



Social-emotional life skills for youth

IN THE MOMENT

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](#)).

