

Suicide prevention at Lake Tahoe: Maintaining a healthier mental space

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Special to the Sun



Most of the time, our resolutions focus on what we don't like about ourselves, but how many times in life would such a negative list inspire us to change?
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TAHOE-TRUCKEE, Calif. — Chances are you are one month into attempting to maintain your New Year's resolutions. Most of us create ambitious resolutions, with lofty goals that begin to seem daunting as February and March approach. These resolutions may create anxiety or frustration, and you may reevaluate the goals you set.

Another approach is to change the way we view a "resolution." Positive psychology tells us that by creating intentions, we can propose an ongoing effort. So if we look at the behaviors we hope to change when setting the resolutions, it will us set an intention rather than trying to change who we are.

By stepping into the new year with intention, we can set attainable goals and be better prepared to handle the surprises life throws at us. For instance, if one of your intentions is to eat healthier and you attend a party and eat a piece of cake, you may have strayed from your intention briefly.

But you can always go back to your intention the next day with more commitment rather than feeling like a failure for enjoying a party with some cake.

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When the clock strikes midnight on the new year, it doesn't symbolize a moment of sweeping change in a person's life. A better way to view the new year, is a time for us all to reflect on our behaviors of the past year and decide what positive adjustments would best encourage positive lifestyle changes.

None of us will ever be perfect, and it is important to strive for a healthier, more positive lifestyle versus perfection. By setting smaller, attainable intentions instead of a singular goal for the entire new year,, you are more likely to succeed in achieving.

Most of the time, our resolutions focus on what we don't like about ourselves, but how many times in life would such a negative list inspire us to change?

Instead of focusing on the negative, let's take a more positive approach to identifying attainable intentions while acknowledging all of our experiences of the past year.

Psychology Today (December 2015) created an "Awesome List" template to help you get started with self-reminders of amazing and awesome things you may have done this past year. Some examples of the Awesome List are: "This year I was courageous when I _____. This year I was brave when I _____. I challenged my fear of _____ when I..."

Once you've acknowledged all of your accomplishments and proud moments of the past year, you are in a more positive mental space to evaluate what you might be ready to confront in the new year. To really set intentions, it is important to do some self-exploration to understand why they are important to set yourself up for success.

An example could look like this: "In the new year, I will be more financially stable." Now, because this is a broad intention, it would be important to create smaller, attainable categories, so you can measure personal successes and identify any challenges to maintaining this intention.

For example, "This year I will put \$300 a month into my savings account," "By November of this year I will have \$2,000 saved to put towards X," "This year I will budget a miscellaneous shopping amount and spend no more than X on my wardrobe."

While setting smaller goals and allowing for dates and specific amounts, one can identify where the real struggles are with the goal and to acknowledge successes in maintaining the original intention of the year.

If we focus on the positives and truly appreciate the work we have accomplished in our lives thus far, we can shift goals that may seem daunting and overwhelming into smaller intentions that we feel confident and proud to share with friends and family. Remember that perfection is unattainable. By setting realistic goals we can maintain a healthier mental health space and acknowledge ourselves as we progress through the year.

If you find yourself truly feeling at a loss and unable to accomplish your intentions, consider reaching out for support. Accepting help from people that care about you will strengthen your ability to manage the stress possibly caused by your resolution.

Mental health professionals are uniquely trained to address emotional issues that may arise as a result of setting a goal or intention around an undesirable personal behavior or trait.

Sarah McClarie is the facilitator for the Tahoe Truckee Youth Suicide Prevention Coalition. And , Outreach Facilitator for the Tahoe Truckee Suicide Prevention Task Force. Contact her at smcclarie@ttusd.org or by calling 530-582-2560.

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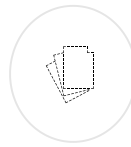


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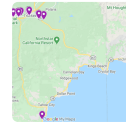
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 1