As we have seen from the last two articles, the development of goals and strategies is an ongoing process that starts from the moment we meet a family. The process does not stop once we’ve developed goals and strategies. It is ongoing throughout the time we are involved with the family as we work to develop goals, implement strategies to achieve those goals, track progress toward the goal, and once achieved, start the process again.

Before we take a look at how that process evolves, it is worthwhile noting that there are several curriculums in use by the NM CYFD-funded home visiting programs. Most of these curriculums offer some type of guidance or tools around goal setting. It may be helpful to reexamine how the curriculum your program uses also informs the process of developing and the ongoing use of goals, and how goals are tied to the use of the curriculum used by your program.

In the first article we mentioned that goals should be “achievable within a relatively short time frame” to be most useful. Typically, a time frame of 3 to 6 months seems to make the most sense, and these dates are entered into the database in the “effective date” and “expiration date” fields. One reason this is important is for the family (as well as the
home visitor) to experience a sense of progress toward the achievement or completion of the family’s goals. If the family comes up with a longer-term goal, something achievable in over 6 months, it may make sense to break that down into parts by identifying some markers that will lead to achieving the larger goal. The benefit of more immediate results is in offering more frequent successes.

Progress towards goals is documented in the data portion of the DAP note as a way to remember what we did on our last visit, and as a historical record to both celebrate progress towards a goal or perhaps to reflect on obstacles or barriers to achieving a goal. If the strategies or action plan is not leading us closer to meeting the goal, then, as in the above quote, we need to turn around and reassess whether or not we are on the right road: are the strategies working, or does the goal need to be revised?

The ability to look back at goals we have achieved, to look at our successes, helps us feel good about ourselves and can build our sense of competence and confidence. This is particularly important for parents that may feel as though they aren’t able to effect the change they would like to see in their life. This might occur for a variety of reasons including depression, being a recent immigrant, or a lack of resources.

As we conclude this series of articles on goals, we invite supervisors and home visitors to consider how else goals connect to other aspects of your work, and in what ways goals can be used to deepen your work with families.

Talking points for supervisors

- How often are goals discussed or referenced during reflective supervision?
- Are a given family’s goals weighted toward case management, more parent-focused goals, or do they include opportunities to pay attention to the parent-child interaction?
- How does the home visitor use goals in an ongoing way to build on the strengths of the family and what’s working?
- Are there specific challenges to parts of the process that continue to come up for the home visitor?