

IN THE CLASSROOM

GOAL SETTING AND ACTION PLANS DURING TRANSITION

Until students identify their goals, it's hard to help them make a plan to reach them. Setting goals is key to an effective transition process. Working toward meaningful goals can motivate a student to acquire skills, complete high school, and become more self-directed. Setting goals and working toward achieving them are also skills that students can use in their adult lives.

Applying simple strategies throughout the goal-setting process with your student can increase the chances of successful goal completion.

OVERVIEW

Some students with a brain injury have trouble thinking about abstract concepts, such as “What do I want my life to be like in 5 years?” For those students, it is important to break down the goal-setting process into more immediate, concrete steps. For other students, setting goals and determining action plans can be difficult because of compromised self-awareness, especially if their injury was relatively recent. Before the injury, the student might have enjoyed activities that are now difficult or impossible. The student might not be aware of how much things have changed. Sometimes you might wonder if a student is in denial about her changed abilities. It is more likely that because of the brain injury, she has trouble accurately evaluating her performance in different areas. By helping students identify their strengths, needs, preferences, and interests, teachers can help their students set meaningful, achievable goals.

HELP YOUR STUDENT IDENTIFY MEANINGFUL GOALS.

When goals are aligned with a student's preferences, interests, needs, and strengths, the transition process goes more smoothly and leads to better transition outcomes. For students who are on an IEP, developing meaningful goals is a requirement of transition/special education law.

HOW?

- Help your student identify her strengths by asking her what positive qualities she thinks she has and what positive qualities she would like to have. If it is hard for her to answer this question, you can try asking her how others would describe her.
 - “One of the qualities you mentioned is your creativity. Tell me how you use your creativity to be successful at school.”
 - Help your student identify needs by asking about accommodations that help her succeed in school and at home.
 - “In the past, what has helped you pay attention in a loud classroom?”
 - Preferences and interests can be discussed by asking the student what she likes, doesn't like, and would like to do more.
 - “What is it that keeps you from going hiking more? Whom can you ask for help?”
 - Ask your student a series of questions to help clarify goals. You and the student can answer the questions together, or the student can answer them herself for the two of you to discuss later.
 - “What obstacles might keep you from reaching your goal? How can you overcome those challenges? What is your plan for overcoming those challenges so you can reach your goal?”
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HELP YOUR STUDENT SET REALISTIC AND ACHIEVABLE GOALS.

Setting your student up for success by helping him set goals he can reach will motivate him to keep working toward all goals.

HOW?

- Break large or long-term goals into smaller, short-term goals.
 - If the student's goal is to go to a 4 year college, start with the immediate steps needed to get there, such as passing a particular math class this semester.
 - If the student's long term goal is to get her dream job, start with the smaller goal of getting a related job to build work experience. If that still seems too big, start with creating a resume.

INVOLVE THE FAMILY.

Students whose families participate in the transition process have better transition outcomes than students whose families do not.

HOW?

- Parents of students who receive special education services get invited to formal IEP and transition planning meetings, but informal meetings and communications often help parents feel welcome to participate in transition planning. Be sure to involve the family in these steps.
 - With your student's permission, invite his parents to meet with the two of you after school one day to review progress on identifying goals.
 - Email your student and his parents to ask them to review his action plan and provide input.

DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN.

An action plan outlines the specific steps the student will take to reach her goals. The written plan can be shared with the family and others on the student's team who can support her in the transition process.

HOW?

- Break down goals into steps that need to be accomplished. List the tasks that need to be done to complete each step. Include a specific timeframe for completing the steps.
Review the plan regularly, and update the plan as steps are completed, added, or changed.
 - **Action Plan**
GOAL: Graduate from high school.
STEP: Complete all graduation requirements.
TASK: Find out what the requirements are.
How and when will I do this? Talk to my counselor at meeting next week.
TASK: Find out which requirements I still need to meet.
How and when will I do this? At the meeting with my counselor next week, I will write down any requirements that I still need to meet.
TASK: Complete course requirements.
How and when will I do this? Next quarter, I will register for any remaining requirements that I have not yet met.