# Goal Setting Overview

You can use this goal setting guide to choose up to five goals to work on with your child. The guide is split into four key areas of social communication. Each area covers a range of skills from early development through to school readiness. Have a look through the lists and mark skills that your child can do independently (✓); skills that are emerging (?) - i.e., skills your child can do sometimes but not consistently, or can do only with adult support; and skills your child does not yet have (X). It is a good idea to start by setting goals for emerging skills, to increase consistency and independence, before you start to target more difficult skills.

Key areas of social communication include:

* Expressive communication – using sounds and gestures (or augmented alternative communication (AAC) systems) to intentionally communicate with another person
* Receptive communication – understanding the words and gestures of another person
* Joint attention – sharing interest in an object or activity with another person
* Imitation – copying the actions, gestures, and sounds of another person

You may also wish to add in other behaviour goals, such as learning a replacement behaviour for reducing harmful behaviours. Or any self-care goals you want to work on, such as increasing independence with eating or dressing. Remember to choose goals that focus on ‘emerging skills’ or the ‘next step’ in your child’s development. (i.e., skills you mark ‘?”, or are just a little bit beyond what your child can currently do independently). You can discuss your goals with your programme facilitators.

You will also have more success with your teaching, and your child will have more success with their learning if the goals are **SMART** (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**daptive, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime-framed). Ensuring that they are SMART will also enable you to track progress. It can also be helpful to think about ‘generalising’ the skills across different environments, different people, or different materials to make sure that your child can use their new skills in many different contexts.

**Example SMART Goals:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| E.g., Ben is starting to show an interest in holding a spoon at mealtimes. Learning to self-feed is adaptive (i.e., likely to improve Ben’s quality of life). Therefore, a SMART goal might be: | By the end of three months (time-framed), Ben will independently use a spoon to feed himself (specific) five spoonsful from every meal (measurable) of sticky foods such as porridge, yoghurt, or scrambled egg (realistic), at both home and at day-care (generalising across environments). |
| E.g., Sophie is learning a new behaviour (using words and gestures to ask for a toy) to replace a harmful behaviour (hitting and grabbing to get a toy). Communicating needs safely is adaptive\*. Therefore, a SMART goal might be:  | By the end of three months (time-framed), Sophie will ask for toys she wants by independently holding out her hand and saying, “my turn” (specific and measurable) 80% of the time (realistic for a pre-schooler! The other 20% of the time can be with some adult support), with her mum, dad, and brother (generalising across people). |
| E.g., Hemi is learning to imitate the actions of other people. Copying others is an adaptive skill for learning from other people. Therefore, and SMART goal might be: | By the end of three months (time-framed), when an adult models an action in a song, Hemi will copy the action independently (specific and measurable), for one familiar action per song (realistic) in five different songs, with his parents and kindergarten teachers (generalising across songs and people). |
| E.g., Isaiah is learning to look where someone is pointing in order to share interest. Sharing attention with other people and understanding conventional gestures such as pointing are adaptive communication and social skills. Therefore, a SMART goal might be: | By the end of three months (time-framed), when an adult points to a picture in a book, Isaiah will independently look where the adult is pointing (specific and measurable) for 8/10 pictures (realistic), across five different books, with his parents and his aunty (generalising across materials and people).  |

\*When writing goals, make sure to frame it in positive terms (i.e., the skills you *do* want to see: “use words to ask”, “walk away” etc), rather than negative terms (i.e., the behaviours you want to reduce: “~~cry less~~”, “~~will not hit~~” etc).

Use the guide on the following pages to help you select goals that are relevant to you. Then fill them into the table below. Around five goals is plenty for most parents to focus on. Of course, you can update the goals as your child achieves them!

