action (if can't do perfectly, don't start)

Sustaining effort:

- Short bursts of motivation followed by crashes
- Hyperfocus on special interests, but can't sustain other tasks
- Energy/willpower feels finite and unpredictable

Why Vague Goals Fail

Example: "Be healthier"

- No clear outcome (healthier how? Exercise? Diet? Sleep?)
- No measurable progress (can't tell if working)
- No action steps (what do I do tomorrow?)
- Creates anxiety because it's overwhelming and undefined

Better example: "Walk 10 minutes after dinner 3 days per week"

- Specific outcome (10-minute walk, measurable)
 - Clear next action (walk after dinner tonight)
 - Trackable progress (did I walk today? Yes or no)
 - Realistic and concrete
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SELF-CHOSEN GOALS (NOT OTHER PEOPLE'S)

Motivation comes from **internal desire**, not external pressure.

Why Self-Chosen Goals Work Better

When your young adult chooses their own goal:

- Natural motivation (they care about outcome)
- Ownership (they can change if needed)
- Alignment with values and interests
- Higher follow-through rate
- Less resentment

When goals are forced by parents/therapists:

- External pressure creates resistance
- Resentment builds (feels like "you make me" not "I choose")
- Low motivation when adult is alone
- Goals feel like punishment, not improvement

How to Help Them Choose Goals

Step 1: Ask open questions (don't suggest)

Good prompts:

- "If life was 10% better in 6 months, what would be different?"
- "What's one thing you wish you could do more easily?"
- "What would help you feel more confident?"
- "What do you want to work on?"
- "What's annoying about your day that you'd like to change?"

Step 2: Brainstorm options together

- Listen without judgment
- Write all ideas (no filtering yet)
- Ask "Anything else?" until they're done
- Let them see all options at once

Step 3: Let them pick 1-3 goals

- Don't argue for your preferences
- Pick 1-3 max (more = overwhelming)
- Ask: "Which one matters most to you?"
- Get genuine commitment: "Is this something you actually want to work on?"

Common Self-Chosen Goals for Autistic Adults

Employment/skill-building:

- "Apply to 2 jobs per week"
- "Learn to use Excel at work"
- "Improve resume and LinkedIn"
- "Practice interview answers"
- "Learn new skill on YouTube"

Social connection:

- "Text one friend per week"
- "Go to gaming group twice per month"
- "Call family member monthly"
- "Join online community for special interest"

Health/wellness:

- "Walk 10 minutes after dinner 3x/week"
- "Drink 6 glasses of water daily"
- "Go to bed before 11 PM"
- "Take vitamins daily"

Home/independence:

- "Cook one meal per week"
- "Do laundry Sunday"
- "Keep dishes done daily"
- "Make bed every morning"

Special interest/fun:

- "Draw for 20 minutes daily"
- "Write fiction chapter weekly"
- "Learn programming language"
- "Build/create something"

Your role: Ask, listen, support their choice—even if you'd pick differently.

SIMPLE GOAL FORMULA (AUTISTIC-FRIENDLY)

Traditional SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) are too rigid for autistic brains. Use this simplified version instead.

The Formula: S.M.A.R.T. (Modified)

S - Specific: Clear outcome, not vague

- ✗ Bad: "Get healthier"
- ✓ Good: "Walk 10 minutes after dinner"
- ✗ Bad: "Be more social"
- ✓ Good: "Text one friend every Sunday"

M - Measurable: Can count or check off

- ✗ Bad: "Try to volunteer sometimes"
- ✓ Good: "Volunteer 2 hours every Wednesday"
- ✗ Bad: "Improve resume"
- ✓ Good: "Add 2 new skills to resume"

A - Achievable: Can do in 5-20 minutes per session; fits current energy/schedule

- ✗ Bad: "Exercise 60 minutes daily"
- ✓ Good: "Walk 10 minutes after dinner"
- ✗ Bad: "Write 5,000-word story per day"
- ✓ Good: "Write 500 words of story twice per week"

R - Realistic: Fits current life, health, support available

- ✗ Bad: "Get new job within 2 weeks" (unrealistic timeline)
- ✓ Good: "Apply to 2 jobs per week for 6 weeks"
- ✗ Bad: "Work out 7 days per week" (unsustainable)
- ✓ Good: "Exercise 3 days per week"

