Child and Family Support System

Common Elements

Module: Preparing for Change

Practice: Goal Setting

Contents

"The Aboriginal Cultural Lenses of Practice" Artist Sasha Houthuysen

Acknowledgment of Country

We respectfully acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners and occupants of lands and waters of this country, whose practices and dreaming is still living through Elder's past, present and emerging.

Further, we acknowledge that the spiritual, social, cultural, and economic practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples come from connection and maintenance of lands, waters, values, heritage beliefs, languages and lore which are of ongoing importance. From the past, in the present, into the future, forever.

We acknowledge the impact of historical policies that were harmful and have contributed to intergenerational trauma. This includes policies and practices of colonisation that have had a profound impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's connection to country, culture, and one another.

We aim to continue to apply a cultural lens when we work together to promote a cultural evidence base that centre around self-determination, choice, and a healing approach, through Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing. All while valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as strong, resilient people, and decision makers in their own lives.

About this document

The South Australian government is committed to creating a cohesive Child and Family Support System (CFSS).

One in three children born in South Australia (SA) are reported to the Department for Child Protection by age 10. Most of those children's families have multiple and complex needs.

Children and young people who are removed from their families and placed in care experience trauma that can continue to impact on their health and wellbeing throughout their lives and across generations. For Aboriginal families and communities, the intergenerational trauma from Stolen Generations and children being forcefully taken from their communities and culture both adds and gives context to the complexities.

The CFSS is committed to ensuring Aboriginal children remain front, centre and highly visible in our work with families and communities. The CFSS commits to understanding and valuing Aboriginal Cultural strengths, enabling self-determination and being honest about the truth of our shared histories, the hurts, the strengths, and the healing. It is only by doing these actions and being true and active allies will we see change.

The "Roadmap for Reforming the Child and Family Support System (CFSS) 2021–2023" outlines the steps that the South Australian government (Department of Human Services) is taking to strengthen the CFSS workforce to intervene early, build positive relationships with families, improve family wellbeing, and avert the need for greater engagement with the child protection system.

The *Common Elements* is one strategy adopted to enhance the CFSS workforce. The *Common Elements*, once bedded into the CFSS workforce, will build greater consistency for families engaging in the CFSS, adds to the pre-existing skills amongst CFSS staff, enhance evidence-based practice and enable access to quality clinical supervision and mentoring.

The *Common Elements* are evidence-informed (the 'common elements' of programs / interventions known to be effective, and / or supported by evidence from multiple sources) and designed to be used flexibly in response to families' needs. The *Common Elements* approach is being implemented by DHS in partnership with the Centre for Evidence and Implementation (CEI). CEI is a global, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to using the best evidence in practice and policy to improve the lives of children, families, and communities facing adversity. Refer to the '*Common Elements: Background and Introduction - Explaining the Common Elements'* document for more information.

Each practice guide is comprised of an overview of the practice and its purpose, cultural considerations, key capabilities, practice strategies, outcomes, and practice points. It should be a practitioner's go-to resource, in addition to training and coaching in delivering these practices with fidelity.

The information in this publication can be provided in an alternative format on request. Please email EIRD@sa.gov.au

