



# Setting Goals Together

FCS  
Sheet  
#13

This FCS Sheet is #13 of an 18 part series on family-centred service.

If you are interested in this FCS Sheet, you may also want to read:

- FCS Sheet #10: Working together: From providing information to working in partnership
- FCS Sheet #12: Making decisions together: How to decide what is best

Key definitions and a list of the topics in this series can be found at the end of this FCS Sheet.

“If we are going to take a family-centred approach, the first order of business is to find out what families want - their expectations, their concerns and what they hope to accomplish by involving themselves with our agency”  
(Winton, 1996, p. 31).

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## Relevance

Goal setting is the first step in developing any plan of action. In family-centred approaches, the plan of action is directed towards family priorities and concerns. The process used for goal setting can help clarify the family's priorities and can create opportunities for families and service providers to form partnerships. Goal setting also provides a way of measuring change over time. This is necessary to determine if the services provided have had the desired outcome. If the goal is clear, all members of the child's team can determine if it has been reached.

## Facts & Concepts

The specific research about goal setting adds to the overall evidence promoting the use of family-centred service approaches. There is evidence in the literature that clear goals enhance motivation and lead to more positive outcomes (Locke & Latham, 1990). There is also evidence that more specific, functional goals lead to the best outcomes (Ponte-Allan & Giles, 1999). It is not surprising, then, that involving the family and the child in goal setting (rather than having the goals being set by the service provider) positively influences a family's satisfaction with care, as well as enhances a child's outcomes.

Despite this evidence, the relationship between goal setting and outcomes is not a simple one. There appears to be a number of factors that influence the process, including the following points that have been outlined in an article by Theodorakis and colleagues (1996):

- The individual's sense that he/she has the ability to achieve the goal (self-efficacy).
- The feedback given about the performance.
- The personal sense of satisfaction with the performance.

Further exploration of the relative contributions of these factors is an area for continued study.

## Strategies for Families and Service Providers to Set Goals Together

### Use an individualized approach.

Each family is unique and will require a different approach to goal setting. Some families know exactly what their goals are and can articulate them very clearly. Other families will need more structure or support in determining what their main concerns are, where they see their family's strengths, and/or what they hope to achieve. Although it is important to follow the family's lead, it is up to the service providers to tailor the goal-setting process to the family's needs and preferred methods for expressing themselves. Specific tools such as the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (Law et al., 1998) may be useful in providing a structure to the process of goal setting.

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## **Use a common language.**

Avoid re-phrasing a family's goal into professional jargon. For example, if the family would like their child to participate in more crafts and colouring activities, don't phrase the goal as development of fine motor skills. Improved motor skills may be what is necessary for the child to participate in these activities, but the goal should be stated in the family's words (that is, "increased participation in craft and colouring activities").

## **Honour and work towards the family's goals.**

Hope is a powerful emotion and one that should always be fostered. Even if the child is a long way from meeting the stated goal, you can always break it down into smaller, more manageable steps and begin to work together toward the long-term goal.

## **Involve the child in goal setting.**

Children as young as 5 years of age can start to contribute to goal setting. At these younger ages, children require a fairly structured approach, but they can start to indicate what is important to them. The Perceived Efficacy and Goal Setting System (Missiuna & Pollock, 2000) is an example of a tool designed to help young children set goals.

## **Set precise goals together.**

State the goals in terms of a specific, observable, functional outcome. The more precise the goals, the better able everyone will be to work towards them. For example, "Darren will continue to develop his gross motor skills" is too broad. "Darren will use the swings and slide at recess time" is a clearer and more measurable goal.

## **Do not limit the discussion of goals by the services available.**

It is important to hear from families about all of their hopes and dreams and goals - to see the family as a whole. Once the goals are stated, then a plan of action can be developed. The plan may involve a variety of resources within the community including recreation, education and health services.

## **Phrase goals in terms of the outcomes that will be achieved, not the methods for achieving them.**

For example, "Sarah will play with one other child during free play-time" is an observable, measurable goal. "Sarah will attend a preschool play-group three mornings per week" is a method for achieving the goal.

## **Include context in the goals.**

Indicate where would you like to see this behaviour happen and under what conditions. State what part of the child's daily routine will be influenced by this goal. For example, "Aaron will use two-word phrases in his preschool program to make requests at lunch and snack times".