# My Child’s Goals

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Developmental Area** | **SMART GOALS** |
| Using Communication   |  |
| Understanding Communication |  |
| Imitation(Object, Body, or Vocal) |  |
| Joint Attention(Responsive or Initiated) |  |
| Daily Life Skills |  |
| Replacement Behaviours |  |
| Other |  |

# Goal Setting Guide

|  |
| --- |
| Communication |
| Using CommunicationNote: unless otherwise specified, communication includes using spoken language, signs, or Augmented Alternative Communication (AAC) such as speech generating devices or picture exchange systems. |
| **Item** | **Description** | **✓ / ? / X** |
| Makes sounds other than crying  | You child will make vocal noises such as vowel sounds (“oooo”, “aaah”), or babbling (“da, da, da”).  |  |
| Has a way of getting your attention  | When your child wants something from you they will make noises, use body movements, or look towards you to get a response from you. |  |
| Uses simple gestures | Your child will use simple gestures such as reaching for things they want, holding their arms up to be picked up, or pushing away things they do not want to communicate their needs. |  |
| Uses one or two words | Has a couple of simple words (or word approximations) such as “mama” and “dada”, or “da” for duck. |  |
| Uses 6+ words for naming, requesting, and describing | Has multiple simple words (or word approximations) for:* Naming/requesting things (e.g., “mama”, “dada”, “car”)
* Describing and requesting actions (e.g., “more”, “go”, “ta”)
 |  |
| Uses words *combined with gestures* to request  | Child will use words/word approximations combined with gestures (e.g., talking + pointing) to request items such as favourite toys and foods, and to request actions such as “more!” or “tickle”.  |  |
| Uses words with gestures for several different purposes  | Child will communicate combined with gestures for different purposes. E.g., * saying no (“no”/shaking head),
* celebrating (“yay”/clapping),
* affirming (“yes”/ nodding head),
* greeting (“hi” or “bye” / waving),
* naming things (nouns/ pointing),
* describing things and actions (verbs/adjectives/gestures to demonstrate)
* being finished (“finished” / sign or push away)
* requesting things and actions (“more” / pointing or reaching),
* asking questions (“where”/ hands up shrug).
 |  |
| Uses two-word phrases  | Uses two-word phrases or two-step AAC sequence for a variety of purposes (see purposes above) e.g., “mummy give”, “more book”, “all gone”, “blue car” |  |
| Uses people’s names  | Child will use their own name, and other people’s names or titles (e.g., “mummy”, “daddy”) to get their attention, to answer questions (e.g. “who’s that?”) |  |
| Asks simple questions (what, where, who) | Child will ask questions using what, where and who (e.g., “where’s teddy?”, “what’s that?”, “who’s that?”) |  |
| Uses three-word phrases for a variety of purposes | Child will use three-word phrases sequences for different purposes. E.g., * saying no (“no more book”)
* celebrating (“I did it!”)
* affirming (“yes please daddy”)
* greeting (“bye bye mummy”),
* naming things (“that’s a dog”),
* being finished (“All done now”)
* requesting things and actions (“I want milk”)
* asking questions (“where is it?”)
 |  |
| Uses prepositions to describe and request  | Your child will use prepositions (e.g., in, on, off, out, under, behind, beside) to describe where things are (e.g., “baby is in bed”) or to request that others do an action (e.g., “pick me up”) |  |
| Uses possessive pronouns | Uses pronouns (mine, yours) to describe who an item belongs to (e.g., “That’s mine”). |  |
| Asks complex questions (why, how, when) | Child will ask questions using why, how and when (e.g., “why is it broken?”, “how do I open it?”, “when can we go?”) |  |
| Uses pronouns | Uses a range of pronouns including I, you, me, we, and they |  |
| Uses past tense | Uses past tense to describe simple actions and events (e.g., “I went to kindy”, “sister jumped down”) |  |
| Tells short stories or recalls past events | Uses past tense to describe multiple events in a story or recount (E.g., “a cat was stuck in a tree and the firefighter saved it”) |  |
| Responds to adult initiated conversations for one round | Child will respond to statements made by an adult in order to keep a conversation going (e.g., adult says “I like your T-shirt”, child responds “It’s a dinosaur T-shirt!”) |  |
| Initiates conversations and participates for two rounds | Child will initiate conversations with others by asking questions or making statements. When the other person replies, child will respond. (e.g., child says “what are you doing?”, person replies “I’m building a sandcastle”, child responds “it’s a big sandcastle”) |  |
| Understanding Communication |
| **Item** | **Description** | **✓ / ? / X** |
| Turns head to look at sounds or voices | When the room is quiet and you make a noise with an object (e.g., a musical instrument) or your voice (e.g. whistle, call out, or sing), your child will turn to look at the source of the noise |  |
| Responds to their name | When your child is not occupied and you call their name, they will respond to you by looking or vocalising |  |