Overview

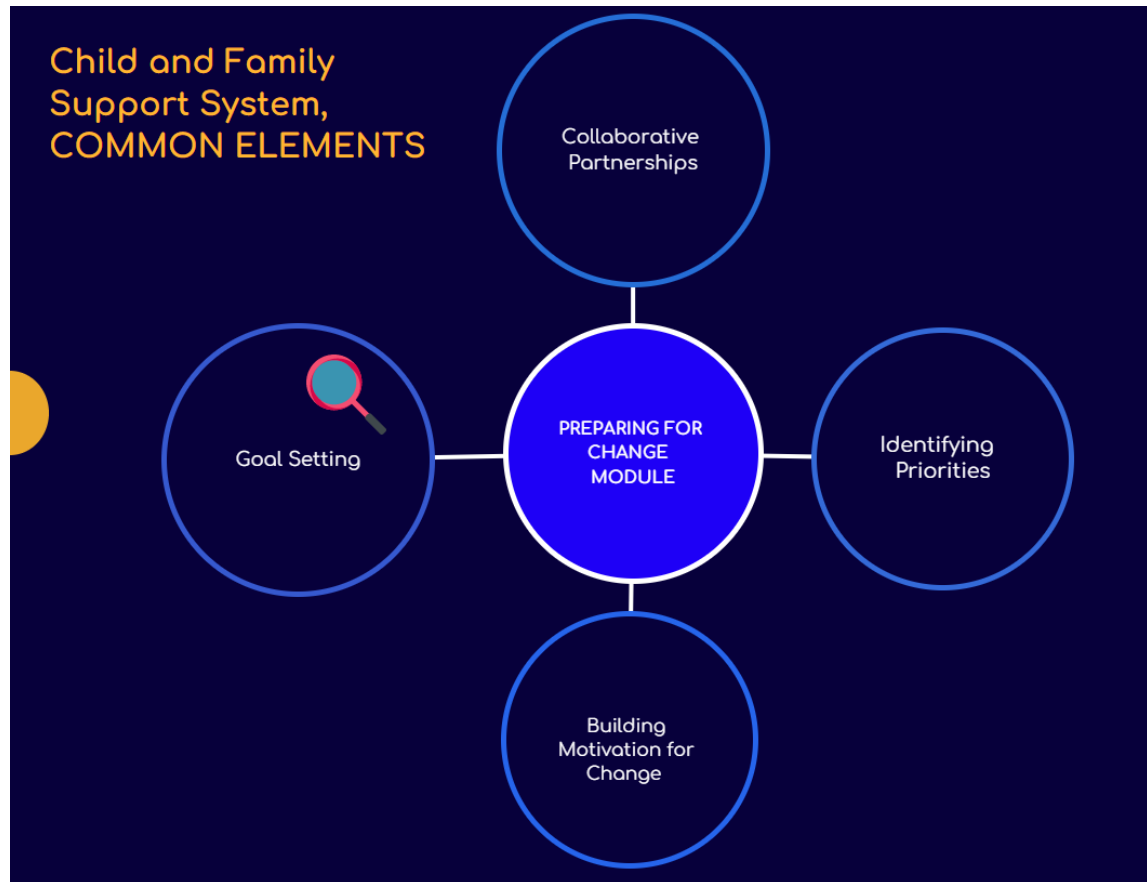*Goal Setting* is a practice associated with achievement in many domains of life. Goals are a signpost for the destination an individual wants to reach rather than a roadmap for getting there. Clear and well-constructed goals help motivate and focus individual efforts and investment of resources. *Goal Setting* is the process of specifying and documenting something an individual wishes to work towards. Once goals have been identified by the individual, a practitioner may then introduce conversations that identify the activities or steps required to achieve the goal.

Goal Setting works best when goals are concrete, realistic, specific, align with an individual's priorities and focus on behaviours that are in the individual's control. Within the CFSS the goals will also need to ensure focus is on maintaining or creating safety for their children.

Documentation of agreed goals should be offered to the family and stored in the agency specific electronic case management systems.

Goal Setting is a practice within the *Preparing for Change* module and is an essential part of outcomes-focused collaborative work between the individual and the practitioner. Goals should be the driving force for collaborative work. This guide can be used with adult individuals (parents, carers, kinship relations) and with young people of approximately 12 years of age (as developmentally appropriate).

Purpose

Goal Setting is a useful activity when beginning work with an individual, to provide clarity and direction for the collaborative work that will be undertaken by individuals and practitioners.

Goal Setting is also revisited regularly throughout work with an individual, as some goals are achieved, new ones are set. This process of setting, working towards and achieving goals continues until the concerns of individuals and child safety and wellbeing concerns have been addressed. Collaborative goal setting is most useful when:

✓ Practitioners have a good understanding of an individual's priorities. This practice guide is intended to be used in combination with Practice Guide: *Identifying Priorities.*
✓ Individuals struggle to articulate clear goals or first steps for addressing their priorities.
✓ Practitioners are supporting individuals to identify goals that are achievable and manageable.
✓ Individuals initiate discussions about work that needs to be done.

Although this practice guide is useful for all individuals, it is likely to be most useful with individuals who have the capacity to self-select appropriate goals.

The role of the practitioner is to provide support for the goal setting process and to assist the individual to plan how to take steps towards achieving these goals. If parents and caregivers cannot self-select appropriate goals that focus on improving child safety, practitioners should work with the individual to build their readiness for change, referring to practice guides such as *Building Motivation for Change, Identifying Priorities* and *Checking for Understanding.*

Allyship Accountability and Aboriginal Cultural Lens

A cultural lens is the consideration and application of how we perceive our environment based on knowledge, values, attitudes, and the traditions of the group with which we most identify.