T - Time-limited: Try for 2-6 weeks, then review

- ✗ Bad: "I will walk forever starting tomorrow"
- ✓ Good: "Walk 10 minutes 3 days per week for 4 weeks, then review"
- ✗ Bad: Vague ongoing goal
- ✓ Good: Set a specific end date to reassess

Goal-Writing Template

Use this exact format:

"I will [SPECIFIC ACTION] [FREQUENCY] [for TIME PERIOD]"

Examples:

1. "I will walk 10 minutes after dinner 3 days a week for 1 month."
2. "I will apply to 2 jobs each Friday for 6 weeks."
3. "I will text one friend every Sunday for 4 weeks."
4. "I will cook one meal per week for 6 weeks."
5. "I will read 1 chapter per night before bed for 2 weeks."
6. "I will attend gaming group on Thursday evenings for 1 month."
7. "I will practice driving 2 days per week for 6 weeks."
8. "I will journal for 10 minutes every morning for 4 weeks."

Your role: Write goal together. Make sure they agree it's realistic and specific.

BREAKING GOALS INTO TINY STEPS

The secret to goal success is **breaking it down** until each step takes 5-20 minutes and feels doable.

Step-by-Step Breakdown Process

Step 1: Brain dump all steps

Think of every action needed—big and small—and write them down without organizing:

Example goal: "I will apply to 2 jobs each week for 6 weeks"

Brain dump:

- Look for job openings
- Read job description
- Check qualifications
- Find cover letter template
- Write cover letter

- Update resume
- Find correct email
- Attach resume and cover letter
- Write professional email
- Send application
- Save application record

Step 2: Order the steps logically

Put steps in a sequence that makes sense:

1. Look for job opening (on Indeed, LinkedIn, company website)
2. Read job description carefully
3. Check if qualifications match
4. Update resume with relevant skills (if needed)
5. Find cover letter template
6. Write custom cover letter
7. Find application email address
8. Write professional email intro
9. Attach resume and cover letter
10. Send application
11. Save job title and date applied (for tracking)

Step 3: Shrink big steps into mini-steps

If any step takes >20 minutes or feels intimidating, break it further:

Problem step: "Write cover letter" (feels overwhelming)

Mini-steps:

- Find cover letter template online (5 min)
- Read template format (2 min)
- Type company name and job title (2 min)

- Write opening sentence (3 min)
- Write why interested in job (5 min)
- Write why qualified (5 min)
- Write closing sentence (2 min)
- Proofread and fix typos (3 min)

Rule of thumb: If a step feels intimidating or would take >20 minutes, it's still too big. Keep shrinking.

Step 4: Assign steps to days/sessions

Put 1-3 mini-steps per day or per week in a visual schedule:

Week 1:

- Monday: Find 2 job openings + read descriptions
- Tuesday: Check qualifications + start resume updates
- Wednesday: Finish resume updates + find cover letter template
- Thursday: Write first cover letter
- Friday: Apply to first job (email + send)
- Saturday: Rest/review

Week 2:

- Monday: Find 2 new job openings
- Tuesday: Read descriptions + check qualifications
- Wednesday: Update cover letter (customize)
- Thursday: Final check of documents
- Friday: Apply to second job

Complete Breakdown Example: "Get Driver's License"

Original goal: "I will get my driver's license"

Problem: Too vague, no clear steps, overwhelming

Reframed goal: "I will pass my driving test within 3 months by practicing 2x per week"

Brain dump of all steps:

- Check DMV requirements
- Get learner's permit
- Sign up for driving lessons
- Practice with instructor
- Practice with trusted person
- Review road rules
- Take practice tests
- Schedule driving test
- Do practice drive day before
- Take driving test

Ordered steps:

1. Check state DMV requirements
2. Gather documents (ID, proof of residence)
3. Go to DMV to get learner's permit
4. Find certified driving instructor
5. Sign up for driving lessons
6. Complete first lesson
7. Practice with family member between lessons
8. Review road rules and signs
9. Take online practice tests
10. Complete all lessons
11. Practice for 1 week after last lesson
12. Schedule driving test
13. Do final practice day before test

14. Go to DMV and take driving test

Mini-steps assigned to weeks:

Week 1-2: Preparation

- Day 1: Check DMV website for requirements (5 min)
- Day 2: Gather documents needed (10 min)
- Day 3: Go to DMV or apply for learner's permit (45 min—one exception to time rule)
- Day 4: Get learner's permit in mail

Week 3-4: Find instructor

- Day 1: Search for driving instructors near you (10 min)
- Day 2: Call 2-3 instructors, get rates (10 min)
- Day 3: Choose instructor, sign up for 1st lesson (5 min)

Week 5-12: Take lessons + practice

- Twice per week: 1 hour lesson with instructor
- 1x per week: 30 min practice with family member
- 2x per week: 15 min review of road rules

Week 13-14: Final prep

- Week 13: Final practice with family
- Week 14 Day 1: Schedule driving test (5 min)
- Week 14 Day 6: Do final 30-min practice
- Week 14 Day 7: Take driving test

VISUAL SUPPORTS, ROUTINES & REWARDS

Just breaking down goals isn't enough. You need **visual reminders, habit stacking, and rewards** to turn goals into daily actions.