## Update goals frequently.

Goals are dynamic. They change according to shifting family circumstances, the child's growth and development, differing priorities, resources, and strengths. Check-in with each other on a regular basis to ensure that the goals are still appropriate.

### Summary

Setting goals together is an important part of a family-centred partnership. Through specific goal setting, everyone (families, children and service providers) can be clear about the family's priorities, hopes, dreams, strengths, and resources. Once the goals have been established, everyone can work together towards the goals. Each partnership will be unique and will require different methods to set the goals, but once established, the goals will help everyone to look ahead and to measure the steps along the way.

## Resources

Law, M., Baptiste, S., Carswell, A., McColl, M.A., Polatajko, H., & Pollock, N. (1998). *The Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (3rd ed.)*. Ottawa, ON: CAOT Publications.

Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (1990). *A theory of goal setting and task performance*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Missiuna, C., & Pollock, N. (2000). Perceived efficacy and goal setting in young children. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 67, 101-109.

Ponte-Allan, M., & Giles, G. M. (1999). Goal setting and functional outcomes in rehabilitation. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 53, 646-649.

Theodorakis, Y., Malliou, P., Papaioannou, A., Beneca, A., & Filactakidou, A. (1996). The effect of personal goals, self-efficacy and self-satisfaction on injury rehabilitation. *Journal of Sport Rehabilitation* 5, 214-223.

Winton, P. J. (1996). Understanding family concerns, priorities and resources. In: P.J. McWilliam, P. J. Winton, & E. R. Crais (Eds.) *Practical strategies for family-centered intervention*. San Diego, CA: Singular Publishing Group.

## Key Definitions

**Family-Centred Service** – Family-centred service is made up of a set of values, attitudes and approaches to services for children with special needs and their families.

Family-centred service recognizes that **each family is unique**; that the family is the **constant in the child’s life**; and that they are the **experts on the child’s abilities and needs**.

The family works with service providers to make informed decisions about the services and supports the child and family receive.

In family-centred service, the strengths and needs of all family members are considered.

**Service Provider** – The term service provider refers to those individuals who work directly with the child and family. These individuals **may** include educational assistants, respite workers, teachers, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech-language pathologists, service coordinators, recreation therapists, etc.

**Organization** – The term organization refers to the places or groups from which the child and family receive services. Organizations **may** include community programs, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, schools, etc.

**Intervention** – Interventions refer to the services and supports provided by the person who works with the child and family. Interventions **may** include direct therapy, meetings to problem solve issues that are important to you, phone calls to advocate for your child, actions to link you with other parents, etc.

Want to know more about family-centred service?

Visit the CanChild website:  
[www.canchild.ca](http://www.canchild.ca)

or call us at 905-525-9140 ext. 27850

## FCS Sheet Topics

The following is a list of the FCS Sheets. If you are interested in receiving any of these topics, please contact CanChild or visit our website.

### General Topics Related to Family-Centred Service

- FCS Sheet #1 – What is family-centred service?
- FCS Sheet #2 – Myths about family-centred service
- FCS Sheet #3 – How does family-centred service make a difference?
- FCS Sheet #4 – Becoming more family-centred
- FCS Sheet #5 – 10 things you can do to be family-centred

### Specific Topics Related to Family-Centred Service

- FCS Sheet #6 – Identifying & building on parent and family strengths & resources
- FCS Sheet #7 – Parent-to-parent support
- FCS Sheet #8 – Effective communication in family-centred service
- FCS Sheet #9 – Using respectful behaviours and language
- FCS Sheet #10 – Working together: From providing information to working in partnership
- FCS Sheet #11 – Negotiating: Dealing effectively with differences
- FCS Sheet #12 – Making decisions together: How to decide what is best
- FCS Sheet #13 – Setting goals together
- FCS Sheet #14 – Advocacy: How to get the best for your child
- FCS Sheet #15 – Getting the most from appointments and meetings
- FCS Sheet #16 – Fostering family-centred service in the school
- FCS Sheet #17 – Family-centred strategies for waitlists
- FCS Sheet #18 – Are we really family-centred? Checklists for families, service providers and organizations