Applying an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural lens means stepping back and considering one's own identity, values and how one's own background and experiences influence these perspectives. When this is understood it creates space to layer additional knowledge, understandings, skills, be embracing of true histories, culture, and Aboriginal ways of 'knowing, being and doing'. This is also known as allyship accountability.

Care should be taken when monitoring goals particularly when progress towards goals is slow. When discussing goal progress, practitioners should be mindful about having appropriate familial supports such as significant kinship supports, cultural authorities and decision makers, to check in and support the individual.

If the consequences of goals not being attained may lead to children being placed in out of home care these discussions should also include appropriate familial supports.

Applying a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Lens

When working with families from CALD communities' practitioners are advised to seek out more information to create a culturally safe and supportive environment. Liaison with community leaders and or culturally specific support services is encouraged.

Trauma in the CALD community is diverse and unique to the lived experiences and migratory journeys of individuals and families and may include intergenerational trauma. Trauma is often associated with pre migration experiences including human rights abuses.

Post migration these experiences of trauma are often made worse by other challenges, including settlement issues, racial and religious discrimination as well as the multiple losses experienced, loss of country, culture, and family.

Clear and effective communication is key to successful outcomes for families. If English is not a person's first language, then it is vital to seek out translation and interpreting services to ensure language barriers do not compromise service provision

Key Capabilities

Enabling Attitudes

When using *Goal Setting*, it is important for practitioners to adopt the following attitudes or stance towards the individual:

- The practitioner believes goals should be owned by individuals to ensure motivation towards the goal.
- The practitioner believes that individuals may already have skills to identify effective goals or can develop them with practitioner's support and encouragement.
- The practitioners believe it is their role to keep individual goals at the centre of the collaborative partnership and the work they do with individuals.

Practitioner Behaviours

Goal Setting is a collaborative process that involves practitioners helping individuals identify and prioritise goals and breaking them down into manageable steps. Practitioners and individuals also identify potential obstacles while working out how to monitor progress and celebrate achievements at each step along the way and/or at goal completion, to build further motivation. Once goals are set, they are used to steer the collaborative work of the practitioner and individual. As some goals are achieved, new goals can be set. In this way individuals are supported to tackle their priorities in a manageable way.

There are features of goals that make them more effective. These key features make it less likely for goals to fail and build the individual's motivation.

Characteristics of effective goals	
Positively worded	The goal is focused on what we want the future to look like to encourage changes the individual is working towards. For example, '*increase the number of nice, calm moments between myself and my baby'* instead of '*do not get angry at the baby'.*
Concrete, specific and measurable	The goal is concrete, specific, and measurable to ensure it is clear whether the goal has been achieved. For example, '*read at least one book to my baby each day after a meal* versus '*read more to my baby'.*
Behaviours that are in the individual's control and which build on existing strengths	The goal is focused on behaviours within the individual's control to ensure the emphasis is on efforts made rather than on outcomes achieved. For example, '*children attend all scheduled classes at school versus children to improve school grades'.*
Challenging but manageable	Making the goals manageable but challenging enough is important to help maintain motivation. Goals that are too big can be overwhelming while goals that are viewed as too easy cannot give a sense of accomplishment. Once the individual has achieved some goals and built confidence, they may increase the size or complexity of the goal.
Time-bound	The goal is time bound so that there is a fixed period of concentrated effort towards achieving the goal and a nominated time to assess progress. For example, **'***have a sober night for the next four Sunday's* versus *'drink less'.*
Values-based	The goal includes values as a constant reminder of why the goal is important. For example, '*have a sober night for the next four Sundays to help me manage the Monday morning routines. This is part of a bigger goal of making sure the kids attend school – I want the kids to be successful in life'.*

The *Goal Setting* process is focused on helping individuals identify clearly articulated, self-selected goals. Clearly articulated goals tailored to the individual's needs are more likely to be achieved. When individuals achieve goals, this builds self-efficacy: the belief that achieving future goals is possible or likely. The opposite is also true and can be detrimental to self-efficacy. This means that care should be taken especially in the first few instances of goal setting to agree on goals that are likely to be achievable to build confidence.

