

Before a Goal - Brainstorm

Before you choose a goal to get started on, there's a brainstorming phase. It is a time to figure out what you actually want. What you're willing to put effort toward.



Brainstorming is a skill. And like all skills, you can learn the principles and practice it with just a bit of effort and intention. You can do this alone or with others. If you're helping your kids set goals and brainstorm, teach them the 4 brainstorm principles.

- **Write it down**
- **No judging**
- **Have at least 1 crazy idea**
- **Try to come up with as many ideas as you can**

Principle One: Write it down. Find a place to write down your ideas. A piece of paper, whiteboard, phone note, or computer file. Seeing all of the options to choose from gives us a sense of autonomy.

Principle Two: No judging or labeling ideas as good or bad, brilliant or dumb. Treat them like innocent cute little children. Smile. Be nice. Have a sense of humor. Let this be a space of imagining what if. Let reality be the dream killer later on, not you.

Principle Three: Have at least one crazy idea. When you're brainstorming it can be helpful to include a crazy, off-the-wall, suggestion. It puts your brain in a new mindset. It relieves the pressure to be clever or to come up with only "good ideas". It gets you out of traditional or "should" goals.

There's actually research by Barbara Fredrickson that shows that positive emotions broaden your thought-action repertoire - basically your ability to brainstorm new action ideas. I think it's interesting that Barbara Fredrickson calls it a thought-action repertoire. It's like saying - I have a repertoire of songs I can sing. But instead it's - I have a repertoire of possible actions I could take on this goal.

The whole theory is called **Broaden and Build**. The broaden part is when you are currently experiencing a positive emotion in the moment, your brain comes up with more ideas, and you literally have broader peripheral vision. The build part means that when you have more options, you are more likely to find one you like and pursue it. That means you'll have more experience. And experience builds a repertoire of skills and lessons learned that you can continue to draw on.

Principle Four: Get as many ideas down as you can think of. When you've got a lot of ideas, you can choose one if it jumps out at you. Otherwise, I'll often give myself a break or give kids some space before we choose one and get started. Especially if you're working on a goal as a team - give the ideas time to percolate and meet back in 15 minutes or tomorrow or next week to talk again and choose and design a goal.

Brainstorming starts with good questions. Some questions to get you started thinking about what you want are: What's on my bucket list - things I want to do before I die? What am I good at? What am I interested in? What do I want to explore? What do I need to prepare for in my near or far future?

If you do know what you want that's great. Some of the questions may help clarify what you want and spark new ideas. If you're introducing your kids to goals, these questions can help them picture their futures. Before you even start your first goal, one way to get traction is to figure out what you want. Seems easy enough but there's actually some art and skill to it.

Don't be surprised if at first you don't know what you want. Kids mostly live in the present and the concept of preparing for their future doesn't arise naturally. Young adults don't have experience structuring their own lives. And adults have often put many of their goals aside for families.

There's lots of different times you're going to brainstorm in the middle of pursuing goals. For example, when you encounter an **obstacle**, you might brainstorm paths around it.

HOPE. When you brainstorm multiple paths around your goal, you are actually increasing your hope. Hope researcher Rick Snyder defined HOPE as having multiple paths around your goal along with a willingness to take one of the paths. So, brainstorming well literally increases your measurable hope. That's why the brainstorming rules exist.

- **No Judging:** When someone judges and comments on the feasibility or worth of a goal, it breaks the NO JUDGING principle to effective brainstorming. It crushes the idea, limits the options, and squishes hope.
- **Crazy Ideas:** If we forget to include a wild idea, we can get stuck in the rut of everything we've already thought of before. We only list standard, run-of-the-mill, typical goals that we're not really excited about and not willing to act on, further squishing our hope.

Brainstorm Anytime: Even if you aren't encountering an obstacle, we often need to check in and plan the next part of our goal. These are our next steps. This can happen in the middle of a goal, or anytime you're stuck. When you ask yourself, "What do I need to do next?" Time to brainstorm!!!

Brainstorming is a skill. And like all skills, you can get it with just a little practice. Give it a try.