It’s All Connected:  
Goals & Strategies – Putting Plans into Action  
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NMAIMH competencies addressed

Theoretical Foundations
- infant/very young child & family-centered practice
- relationship-focused, therapeutic practice

Working with Others
- building & maintaining relationships

Direct Services Skills
- observation & listening

Thinking
- planning and organizing

“Although goals are important, having a plan of action is vital to the success of those goals. Having a goal with no plan of action is like wanting to travel to a new destination without having a map.”

Steve Maraboli, Life, the Truth, and Being Free

In the previous article, “Reaching for Goals”, we discussed why goals are important and the process of developing goals. We discussed the use of observation and listening during the intake as one way to obtain clues about what is important to the family. Once the intake and screenings are complete, the results of the screenings, in particular, offer a lot more information that we can present to families that may also inform the development of goals. It the ASQ-3 shows an area of concern, for example, the family may want to come up with a goal around their child’s development. Likewise, if the SSI indicates a family with few social supports, a parent may want a goal related to accessing supports within the community.

That is just the beginning of the process because, as Steve Maraboli reminds us, goals must be accompanied by a plan of action, or strategies, to achieve those goals. The database offers us a place to not only document goals, but also a template or framework to guide us further along the process of partnering with the family to support them in developing a plan of action.
Once the family, with support from the home visitor, has established their goals, they are entered in the “Family Goal” section of the “Goal/Outcome Information” screen. For each goal, the home visitor also documents how this will benefit the child and family. This is an important step because it identifies why this goal has value for the family and connects the family’s goal with the bigger picture. When we take the time to encourage parents to reflect upon their values, beliefs and aspirations by answering the question, why is this goal important to us, it helps the home visitor better understand the culture of this family. In addition, families and home visitors have something to refer back to if we get off track.

For each goal, the home visitor will also select one of the program outcomes (“Family Outcome”) on the “Goal/Outcome Information” screen. The outcomes are how we document achievement of the Home Visiting Program goals to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program.

As we continue the process and our discussions with the family, we want to begin to think about how these goals will be achieved. Notice that under the “Family Goal” section, there is a prompt for the home visitor to document what the family identifies as strengths and resources (both within and outside the family) that can be tapped to achieve the goal. As we use exploration and inquiry to move through this process of identifying strengths and resources, the family may be surprised to discover assets they bring to the table that they weren’t aware of as well as external (community) resources that they didn’t know existed. For many parents, this sense that they can make a difference in the life of their child and family can be quite powerful.

These resources and supports are then weaved into the strategies that form the family’s action plan to achieve their goals. Strategies should be family-centered (the parent or caregiver takes the lead) with the home visitor and the community providing support. As an example, if the SSI indicates that a mother feels she doesn’t have many social supports and during the intake mentioned something about wishing her 2 year old had some friends, using the framework from the database, we might come up with the following:

**Goal and how this will benefit my child/family:**

Jose and I will enroll in a parent-child play or activity group that we can attend at least once a week. This will be good for Jose because he will have friends to play with and I’ll have a chance to meet other parents.

**Personal strengths, family and community resources that can help with this goal:**

People say I’m easy to talk to. My son seems really interested in kids his age when he sees them in the store. I’ve heard of a place that has some money to help cover the registration cost if there is one.

**Strategies:**

1. [Home visitor name] will help me figure out how to use the computer at the library to search for different types of play groups.
2. [Home visitor name] will call the person they know to make a referral to the YMCA [resource referral].
3. I’ll pick one or two places and sign up for the groups, and contact the program I know to help pay for registration.

The family and home visitor now have a plan of action which will guide this part of their work together.

Next month we’ll discuss the ongoing use of goals which will also relate to the last two pieces of information that need to be entered into the database (effective/expiration dates and disposition).

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**Talking points for supervisors**

- After a home visitor completes the intake and the screenings, do the results suggest any goals the family may want to address?
- What do the goals the family selects say about what is important to this family and how does this inform our work with families?
- Is there a clear plan of action (strategies) and have internal and external resources been identified?
- How was this process for the family? For the home visitor? And are we using the reflective practice to understand the places where it becomes challenging?

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**References/Additional Resources**

The University of Kansas has developed a handout on creating S.M.A.R.T. goals that may be helpful in thinking about how to write goals.  
[http://www.oma.ku.edu/soar/smartgoals.pdf](http://www.oma.ku.edu/soar/smartgoals.pdf)