

How can high-performing students set healthy goals?

[Rogers Behavioral Health](#)

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We live in a competitive world. The drive for success is affecting children at an increasingly early age with young people feeling the pressure to achieve better grades, excel on standardized college admission tests, and outperform their peers, whether it be in academics or athletics. All that can add up to stress and anxiety, even for high-performing

students.

“It’s all about balance,” says Amanda Heins, PsyD, supervising psychologist in Rogers’ OCD and Anxiety Center for adolescent residential care. “We want high achievers in the world. They cure diseases, come up with amazing new technology, and perform complex procedures and surgeries. It’s also important when pushing yourself to succeed that you ask some questions like what do I want to accomplish? What are my personal values? Why do I want this particular goal? What’s driving me? When it comes to setting goals, oftentimes there’s a missing ingredient that unintentionally sets us up for failure.”

What are SMART goals?

Dr. Heins says goals should be SMART:

S – specific (Clearly define what it is you want to achieve.)

M – measurable (Establish a way to determine if you’ve met your goal with a tangible metric.)

A – appealing (Pursue a goal that interests you.)

R – realistic (Make sure your goal is achievable.)

T – time bound (Ensure you have enough time to achieve your goal.)

"It's important to set goals for things you're passionate about," explains Dr. Heins. "And you need a realistic time frame for achieving it. If you decide to run a marathon, you need to start by setting smaller goals of running a few miles every day. Ask yourself what are the steps to get me from the starting point to the finish line and what do I need to do to break the goal down into smaller, manageable milestones? It's important to keep tabs on your progress, and if you hit a bump, be flexible and adjust as needed. Give yourself a break even when you take a step toward your goal and it doesn't work out as planned. We need to maximize those learning moments," she says.

Setting ambitious goals and being driven isn't unhealthy, but for people with OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder) and anxiety, who may also struggle with perfectionism, it's a lot harder to manage.

Symptoms to look for are:

- Inability to manage day-to-day activities
- Spending excessive time on tasks, needing to "start over" if they aren't perfect/just right
- Frequent emotional meltdowns when unable to complete or perfect a ritual
- Withdrawing from things they used to engage in
- Significant change in academic achievement (ex. going from As to Ds)

“If you notice OCD tendencies creeping in, the good news is we know how to treat that,” says Dr. Heins. “And by going into treatment, it doesn’t mean you will no longer be a high achiever. Treatment is actually going to help you be more effective in what you’re passionate about.”

Rogers offers evidence-based treatment throughout Wisconsin and nationwide for kids, teens, and adults dealing with OCD and anxiety, including our newly opened [bilingual outpatient clinic in Miami](#). For more information call 1-800-767-4411 for a free screening or [request a screening online](#).