

Change Your Behavior for Good!

We all know people who courageously decide to make behavioral changes, whether it's to exercise more, cut out alcohol, stop smoking or spend less time on the Internet and more time with family. Some are successful with making new habits stick, while others fall back into the familiarity of their former, even if unhealthy, routines. So, it's no surprise that changing behaviors can be challenging. It's rarely a simple process and may require a concentrated commitment of time and effort to make them permanent, but there are ways to increase your chances of success.

It should help to know that numerous studies indicate you're not doomed to destructive habits. It's possible to adopt new habits as well as undo negative ones. It may well rest on gaining some insights into approaches recommended by professionals.

A clinical psychologist with Deployment Health Clinical Center explained that "the more frequently you push yourself to practice a new behavior, especially when you don't feel like it, the easier it will be the next time." It's important to remember this as you try to make a change in behavior, especially when temptation to settle back into old routines returns.

So, what are key tips to remember to make a behavior change permanent?

- **Connect the behavior to a new routine as a reminder.** The technique "habit loop model" involves prescribing yourself a new routine to be performed at specific times

of the day or in response to specific cues. Your cue may be a sticky note, an alarm (smartphones are great for this) or an associated task or routine (like walking in the front door). It gradually becomes habitual as you identify the new behavior with that time of the day.

- **Communicate and be accountable.** If you're serious about creating your new habit, tell someone and share your goal — friends and family can provide positive reinforcement. Logging your progress in a journal or finding a visible way to track your improvement also helps to keep you accountable, and seeing your progress over time can be encouraging.
- **Link a difficult task to a reward.** This involves associating a new behavior, which may feel uncomfortable at first, with a reward so that the new behavior eventually links to a positive feeling. Rewarding progress is a technique often used successfully to change behavior. Self-praise, a gift or praise from your friends and family are examples of associated rewards.
- **Don't skip your habit.** Research shows that if you skip your daily habit, the behavior change you're trying to make will be less progressive.
- **Start with less complex behaviors.** By starting small and slow, forming a new behavior can be more manageable. In one study, more complex behaviors were found to take longer to become habits. If you recently embarked on a healthy eating plan, don't complicate it with counting calories, carbs and sugars. Instead, replace your burger lunch with a green salad each day, and go from there.



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- **Make a plan.** Studies show that having a plan to follow increases the chance of positive behavior change. Structure yields positive results. Put together a thoughtful, step-by-step plan to keep you on track.
- **Think positively.** If you find yourself thinking negative thoughts, try turning them around and look for the positive — find the joy in your new habit.
- **Be prepared for the long haul.** You shouldn't start a new behavior or habit with the expectation that it will happen quickly. According to one study, the average time to reach peak automaticity was 66 days.

Changing a behavior is a process that benefits from support. A health scientist administrator at National Institutes of Health notes that "learning new habits is helped by sharing your goals with people who care and even asking them to join you in building your new habit." So, share your goals with people in your life who demonstrate caring, understanding and acceptance. It's important to remember that no one is perfect. Minor missteps on the road to your goals are normal. Resolve to recover and get back on track.

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The Art of Bouncing Back: Developing Resilience

Have you ever noticed that some people always seem to see the glass as half full, while others view it as half empty? The quality that helps people deal with stress in a positive way is called resilience.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, resilience means "the personal and community qualities that enable us to rebound from adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or other stresses — and to go on with life with a sense of mastery, competence and hope."

Resilience is more than a sunny disposition. It is a quality that affects every part of our lives; and it takes

practice. We can become more resilient by taking charge of the way we react to life's events.

Taking charge means viewing our response to life's events as something we can control — not something that controls us. It means deciding how we will react. The world is a stressful place, but we don't have to let stress run our lives.

Being resilient doesn't mean ignoring life's ups and downs. It doesn't mean pretending stress and pain don't affect us. Resilience allows us to recover — to bounce back — in a healthy way.

Resilience can help us recover from a shock or loss. It can help us live with chronic pain or mental illness. A resilient person can meet life's challenges with confidence.

Portrait of a Resilient Person

A resilient person is able to resist stress and weather bad times. A resilient person probably has:

- A network of supportive people;
- A sense of confidence in his or her own abilities;
- Good communication skills;
- Good problem-solving skills;
- Techniques for managing feelings and impulses.

Ten Ways to Build Resilience

1. Make connections. Good relationships with close family members, friends or others are important. Accepting help and support from those who care about you and will listen to you strengthens resilience. Some people find that being active in civic groups, faith-based organizations or other local groups provides social support and can help with reclaiming hope. Assisting others in their time of need also can benefit the helper.



2. Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems. You can't change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these

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events. Try looking beyond the present to how future circumstances may be a little better. Note any subtle ways in which you might already feel somewhat better as you deal with difficult situations.

3. Accept that change is a part of living. Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

4. Move toward your goals. Develop realistic goals. Do something regularly — even if it seems like a small accomplishment — that enables you to move toward your goals. Instead of focusing on tasks that seem unachievable, ask yourself, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"

5. Take decisive actions. Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take decisive actions, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.

6. Look for opportunities for self-discovery. People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of their struggle with loss. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, a greater sense of strength even while feeling vulnerable, an increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality and a heightened appreciation for life.