Visual Supports

Why visuals work:

- Reduce reliance on memory (goal is always visible)
- Concrete reminder of what to do next
- Tracking progress is satisfying
- Less executive function needed to figure out "what's next?"

Types of visuals:

Checklist (simplest):

Daily Goal Checklist: Apply to jobs

- Step 1: Search Indeed.com for jobs (2 jobs found)
- Step 2: Read job descriptions (understand requirements)
- Step 3: Update cover letter for Job #1 (customized)
- Step 4: Send application for Job #1 (sent Friday AM)
- Step 5: Search LinkedIn for Job #2
- Step 6: Write cover letter for Job #2
- Step 7: Send application for Job #2

Whiteboard schedule (visual and erasable):

GOAL: Walk 10 minutes 3x per week

MONDAY: Walk after dinner (30 min) ✓ DONE

WEDNESDAY: Walk after dinner (30 min)

SATURDAY: Walk after dinner (30 min)

Week total: 2/3 walks ✓

Phone alarm + calendar:

- Set daily reminder: "Walk after dinner"
- Add to calendar with 15-min warning

- Notification pops up at 6:15 PM
- Simple pop-up: "Walk time in 15 min"

Door/fridge sign:

GOAL: Text a friend every Sunday

NEXT STEP: Text [Friend name] this Sunday

Phone lock screen:

- Screenshot goal
- Set as lock screen background
- See goal every time you pick up phone

App options:

- Habitica (gamified habit tracker)
- Done (simple checklist app)
- Streaks (track daily habits)
- Google Tasks (free, syncs with phone)

Placement rule: Put visual where it's seen every single day (bedroom mirror, bathroom, phone, kitchen fridge).

Your role: "Let's make a visual so you don't have to remember. What works—whiteboard, app, or checklist?"

Attach Goals to Existing Routines

"Habit stacking" works: Link new goal to existing habit so it becomes automatic.

Formula: "After [EXISTING HABIT], I will [NEW GOAL]"

Examples:

Employment goal:

- After breakfast → spend 5 min job searching (coffee, then applications)
- After work → apply to 1 job before dinner prep

- After lunch → review LinkedIn messages

Health goal:

- After breakfast → take vitamins with water
- After dinner → walk 10 minutes
- Before bed → journal for 5 minutes

Social goal:

- After breakfast → read one friend's social media (starts connection)
- Sunday at 7 PM → text friend weekly check-in
- Friday evening → plan weekend social activity

Home goal:

- After dinner → wash dishes (routine link)
- Before bed → lay out clothes for tomorrow
- Sunday evening → plan meal for week

Special interest goal:

- After school/work → 5 min special interest (reward warm-up)
- Then 10 min on goal task

Why this works:

- Existing habit is automatic (already in routine)
- New goal "piggybacks" on automatic behavior
- No extra willpower needed to start
- Over time, new goal becomes automatic too

Your role: "You have breakfast at 8 AM. After breakfast, apply to jobs. What do you usually do after breakfast now?"

Rewards (Motivation Fuel)

Key principle: Reward the **effort**, not just the final result.

Why small, frequent rewards work:

- Build motivation immediately
- Show progress is happening
- Break monotony
- Give dopamine boost for effort

Reward timing:

- After completing one step (not waiting for whole goal)
- Immediately or within same day
- Consistent reward structure
- Something genuinely wanted (not forced)

Reward ideas (by person):**For special interest-focused people:**

- 15 minutes on special interest
- Watch one YouTube video on interest
- Time to draw/write/create
- Browse hobby subreddit
- Time gaming or with favorite hobby

For snack-motivated people:

- Favorite candy or snack
- Coffee shop run
- Homemade treat
- Dessert after dinner

For entertainment-focused:

- One episode of favorite show
- Video game time
- Podcast/audiobook time

- Movie night

For experience-motivated:

- 30 minutes relaxation
- Drive to favorite place
- Outing to store/cafe
- Social activity

For sensory-focused:

- Bath time
- Favorite music session
- Fidget toy time
- Massage or physical comfort

Reward Structure Examples

For job application goal:

- Complete 1 job application → 15 min special interest ✓
- Apply to 2 jobs per week → movie night Friday ✓
- 4 weeks of consistent applications → bigger reward (meal out, gift card)

For exercise goal:

- Walk 10 min after dinner → 10 min favorite show ✓
- 3 walks per week completed → extra snack Saturday ✓
- 4 weeks of consistent walks → bigger reward (new clothing item, special outing)

For social goal:

- Text one friend → 5 min reward now ✓
- Text friend every week for 4 weeks → special meal or outing ✓

Reward rule: Make rewards immediate, small, and genuine. The goal is motivation, not bribery.

Your role: "After applying to 2 jobs, you get [their favorite thing]. What reward sounds good to you?"

COACHING & SUPPORT (NOT BOSSING)

Autistic young adults do best with a "**goal coach**" who supports and problem-solves, not someone who supervises and judges.

What a Good Goal Coach Does

Check in regularly (1x per week, 15-30 min):

- Same day/time if possible
- Consistent person (ideally one person, not different people)
- Purpose: review progress, solve problems, adjust plan

Help choose/reshape goals, not force them:

- Questions don't come across as interrogation
- Safe to change goals mid-course
- Help problem-solve, don't judge failure

Ask supportive questions:

- "What got in the way?" (not "Why didn't you do it?")
- "What worked well?" (celebrate wins)
- "Do we need to make this step smaller?" (problem-solve, not blame)

Help adjust when stuck:

- If step is too hard, make it smaller
- If motivation crashed, explore why
- If goal changed, that's okay—adjust it
- If plan needs tweaking, do it together

Weekly Check-In Script

Open with wins (5 min):

- "What went well with your goals this week?"
- "Any wins, even small ones?"

- Celebrate effort, not perfection

Explore challenges (10 min):

- "What was hardest?"
- "What got in the way?"
- "Did anything feel overwhelming?"

Problem-solve together (10 min):

- "Do we need to make [step] smaller?"
- "Would [different time] work better?"
- "Need help with anything?"

Plan next week (5 min):

- "Same plan next week, or adjust?"
- "Anything you want to change?"
- "Ready for next week?"

Example check-in:

Coach: "How'd the job applications go this week?"

Young adult: "I only applied to one job instead of two."

Coach: "What got in the way?"

Young adult: "I couldn't figure out how to write the cover letter."

Coach: "Okay, so cover letter was the hard part. Want me to help you with a template Tuesday? Then applying is easier?"

Young adult: "Yeah, that would help."

Coach: "Tuesday after lunch, we'll do cover letter template together. Sound good?"

What a Good Coach Does NOT Do

- ✗ Shame or guilt trip ("Why can't you just do it?")
- ✗ Ignore genuine barriers (exhaustion, mental health, life chaos)
- ✗ Push harder when motivation is low (shrink plan instead)

- ✗ Force goals they don't want
 - ✗ Surprise check-ins or surprise accountability
 - ✗ Compare to neurotypical peers
 - ✗ Assume laziness (assume barrier first)
-

STAYING MOTIVATED WHEN THINGS SLIP

Motivation crashes happen. It doesn't mean the goal failed—it means the plan needs adjusting.

When Motivation Crashes

Normalize setbacks:

- "Missing 3 days doesn't erase 10 successful days"
- "Motivation naturally goes up and down"
- "This is a signal to adjust, not a failure"
- "Plans change. That's normal."

DO NOT:

- ✗ Shame them for slipping
- ✗ Restart from zero and pretend previous progress didn't happen
- ✗ Push harder with bigger goals
- ✗ Blame them for laziness

DO:

- ✓ Acknowledge the slip without judgment
- ✓ Explore what changed (energy, schedule, life event, interest?)
- ✓ Adjust the plan to fit current reality
- ✓ Celebrate that they're trying

Motivation Recovery Strategies

Strategy 1: Shrink the plan

If full goal feels impossible, reduce it:

- **Reduce time:** 20 min/day → 5 min/day
- **Reduce frequency:** 5 days/week → 2 days/week
- **Reduce scope:** "Complete whole project" → "Do 1 section"

Example:

- Original: "Walk 10 minutes 5 days per week"
- Too hard? → "Walk 10 minutes 2 days per week"
- Still hard? → "Walk 5 minutes 2 days per week"
- Works? → Build back up over time

Strategy 2: Add a "warm-up" first

Make starting easier by doing something enjoyable first:

- 5 min favorite activity → 5 min goal task
- Example: "5 min drawing, then 5 min job application"
- Makes transition easier, less jarring

Strategy 3: Check the goal itself

Sometimes motivation is gone because goal doesn't matter anymore—and that's okay.