Behaviours for practitioners to work towards when Goal Setting	Behaviours for practitioners to avoid when Goal Setting
As needed, practitioners equip individuals with the information to set effective goals. For example, if a parent needs help to make a goal measurable, the practitioner prompts with questions about measuring success and can offer ideas on how to do so.	The practitioner drives the selection of goals and does not check in with or invite input from the individual – ownership of the goal rests with the practitioner.
When goals are agreed upon, practitioners keep the individual focused on the goal. Goals are used to drive all other work. For example, the practitioner gives the individual a written copy of the goal sheet and begins each home visit reviewing progress towards the goal and linking current activities towards the goal.	The practitioner does not inform the individual as needed, about the characteristics of effective goals.

The practitioner supports the individual to undertake multiple activities that are unrelated to goals without suggesting that they review current goals and check whether activities are aligned. |
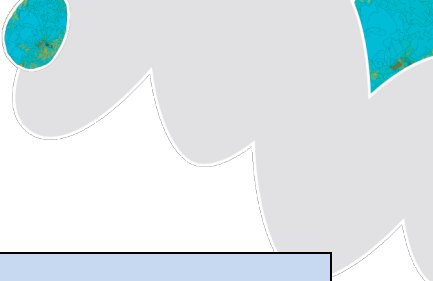| The practitioner offers input into goals as a suggestion for consideration by the individual rather than a direction. | The practitioner does not keep goals central to the work. Home visits/sessions are not related to the goals identified as important by the individual and instead focus on other matters. |
| The practitioner should ensure that goals increase family functioning and reduce the risks of abuse and or neglect, preventing further escalation into the child protection pathway. | |

Practice Strategies

Setting Goals

This section provides a guide on the steps involved in conducting Goal Setting with families.

Steps/Components	Skills/Strategies
Provide an overview and rationale for setting goals	The practitioner introduces goal setting as a way of helping the individual keep track of the changes they want to make. Practitioner*: "I've heard you say that there are lots of things in your life you want changed. Sometimes it feels like there might be too many things to tackle at once. It can be useful to have a couple of things that we are working on and to be clear about what you want to change or how you would like things to be different, so that we can tackle them together one at a time. If we create goals together, we will have a plan that helps you achieve the change you want."*
Help individuals identify goals	**Via values:** The practitioner invites individuals to identify goals from their values (what is important to them). Practitioner*: "You've talked about this idea of being a good mum. What would your goals about being a good mum look like?"* Some individuals might need help to explore values before they go on to discuss goals. Practitioner*: "Sometimes parents get ideas for goals from things that are really important to them - what's really important to you?"* **Via (individual labeled) issues:** The practitioner invites individuals to identify and describe the key problems they are facing (e.g., high parent-child conflict, child safety concerns) and reframe the problems as goals (e.g., improved parent-child communication). Practitioner*: "You've mentioned the level of conflict in the house. What would it look like if there was less conflict in the house?"* **Via priorities:** The practitioner narrows in on a goal by inviting individuals to refer to their highest rated priorities (see Practice Guide: *Identifying Priorities*).

Steps/Components	Skills/Strategies
	Practitioner: *"Your top concern now is Matt getting out of jail. What needs to happen so that you feel less concerned about that?"*
Help individuals prioritise goals	The practitioner explains that it is usually more manageable and motivating to make progress towards two or three goals at a time, rather than trying to address many goals at once. Practitioner: *"Goals are usually easier to achieve when we focus on one at a time and keep them manageable. If you had to choose, which goal would be priority one for you?"* The practitioner invites the individual to number the goals in order of priority (1 = highest priority). Practitioner checks that the goal marked as 1 is where they would like to focus their attention first. See Practice Guide: *Identifying Priorities* for additional information on setting priorities.
As needed, prompt individuals to identify the characteristics of an effective goal	**Positively worded:** Practitioner: *"What would you like to see instead of [the problem]"* **Concrete, specific and observable:** Practitioner: *"How will we know when you have achieved this?"* **Behaviours that are in the individual's control:** Practitioner: *"Is that something you can change?"* or *"What are the parts here that you can change?"* **Challenging but achievable:** Practitioner: *"What might the first step be?"* **Time-bound:** Practitioner: *"How long do you think it would take to get there?"* **Includes values:** Practitioner: *"And why is that important to you?"*

