Practice Guide	# Goal Setting	**Use This When:**

Use This When:

To assist the child and family with identifying and achieving desired outcomes.

For Family

Objectives:

- to provide a rationale for using a goal setting framework
- to identify goals that are important to the child and family
- to establish a realistic, achievable progression of steps towards desired goals
- instill optimism about goal achievement

Steps:

☐ **Provide overview**	Discuss with the child and family that goal setting provides a framework for making progress toward certain desired outcomes. Provide examples of possible outcomes including behavioral changes (e.g., increased school attendance), emotional changes (e.g., improved mood), relationship improvements (e.g., positive child-caregiver communication), and specific achievements (e.g., making the honor roll).
☐ **Describe the benefits of goal setting**	Explain that goal setting can benefit the child and family by: • Providing direction in terms of helping the child and family think about and identify desired outcomes, • Providing the child and family with control over achieving those desired outcomes, • Making large goals manageable by reducing interference from goal-irrelevant activities, • Increasing the likelihood of persistence in the face of obstacles, • Providing a source of pride and satisfaction following progress and success.
☐ **Identify goals**	Collaboratively establish goals that are important to the child and family to increase their motivation: • Reframe problems (e.g., truancy, depressed mood, aggression towards peers) described by the child and family as goals (e.g., spending time at school, doing fun activities, being kinder to others). • Cast as goals the child's strengths and interests regarding skill building (e.g., developing proficiency in a new sport) or achievement (e.g., making the honor roll or being picked for a play or a sports team).
☐ **Prioritize goals**	Collaboratively prioritize goals to help the child and family focus on accomplishing a particular goal without getting distracted by other goals. If appropriate, explain that motivation tends to increase as the child or family comes closer to achieving a goal, so it is better to focus and make large gains on a small number of goals than to make small gains on a large number of goals. This increased motivation and focus will make the child more likely to persevere in the face of challenges or obstacles.
☐ **Break large goals into smaller goals**	Set up goals so that there are a number of smaller goals on the way to larger ones. Each small success can help the child and family build confidence and motivation to persevere toward larger accomplishments.

Steps:

☐	**Discuss characteristics of effective goals**	When creating goals, explain that effective goals are: • **Stated in the positive** (e.g., "Use positive communication skills when discussing disagreements with parents" vs. "Don't fight with parents"). Positively stated goals help the child adopt a positive mindset focused on success, lend themselves to easy assessment of progress, and are consistent with a strengths-based approach. • **Concrete, specific, and behavioral** (e.g., "Practice relaxation at least three times per week"). Stated in this way, progress towards the goal is easily observed and measured. • **Effort-based rather than outcome-based.** Certain outcomes (e.g., "Winning the State title competition for a particular sport") may not be achieved due to circumstances beyond the child's or family's control (e.g., poor field conditions, teammates with subpar performances, injury). Prioritizing the child's or family's effort and engagement rather than the ultimate outcome provides the child and family with greater control over achievement of the goal and feelings of pride when the goal is accomplished despite an undesirable outcome. • **Written down and shared**. Documenting a goal or making a public commitment to a goal enhances a child's and family's commitment to making progress toward the goal. • **Realistic and challenging, yet achievable with hard work.** Effective goals take into account the child's and family's abilities and resources, are moderately challenging so that the child and family are motivated to work toward success, and are achievable with persistence and effort. Goals that are too easy may be pursued at first so that the child can experience some early success. However, over time, goals should be crafted so that they are moderately challenging. Sometimes goals are set too high, perhaps because the child or family do not accurately assess the degree of skill required to achieve the goal or do not recognize substantial obstacles. Goals that are too high can dramatically reduce motivation and persistence, leaving the child or family with a feeling of failure. • **Time-bound.** Having specific timeframes for accomplishing goals helps motivate the child and family to action and provides a standard for assessment of progress.
☐	**Identify potential obstacles**	Anticipate potential obstacles to achieving a goal, and assist the child and family with creating a plan for overcoming these barriers and persisting toward goal attainment should those obstacles develop.
☐	**Instill confidence and plan to monitor progress**	After the goal setting plans have been developed, praise the child and family for taking the first step (i.e., setting the goal) toward successful accomplishment of the goal. Exude optimism and confidence that the child and family can tackle the next steps toward the goal, and plan to monitor progress to increase the child's and family's motivation for continued effort and achievement.

Helpful Tips:

- Remember to praise often.
- Remember to review often, by asking questions.
- Brief any caregivers, teachers, or other adult figures who may be involved.
- Simplify these steps if you have to.
- This material can be covered in more than one session/meeting.