Ask:

- "Does this goal still matter to you?"
- "Did something change?"
- "Do you want to switch to a different goal?"

It's OKAY to:

- Stop a goal and pick a new one
- Pause and come back to it later
- Decide a goal isn't right anymore
- Change timeline or frequency

Bad idea: Force someone to continue a goal they don't care about anymore. Connection to goal is what drives motivation.

What Causes Motivation Crashes (And How to Prevent)

Cause	Signs	Prevention/Recovery
Burnout/exhaustion	Too tired, can't focus	Reduce goal size, add rest days, check sleep/stress
Goal became too hard	Steps feel overwhelming	Break down further, shrink scope
Lost interest	Goal doesn't matter anymore	Change goal to something more interesting
Life event	New stress, chaos, crisis	Pause goal temporarily, don't abandon
Health issue	Illness, medication change	Shrink goal to 5 min, pause if needed
Missing accountability	Forgot about it	Add visual reminder, stronger routine link
No reward system	Feels pointless	Add immediate small reward after each step
No progress visible	Can't see it working	Use tracking, celebrate every win

GOAL TRACKING & PROGRESS CELEBRATION

Seeing progress is huge for motivation.

Simple Tracker

Print or use this format:

GOAL: Walk 10 minutes 3x per week for 4 weeks

Week	Mon	Wed	Sat	Total	Reward
Week 1	✓	✓	✓	3/3	Movie night
Week 2	✓	X	✓	2/3	Snack

Week	Mon	Wed	Sat	Total	Reward
Week 3	✓	✓	✓	3/3	Special outing
Week 4	X	✓	✓	2/3	+1 bonus

Total: 10/12 walks completed = 83% success ✓

Celebrate Wins (Big and Small)

- **Every completion:** "You did it! Reward time."
- **Weekly:** "3 weeks of consistent work! You're building this habit."
- **Monthly:** "You completed 1 full month! So proud."
- **3-month:** "3 months of [goal]! Look how far you've come."

Don't minimize wins:

- ✗ "You walked 3 times but skipped Wednesday"
- ✓ "You walked 3 times this week! Strong work."
- ✗ "You only applied to 1 job"
- ✓ "You applied to 1 job! That's progress."

HANDLING GOAL FAILURE & RESET

Sometimes goals don't work. That's okay—it's data, not failure.

After a goal ends (4-6 weeks), evaluate:

Questions:

- "Did you complete this goal?"
- "Was it helpful?"
- "Do you want to continue?"
- "What should we do next?"

Options:

Goal succeeded:

- Celebrate
- It's now a habit (might not need tracking)
- Pick new goal if wanted

Goal partially succeeded (60-80%):

- Good effort
- Ask what got in the way
- Continue? Shrink? Change?

Goal didn't work (<60%):

- No shame—now you know this goal/approach doesn't work
- Why? Too big? Wrong timing? Wasn't their goal?
- Learn, adjust, pick different goal

Important: Low goal completion is DATA, not failure. It tells you:

- Step size was too big
- Goal wasn't self-chosen
- Life circumstances changed
- Different type of support needed
- Goal genuinely doesn't matter to them (and that's okay)

Your role: "That goal didn't work—and that's okay. We learned something. What do you want to try next?"

GOALS FOR DIFFERENT LIFE AREAS

Employment/Career Goals

Examples:

- "I will apply to 2 jobs each Friday for 6 weeks"
- "I will practice interview questions 2x per week for 1 month"
- "I will update my resume with 3 new skills by [date]"

- "I will attend 1 job networking event per month"
- "I will learn Excel basics using YouTube (1 tutorial per week)"

How to break down job applications:

1. Search job site (5 min)
2. Read job description (5 min)
3. Check qualifications (3 min)
4. Update resume if needed (10 min)
5. Find/customize cover letter (10 min)
6. Find application email (2 min)
7. Write professional email (5 min)
8. Attach documents (2 min)
9. Send (1 min)
10. Log application (2 min)

Social Connection Goals

Examples:

- "I will text one friend every Sunday for 4 weeks"
- "I will attend gaming group on Thursday evenings"
- "I will join one online community for my interest"
- "I will make 1 phone call per week to family"
- "I will go to 1 meetup per month"

How to break down texting goal:

1. Pick a friend (2 min)
2. Open text app (1 min)
3. Write message (2 min)
4. Send (1 min)

Total: 6 minutes. Easy.