| Understands a few words | When you say the name of an item your child knows well (e.g., truck, milk, book), your child will indicate that they understand the word (e.g. by looking at the named item, or picking it up) |  |
| Follows simple instructions paired with gestures | When you ask your child to do an everyday action such as sitting at a table using words (e.g., “sit down”) and gestures (e.g. tapping the seat) your child will follow the instruction |  |
| Points to a few body parts when asked | When ask your child “where’s your….”, your child will point to or touch the named body part for 5 different body parts. |  |
| Consistently follows simple instructions | When you ask your child to do an everyday task that only involves one-step, they will consistently follow the instruction, for at least 5 different actions (e.g., “give me the book”, “lie down (for a nappy change)”, “get your shoes”, “kiss the baby” etc.) |  |
| Responds to simple questions (who, what, where) | When you ask your child a simple question using “who”, “what” or “where”, your child will show that they understood (verbally or non-verbally). (E.g. you point to a photograph of the child and say “who’s that?” and your child says their name or “me”, or you ask “where’s your bottle” and the child picks up their bottle) |  |
| Understands opposite words such as up/down, stop/go, and big/little | When you give your child an instruction using the concepts up/down, stop/go, or big/little your child will follow the instruction (e.g. “give me the little car”, or playing a stop/go game) |  |
| Understands prepositions without context clues | When you give your child an instruction using a preposition (in/on/off/out/under/behind/beside) your child will follow the instruction, even when it’s not clear from the context where you are indicating. (e.g., “put the block beside the tower” vs “put the block on the tower” requires your child to understand the preposition. However, your child may be able to follow the instruction “put your plate on the table” due to the context clues (i.e., plates often go ON tables). |  |
| Consistently follows two-part instructions | When you give your child an instruction that involves two-steps your child will follow both parts of the instruction independently. (e.g., “get the spoon and put it on the table”) |  |
| Understands words for colours | When you give your child an instruction or ask a question involving colours your child will show their understanding by indicating the correctly coloured item, for six different colours. (e.g., “where’s the green car?”) |  |
| Understands words for shapes | When you give your child an instruction or ask a question involving shapes (e.g., “give me the circle”) your child will show their understanding by indicating the correct shape, for 5 different shapes (e.g., square, circle, rectangle, triangle, star) |  |
| Understands and responds when you call from another room | When you call your child’s name from a different room of the house (e.g., “Tommy, can you come here please?”) your child will understand and respond (e.g., by coming to you, or saying “not now, I’m busy!). |  |
| Understands terms for family members | When you give your child an instruction or ask a question involving family members (e.g., “where’s grandma (in this photo?)”) your child will show their understanding by indicating the correct person, for 5 different people (e.g., grandma/grandad, brother/sister, aunty/uncle) |  |
| Understands words for order of events (next, last, first, second) | When you give your child an instruction or ask a question involving order of events (e.g., “what happens next in the story?” or “first put your shoes on, then get your bag”) your child will answer or follow the instruction in the correct order.  |  |
| Responds to complex questions (how/why/when) | When you ask your child a complex question using “how”, “why” or “when”, your child will show that they understood (e.g. “how does the toy work?” = your child shows you how to wind it up) or answer the question (e.g., “why did you put your gumboots on?” = “I want to jump in the puddles”), for each of the three question types.  |  |
| Understands words for time (yesterday, today, tomorrow, last week). | When you ask your child a question involving time (e.g. “what did you do yesterday?”) your child will answer the question with the correct information.  |  |
| Answers questions about themselves (name, age, relationships) | When someone asks your child a question about themselves (e.g., “how old are you?”, “what’s your name?”, “who is your sister?”) your child will answer with the correct information. |  |
| Follows instructions involving three unrelated steps | When you give your child an instruction that involves doing three unrelated steps or actions (e.g., “turn off the tap, go get your pyjamas, and give mummy a kiss goodnight”), your child will follow all three parts of the instruction independently.  |  |
| Follows classroom style instructions | When someone gives your child a classroom style instruction (e.g., “draw a circle around something you like to eat” or “cut out all the triangles and glue them onto the coloured paper”) your child will follow the instruction independently.  |  |