7. Nurture a positive view of yourself. Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.

8. Keep things in perspective. Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion.

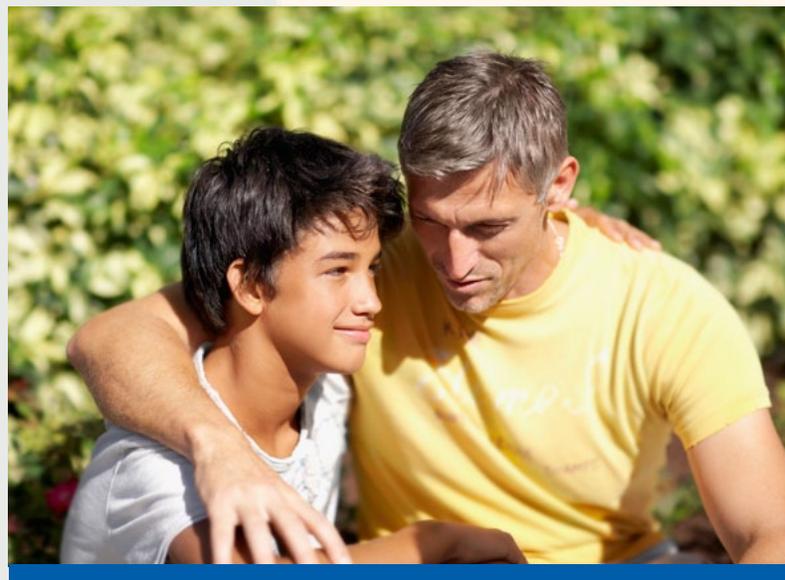
9. Maintain a hopeful outlook. An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.

10. Take care of yourself. Pay attention to your own

needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly. Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body primed to deal with situations that require resilience.

Additional ways of strengthening resilience may be helpful. For example, some people write about their deepest thoughts and feelings related to trauma or other stressful events in their life. Meditation and spiritual practices help some people build connections and restore hope. The key is to identify ways that are likely to work well for you as part of your own personal strategy for fostering resilience.

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Start Talking with Youth

Ohio Youth Drug Prevention Initiative

Drug abuse is a public health epidemic across the nation, and Ohio is not immune. In 2011, drug overdoses were the leading cause of accidental deaths in our state, with one Ohioan dying from a drug overdose every five hours. Under Gov. John R. Kasich's leadership, Ohio has made attacking the drug problem a priority. Efforts are underway to broaden public and professional education, particularly regarding the prescribing and abuse of

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opioids; law enforcement has ramped up interdiction efforts on our highways and in our communities; and treatment options and recovery supports have been expanded to help those struggling with addiction regain control of their lives.

To help reduce the likelihood of youth drug use before it starts, Gov. Kasich



and Mrs. Kasich launched **Start Talking!** statewide youth drug prevention initiative this January. **Start Talking!** is inspired by research that shows children whose parents talk to them about the risks of drugs are up to 50 percent less likely to use drugs than kids who do not have these critical conversations with their parents. Whether it is on the athletic field, in the classroom, at the doctor's office or around the kitchen table, **Start Talking!** can reach children through one of its four components.

- **Know!** is a drug prevention and awareness partnership developed by The Drug-Free Action Alliance that targets parents and caregivers of middle school students and empowers them to raise their children substance-free. Its goal is to increase communication between parents and their children about substance abuse. This is achieved through free, twice-monthly emails that offer parent tips to families to help them talk about this subject.
- **Parents360 Rx** is a component of a national community education program developed by the Partnership at Drugfree.org that has demonstrated significantly increased knowledge of substance abuse among adults, thereby enhancing confidence in their ability to speak with teens about the subject. Ohio is disseminating Parents360 Rx Action Toolkits to assist parents and school leaders in hosting discussions locally to support prevention efforts in their communities.
- **5 Minutes for Life** is led by the Ohio Highway Patrol and the Ohio National Guard, in partnership with high schools, local law enforcement and the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA). Patrol and National Guard members talk to student athletes and encourage them to become ambassadors who lead peer-to-peer conversations that promote healthy lifestyles. The statewide

partnership involves all 58 Patrol Posts, more than 800 OHSAA-member high schools and Ohio National Guard Service members from around the state.

- **Building Youth Resiliency** and encouraging good behavioral health among young people are both essential to enhancing their ability to resist substance abuse and addiction. The Office of Ohio First Lady Karen W. Kasich, in partnership with other state agencies, is getting ready to announce a series of grants to assist local communities in utilizing evidence-based programs to help youth resist substance use. This initiative will give communities and schools the tools to develop student's resiliency so they have the courage to push back against peer pressure.

Learn more at: www.StartTalking.Ohio.Gov. Join the conversation on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/StartTalkingOhio>.



OHIO EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Your employee assistance program offers confidential help for personal problems

and concerns. Concerned about a troubled family member who won't get help? Feel tired and exhausted, but don't know if it's burnout, loss of motivation, depression or all three? Late for work too often? Has use of alcohol or drugs created a crisis you are facing right now? The bottom line: Never wonder if your concern is suitable of the OEAP. So, if you've been putting off taking action to solve a serious issue that is weighing on you, give OEAP a call today.

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