Steps/Components	Skills/Strategies
	If needed, writing down the goal can be helpful. An example worksheet is provided at the end of this guide, but individuals can use their phone or another system that works for them. Practitioner*: "Are you interested in looking at this tip sheet which gives us reminders about how to set up our goal so it's clear and manageable? It might help you think about the important parts of the goal you have in mind."*
Identify obstacles	The practitioner brainstorms with the individual about the things that might get in the way of achieving the goal (barriers to goal attainment). Practitioner*: "And when you think about the path to achieving this goal, can you see anything that might get in the way?"* The practitioner collaboratively plans for how each barrier could be addressed or overcome.
Plan to monitor progress	The practitioner explains that people who actively monitor their progress make themselves accountable to their goal and are more likely to stay motivated and achieve that goal. The practitioner helps the individual plan how progress will be monitored. Consider: • how assistance to monitor and record progress will be provided (e.g., case plan, action plan, rewards chart, attendance record). • when and how progress will be reviewed and by whom. Practitioner*: "People are more likely to achieve a goal if they have some way of keeping track of their progress. It usually includes having help from somebody else so they can check in with progress."*
Celebrate achievements	Celebrating the achievement of goals or parts of goals should always take the form of celebrating the achievements of the individual rather than the successes of the practitioner. The success of the collaborative partnership can also be celebrated. **Provide specific praise.** The practitioner focuses this on the efforts of the individual rather than their inherent qualities or personal traits.

Steps/Components	Skills/Strategies
	Practitioner*: "Such patience and perseverance Abby! Navigating housing, the department and all your psychologist appointments to finish this goal in four weeks."* **Rather than:** *"You've done a good job" or "I knew you could do it, you're so smart!"* The practitioner asks the individual how they feel. This allows the individual to verbalise their feelings and for the practitioner to affirm their achievement. *Practitioner: "How does it feel to have achieved this goal/success?"* The practitioner should remember to thank the individual for continuing to work with them and let the individual know they appreciate and value them; letting the practitioner into their life to work with them and their family.

Goal maintenance

This section below provides step by step guidance on how to use *Goal Setting* after the goal has been set, for goal maintenance.

Steps/Components	Skills/Strategies
Recap progress at the start of each session	At the start of each home visit, recap the work that has been done towards goals. **Practitioner***: "Okay, so let's look at the school attendance goal we've been working towards. Great, you have it with you there! Last week you spoke to the counsellor to get some ideas from her about strategies and we have been looking at some parenting programs or strategies that might be useful to help at home. Have I missed anything?"*
Remind individuals of how activities that are undertaken together relate to their goals	Orientate the home visiting agenda around the goal and the progress made towards it. **Practitioner***: "Last week we said that today would be about talking through our options for parenting programs and choosing something. Do you want to change or add anything in here?"*
At the end of the visit, set up the next steps towards achieving the goal	Collaboratively set an agenda for the next session that works towards the goal. **Practitioner***: "Just to recap, we have landed on some ways to supervise Haylee in the morning to work towards improving her school attendance. Is there anything else that we need to chat about next time?"*
Review the goal in relation to barriers to goal success	If barriers start to get in the way of weekly success, review the goal and its importance. **Practitioner***: "I just wanted to bring up the fact that a few things have been getting in the way of our goal around school attendance. I want to talk through these barriers to check it's still a priority for us to work on."* After bringing up barriers, it is important to consider using Practice Guide: *Building Motivation to Change* to explore the individual's intrinsic motivation towards the goal.

This section below provides step by step guidance on how to use *Goal Setting* after the goal has been set, for goal maintenance.

Goal Setting Examples

There are many ways to capture and document the goals. The example templates below outline what a completed goal sheet looks like using goals that demonstrate the characteristics of effective goals. Practitioners might consider using these if they appear fit for purpose.

It is important that goals are presented in a practical way that motivates individuals to work towards success. For example, for some individuals it may be appropriate to include more pictures and fewer words.

Example 1: A single goal for one priority

Priority: Keeping Haylee in school

	Family goal
Specifically, our goal is to:	Increase school attendance
We will measure our success by:	We will see Haylee attend school 3 days per week
This goal is manageable but challenging because:	We are committing to following an agreed morning routine which is displayed on the fridge
Our goal will be achieved using this timeframe:	Within one month
This goal is relevant because:	This will mean we will not receive any more letters from the school. Improving attendance is an important priority for providing a good life for Haylee (value).