| Joint Attention |
| Responsive Joint AttentionNote: Responsive joint attention involves watching and looking in response to the actions of another person in order to be focused on the same thing as the other person. It is a foundational skill for social interactions and communication. |
| **Item** | **Description** | **✓ / ? / X** |
| Watches others’ faces or bodies when they do interesting actions with objects | When you hold or operate a toy or object your child is motivated by (e.g., take a turn putting a marble down the marble run), your child will look towards you. |  |
| Watches others’ faces or bodies when they are not holding an object | When you do a fun action with your body and/or voice such as sticking out your tongue, clapping your hands, singing a song, pushing your child in a swing, or initiating a chase or tickle game, your child will look towards you.  |  |
| Looks to where someone else is pointing (finger touching item/picture) | When you put your finger on a specific item or picture (e.g., point to a picture in a book), your child will look where you are pointing (just to share attention and interest, not to obtain the item). |  |
| Looks to where someone is pointing (<2m away) | When you point to a specific item or picture that is nearby (e.g., pointing to a dog less than 2 metres away), your child will look where you are pointing (just to share attention and interest, not to obtain the item).  |  |
| Looks to where someone is pointing (>2m away) | When you point to a specific item or picture that is distant (e.g., pointing to an airplane in the sky), your child will look where you are pointing (just to share attention and interest, not to obtain the item).  |  |
| Looks to where someone else is looking  | When you look at something without pointing or saying anything, your child looks where you are looking (e.g., your child asks, “where’s Dad?”, you look across the room at Dad, your child also turns to look at Dad).  |  |
| Initiated Joint AttentionNote: Initiating joint attention involves the child beginning a social interaction with another person, in order to be focused on the same thing as them. It is not about requesting something tangible from the other person – rather, wanting to share a social exchange or communicate shared interest. This is a foundational skill for social interactions and communication. |
| **Item** | **Description** | **✓ / ? / X** |
| Shifts attention between an object and a play partner | When you and your child are playing with an interesting object together your child will show that they are paying attention to both you and the object. For example, by looking towards you, directing communication towards you (verbal or non-verbal), or giving you things. |  |
| Points to things to draw others’ attention to them (finger touching item/picture) | Your child will point to items or pictures by putting their finger on them *and will wait for you to respond* (e.g., waiting for you to say the letter of the alphabet they are pointing to). Pointing to request actions and objects does not count for this skill.  |  |
| Points to things to draw others’ attention to them (<2m away)  | Your child will point to items or pictures that are nearby (e.g., pointing to a picture on the wall less than 2 metres away) *and will wait for you to respond.* Pointing to request actions and objects does not count for this skill. |  |
| Points to things to draw others’ attention to them (>2m away)  | Your child will point to items or pictures that are distant (e.g., pointing to a bus down the road) *and will wait for you to respond.* Pointing to request actions and objects does not count for this skill. |  |
| Shows other people objects during play | When you and your child are playing together, your child will hold up an item towards your face to “show you” and will wait for you to respond. |  |
| Combines verbal and non-verbal communication to draw another person’s attention to something  | Your child will use gestures (e.g., showing, pointing, expressions), combined with verbal communication (or AAC) to gain another person’s attention. (E.g., saying “look at that giraffe mummy!” while pointing to the giraffe) and will wait for a response. |  |
| Uses facial expressions to communicate emotions  | Your child will look towards you and make an expression to communicate how they are feeling. Can be playful (e.g., an exaggerated “yuck” face while pretending to eat something yucky), or real (e.g., a sad face when a sibling takes their toy). Can demonstrate at least three different emotions. |  |
| Imitation |
| Object ImitationNote: typically, children learn to do some object imitation first, then body imitation, before being able to imitate vocal sounds. If your child is not yet imitating many sounds, try teaching some object and body imitation skills first! |
| **Item** | **Description** | **✓ / ? / X** |
| Imitates repeated actions | When your child does an action on an object, and you copy their action, your child will do the action again (e.g., child bangs drum, you bang drum, child bangs drum again). Can be on the same toy or two matching items. |  |