Health/Wellness Goals

Examples:

- "I will walk 10 minutes after dinner 3x per week for 6 weeks"
- "I will drink 6 cups of water daily for 4 weeks"
- "I will go to bed before 11 PM 5 nights per week"
- "I will take my medication daily for 2 weeks"

How to break down water intake:

1. Fill water bottle (1 min)
2. Drink with breakfast (5 min)
3. Drink with lunch (5 min)
4. Drink with dinner (5 min)
5. Drink evening snack (5 min)
6. Drink before bed (2 min)

Total: Built into meals, not a separate task.

Home/Independence Goals

Examples:

- "I will do laundry every Sunday evening for 1 month"
- "I will cook one new recipe per week for 4 weeks"
- "I will wash dishes daily for 2 weeks"
- "I will make my bed every morning for 4 weeks"
- "I will take trash out when full"

How to break down cooking a meal:

1. Pick recipe (5 min)

2. Gather ingredients (5 min)
 3. Read first step (2 min)
 4. Do first step (varies, 5-20 min)
 5. Read next step (2 min)
 6. Do it (5-20 min)
 7. Continue steps...
 8. Plate food (3 min)
 9. Clean up (5 min)
-

Learning/Skill Goals

Examples:

- "I will do 1 Duolingo lesson daily for 2 weeks"
- "I will watch 1 coding tutorial per week for 6 weeks"
- "I will practice drawing for 20 minutes 3x per week"
- "I will read 1 chapter before bed 4 nights per week"

How to break down learning:

1. Open app/resource (2 min)
 2. Complete lesson/read (10-20 min)
 3. Review if needed (5 min)
-

SPECIAL SITUATIONS & ADAPTATIONS

Goal-Setting When Depressed

Depression lowers motivation to zero. Adjust accordingly:

- Pick tiny goal (5 min daily, not 30)
- Reduce frequency (1x per week, not daily)
- Focus on "something" not "everything"

- Celebrate tiny wins loudly
- Consider whether depression treatment is needed first

Example: Instead of "walk 30 min daily," try "sit outside 5 min once weekly."

Goal-Setting During High Stress/Chaos

- **Pause goals completely** if major life event (moving, job loss, family crisis)
- **Shrink to maintenance only** (keep one small habit going, pause others)
- **Resume after crisis** when stable again
- **Validate:** "Life is hard right now. We'll focus on just 1 small thing."

Goal-Setting for Self-Esteem

- Deliberately set **easy goals first** to build confidence
- Pick something they've succeeded at before
- Build up gradually
- Celebrate wins frequently
- Use success momentum

Goal-Setting When Medications Change

- Motivation/energy may shift dramatically
- Goals may become easier or harder
- Adjust timeline and scope as needed
- It's not their fault—it's the medication
- Work with doctor if side effects are severe

REMEMBER THIS

Goals don't fail. Plans do.

Your young adult isn't broken or lazy if motivation crashes. They need:

- Smaller steps
- Visual reminders

- Routine links
- Frequent rewards
- Weekly support
- Self-chosen goals
- Compassion when adjusting

Progress beats perfection.

One step completed is progress. Two skipped days and five done is still progress.
Consistency over time = results.

They belong in their own life. Their pace is valid.

TRACKING & RESOURCES

Goal-Setting Tools

- Google Tasks (free, simple)
- Habitica (gamified habit tracker)
- Done (clean, simple app)
- Streaks (visual daily tracking)
- Pen and paper checklist (always works)

Motivation Resources

- YouTube: How to set goals for ADHD/autism (Kati Morton, How to ADHD)
- Podcast: "TED Radio Hour" episodes on motivation and goals
- Book: "Atomic Habits" by James Clear (simplified for autistic learning)

Support

- Look for goal coaching through adult autism services
- Life coach specializing in neurodivergence
- Therapist trained in executive function coaching
- Trusted family member or mentor

SpectrumCareHub – Science-grounded autism family support

Educational resource only – not medical advice. Consult healthcare providers and coaches for individual support.

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