Example 2: Multiple goals for one priority

Priority: Keeping Haylee in school when she returns to my home from her dad's house after the holidays

	Family goal 1	Family goal 2	Family goal 3
Specifically, our goal is to:	assess our morning routine with my social worker so I am ready to talk with Haylee about attendance	create a morning routine	increase Haylee's school attendance
We will measure our success by:	making a small written plan about how to raise this with Haylee and how to get her input on the routine	written morning routine is in place, on the fridge	Haylee attends school at least 3 days a week, arriving by 9.30am
This goal must be manageable but challenging:	we will have two weeks to plan before Haylee returns home	although Haylee is not yet returned to me from her dads - into my care, I will call Haylee towards the end of the holidays to get Haylee's input on the plan	committing to following the morning routine which we developed and is displayed on the fridge
Our goal will be achieved using this timeframe:	by the start of the first day Haylee is home	by the end of the first week	within one month of Haylee being at home
This goal is relevant because:	this will help me create a morning routine, this is part of wanting a good life for Haylee	this will help me improve Haylee's attendance, this is part of wanting a good life for Haylee	this will mean we won't receive any more letters from the school and improving attendance is part of wanting a good life for Haylee

Outcomes

Practice level outcomes

- The practitioner and individual have a shared understanding of the purpose of their work together.
- Practitioners and individuals have a clear focus on what they are working collaboratively towards.
- Individuals feel that changes they are working towards at any one time are manageable.
- Discussions between individuals and practitioners are purposeful.

Practice Points

Often, while setting a goal, people realise the difficulty of change. Watch and respond to motivation to change and motivation not to change (see Practice Guide: *Building Motivation for Change*) before proceeding with a detailed goal setting approach. After discussing the individual's concerns, practitioners may be able to suggest breaking the goal down further or choosing a smaller goal.

Use strengths-based language and focus on positive qualities and achievements that individuals may not recognise as a way to achieve the goal.

When setting goals, it can be common to underestimate how long goal attainment will take. Normalise the experience of goal attainment taking longer than desired and the challenges of behaviour change. Encourage consideration of realistic, not aspirational, timeframes.

It is helpful to introduce (and return to) goal setting with individuals. For example, it may be useful to revisit goal setting when:

- Individuals feel overwhelmed by the complexity of issues confronting them.

- Individuals are unsure about how services might help.

- Individuals have difficulty focusing on specific tasks.

- Goals have been achieved.

- It is time to set new goals.

Individuals can refer to a written copy of goals to review regularly for self-monitoring. If written information is not suitable, work with the individual to find other ways to record their goals. For example, using the individuals mobile phone apps to audio-record the information or by taking photos on their phone camera.

When reviewing a goal not achieved due to barriers, help individuals explore whether different strategies might be needed to overcome these barriers and whether changes to the goal might be needed to make it more achievable.

Thinking about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation is important when identifying priorities and goal setting. It is likely that parents and carers will have the pressure of potential involvement with statutory services and while this may be an extrinsically motivating factor, it is worthwhile linking these goals to

more intrinsic and positive motivations (e.g., wanting their child to get through school or to have a life better than theirs). It is always important to harness an individual's internal motivation for change.

It is also important to harness the intrinsic motivation of the individual, particularly if they view child safety concerns differently to others, this may mark a pre contemplative stage where support to bring personal values into the child safety goals can enable a change in attitude.

Practitioners should take care to help individuals include values within the goal.

In the context of shared custody arrangements, be aware that when goals relate to developing parenting skills or strategies, that some goals may take a long time to achieve as individuals may have limited contact with their children and therefore limited opportunities to develop these skills and work towards goal achievement.

If this is the case, practitioners should help the individual consider alternative goals or ones that address first steps for achieving the longer-term goal. For example, creating a safe play space in the house for the child before working on improving parent-child interaction skills. In these instances, it is important to make sure there are clear links between these goals to remind individuals that smaller 'sub-goals' are linked to bigger, important goals.

It is important to consider the literacy level of family members prior to introducing written materials. Be aware that the issue of literacy should be handled sensitively and that individuals may feel a sense of shame about their lack of literacy.

Reflective Questions for Practitioners

- What do you think is the most important aspect of *Goal Setting* and why?

- Think about a time when you had to accept change, can you remember how that felt and how you were able to make the necessary adjustments to move forward?

- When you have had support to assist you in making change, what were the skills and behaviours that you appreciated?

- If parents want to work on goals that are not directly related to their children's safety, how do you reconcile your values and thoughts with what the family is experiencing?

Notes