| Imitates high frequency actions with familiar toys AND novel toys | When you model an action on an object that your child is highly likely to do, then your child will imitate your action (e.g., you bang drum, child bangs drum AND you bang a [new] xylophone, your child bangs the xylophone). Can be on the same toy or two matching items. |  |
| Imitates a range of one-step actions | When you model an easy action on an object, your child will imitate your action, for a range of different actions (e.g., poking or rolling playdoh, chopping wooden fruit, putting a block on a tower, taking a puzzle piece out etc.) |  |
| Imitates two-step play sequences | When you model two related actions on an object, your child will imitate your actions. (e.g., take the lid off the playdoh and pull some out, or squash the playdoh flat then stamp it with a shape).  |  |
| Imitates pretend play actions | When you model a pretend play action, your child will imitate your action (e.g., pretending to drink from a cup, feeding a doll some food, putting a lego person down a slide) |  |
| Imitates multi-step play sequences | When you model a multi-step play sequence, your child will imitate at least three steps of the play sequence (e.g., putting train tracks together, putting a train on the tracks, attaching a train carriage, driving the train to the station, putting some people into the carriage).  |  |
| Body Imitation |
| **Item** | **Description** | **✓ / ? / X** |
| Imitates simple actions | When you model a simple body action, your child will imitate the body action (e.g., clapping hands, or patting knees). |  |
| Imitates several simple actions in songs | When you model a simple body action in a song, your child will imitate the body action (for a range of different actions / songs). (E.g., “twinkle twinkle” hands, hands open/shut, “wind the bobbin up”, “fishies in the water”,  |  |
| Imitates conventional gestures | When you model a conventional gesture, your child will imitate the gesture (e.g., waving hello/goodbye, putting a finger to your lips for “shh”, holding up 1 or 2 fingers for numbers). |  |
| Imitates whole body actions | When you model a whole-body action, your child will imitate you (e.g., jumping up and down, stomping your feet, or spinning around) |  |
| Imitates facial expressions | When you model an expression or action with your mouth, your child will imitate you (e.g., blowing a kiss, making an exaggerated grumpy face, sticking out your tongue). |  |
| Imitates pretend play actions without objects | When you model a pretend play sequence, your child will imitate you (e.g., pretending to yawn and lie down to sleep, pretending to eat an invisible burger and wipe sauce off your face, pretending to fly like a butterfly and drink nectar from invisible flowers).  |  |
| Imitates others’ behaviour across environments | When others around them are behaving in a way that is specific to the environment, your child will imitate the behaviour of those around them (e.g., sitting quietly at mat time or at church, imitating actions in a dance class, playing follow the leader). |  |
| Vocal Imitation |
| **Item** | **Description** | **✓ / ? / X** |
| Imitates repeated sounds | When your child makes a sound and you copy them, your child will then repeat the noise again (e.g., your child says “ba”, you copy “ba”, your child says “ba” again) |  |
| Imitates easy sounds | When you make a fun sound that you know your child can make, your child will imitate your sound (e.g., you say “ba”, and your child says “ba”) |  |
| Imitates sound effects | When you make a fun sound effect or animal noise, your child will imitate your sound (e.g., “meow”, “roar!”, “vroom!”, “uh oh”, “pop!”) |  |
| Imitates ten simple words | When you say a simple familiar word, or word that’s related to your child’s focud of attention or interests your child will often imitate your word (e.g., “dada”, “mama”, “go”, “bye bye”) |  |
| Imitates two-word phrases | When you say a two-word phrase related to your child’s focus of attention, your child will often imitate the phrase (e.g., “blast off”, “go up”, “crash down”) |  |
| Imitates novel words and phrases | When you say a word or phrase your child does not know, your child will often repeat the word or phrase (e.g., you say “that’s a stegosaurus”, your child repeats “stegosaurus”) |  |

**Resources that informed this guide:**

<https://clarityupstate.org/speech/milestones/>

<https://growingearlyminds.org.au/tips/joint-attention/>

<https://lkn-slp.com/typical-speech-development-of-children/#:~:text=Lip%20sounds%20and%20beginning%20tongue,to%20one%20year%20of%20age>.

<https://pathways.org/all-ages/checklists/>

<https://www.aapd.org/globalassets/media/policies_guidelines/r_speechmilestones.pdf>

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html>

<https://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/SPAweb/Resources_for_the_Public/Children_Communication_Milestones/SPAweb/Resources_for_the_Public/Communication_Milestones/Communication_Milestones.aspx?hkey=fb6753df-a757-4c4a-8100-aaebdd4451fd>

<https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=age-appropriate-speech-and-language-milestones-90-P02170>

<https://www.weetalkers.com/blog/imitation-development>

<https://i.ytimg.com/vi/TKeffk6iyAI/maxresdefault.jpg> )