

Sue Koger's Guidelines for
ACT LOCALLY Personal Projects

It is important to emphasize to students that the more carefully they think through and structure their behavior change program, the more likely that they will succeed. The following is adapted from (Watson & Tharp, 2002), and represents a behavior modification approach.

- I. Problem identification. Identify a specific behavior(s) you currently engage in that has an adverse environmental impact. The problem should be interesting enough to challenge you, and should have a good chance of success. Some examples are: 1) reduce the amount of paper that you use; 2) reduce the overall amount of trash that you produce (e.g., avoid over-packaged goods; reduce consumption); 3) increase your use of public transportation, walking or biking rather than driving; 4) reduce your consumption of meat.
- II. Specify the problem and building commitment.
 - A. Specify the behavior in terms of the specific situations in which it occurs, and how you will increase or decrease it.
 - B. If your goal is to decrease a behavior, state the goal in terms of an increase of a behavior that is more desirable and incompatible with the undesired behavior.
 - C. If it is complex goal, or one that will take a long time, state short-term goals.
 - D. Overcoming obstacles.
 - i. List situations that may interfere with changing the behavior.
 - ii. List short- and long-term pros and cons of changing the behavior.
 - E. Building commitment.
 - i. Make plans for dealing with obstacles.
 - ii. Commit yourself to your goal -- both to yourself and to others
 - iii. Establish sub-goals, and plans for reaching them.
- III. Begin self-observation, and think about the stimuli that are governing your behavior.
 - A. Record your Behavior (includes thoughts, feelings, actions).
 - i. Use a diary, or other method that is easily incorporated into your daily schedule
 - ii. Begin by simply recording when behavior occurs to get a "baseline" (don't worry about change yet).
 - iii. Is the behavior strong and frequent? Or weak and infrequent? How will this impact your program of change?
 - iv. Are you aware of people (i.e., models) in your past whose behavior or some aspects of it you may have copied?
 - v. Does any part of your goal involve changing behaviors that are very difficult to change (i.e., resistant to extinction)?
 - B. Identify Antecedents.
 - i. In what situations does the behavior occur?
 - ii. Do you react automatically to some cue with the undesirable behavior?
 - iii. What are you saying to yourself before the behavior occurs?
 - C. What are the results of your behavior? (Consequences)
 - i. Are your desired behaviors positively reinforced?
 - ii. Are undesirable behaviors being reinforced?
 - iii. Is it possible that the desired behavior is being punished?
 - iv. Is your own "self-speech" rewarding or punishing your behavior?

v. Are the consequences for some behaviors difficult to identify?

IV. Plan for behavior modification.

A. Antecedents - Devise plans to increase or decrease antecedent stimulus control. For example, avoid some situations; use prompts; rely on support system for reminders.

B. Behavior (actions, thoughts, feelings) - Consider methods of developing new behaviors (behavior substitution, overt and imagined modeling and rehearsal, shaping). Plan how to break automatic patterns.

C. Consequences - Identify specific reinforcers for new behavior, and/or punishers for undesired behavior. Additionally, plan to eliminate existing reinforcers for undesired behaviors.

V. Putting it all together: Write out your plan in detail, as follows:

A. State your goal and any sub-goals. Indicate your current level of performance using your baseline records.

B. State specific rules for your goal or first subgoal (ie., "If....., then.....). What behaviors will you have to perform in each situation to achieve the subgoal? Examine the preliminary plans you have made (Part IV) and consider alternatives.

C. Be sure to get accurate self-observations and feedback along the way, and compare your performance to your goals.

D. Sign your contract, and begin implementing it.

VI. Long Term Maintenance.

A. It is important to get other people involved in helping you reach your goal.

B. Work at maintaining changes in situations that previously elicited the behavior.

C. Set up natural reinforcement contingencies, and phase out unnecessary ones.

D. Phase out record-keeping.

VII. Solving Problems - Be prepared to modify your plan as problems arise.

A. List concrete details of the problem.

B. Try to think of as many solutions as possible.

C. Brainstorm with others.

D. Choose one or more solution(s) to implement.