



IN THE MOMENT

Social-emotional
life skills for
youth

ESTABLISHING HEALTHY HABITS

We first make our habits,
and then our habits
make us.

- JOHN DRYDEN

How do habits develop?

Habits are repeated, and often subconscious, actions that are triggered in response to contextual cues. Wearing a seatbelt is an example of a habit. For many people, the action of buckling a seatbelt is triggered by the contextual cue of shutting the vehicle door after you get in.

Research shows that through repetition, simple actions can become a habit. Repeating an action for 21 days reduces dependence on conscious attention or motivational processes and leads to performing the action automatically.

While positive habits help us to live healthier lives, a habit can form around many different aspects of life:

- Finances and budgets
- Behavior
- Food and nutrition
- Self-care
- Alcohol and drug use
- Electronic device use

✓ How can habits impact our lives?

Money management: Money is the top cause of stress in the United States, according to the American Psychological Association (APA). Build positive money habits to minimize financial stress.

Self-regulation: Self-regulation is the ability to control one's behavior, emotions, and thoughts. Managing our feelings during disappointing situations and rebounding from disrupted emotions helps us to improve self-esteem and relationships.

Self-care: Habits relating to sleep, nutrition, bathing, dental care, and physical activity form quickly and can have significant impacts on health.

- One in five children and more than one in three adults struggle with obesity.
- One in 10 people eats the recommended daily amount of vegetables.
- Fewer than one in four youth get enough aerobic physical activity.

Drug and alcohol use: About 23.6 million people aged 12 or older reported a nicotine dependence, according to [National Institute on Drug Abuse \(2020\)](#). People who smoke one pack of cigarettes each day could save \$188 per month, on average ([smokefree.gov, 2022](#)).

Screen time: Tablets, phones, and computers consume more of our time than we often realize. The average person in the United States spends around 12 hours and 20 minutes each day on electronic devices ([Nielsen Company Audience Report, April 2020](#)).

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Steps to making a new healthy habit

REFLECTION

It is important to be careful and conscious with our actions. Our lives can revolve around our habits, so it is important that we select and make positive and healthy choices. Those choices become habits that can be either harmful or helpful.

Putting it into practice

- 1 Identify** a healthy habit you would like to set. Make it a goal that you want to achieve to support your health.
- 2 Choose** a simple action that can be repeated daily to help you meet your goal.
- 3 Plan** when and where you will do your chosen action. Be intentional and consistent about selecting a realistic time that you can complete the action every day of the week.
- 4 Do** the action when you encounter the time and place. Don't give up!
- 5 Be patient** with yourself! Establishing a habit gets easier over time and generally becomes automatic after about 10 weeks of working toward your goal.

In your moment

Reflect on positive habits you already have and identify new healthy habits you would like to incorporate into your life.

THREE HEALTHY HABITS

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For additional SEL resources, visit: go.illinois.edu/InTheMoment

REFERENCES

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SOURCE

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