

# The Family Partnership Process: Engaging and Goal-Setting With Families



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON  
**Parent, Family, and  
Community**

[ncpfce@childrens.harvard.edu](mailto:ncpfce@childrens.harvard.edu)

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family>

This resource was prepared under Grant #90HC0003 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, by the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. We are grateful to our colleagues and the families in the Head Start and Early Head Start community for their contributions.

**Dear Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Childhood Program Staff,**

The work you do with families is invaluable. You build relationships with families that will develop into respectful partnerships over time. These partnerships support family well-being and help families to meet their goals for themselves and their children. Strong, healthy families give their children the best chance at success in school and in life.

The *Family Goal-Setting Guide* explores how strong partnerships can positively influence the goals families set in the Family Partnership Process. The guide recommends Seven Steps for Setting and Reaching Goals with Families (Seven Steps). This guide will help Head Start, Early Head Start, and early childhood program staff:

- learn about families and their evolving strengths, challenges, and priorities;
- build trust to establish and maintain positive goal-oriented relationships;
- engage families in effective goal-setting; and
- gain adequate and meaningful information to complete a Family Partnership Plan.

The guide explores family goal-setting with individual families during each phase of the Family Partnership Process.

These phases include recruitment and enrollment, family assessment, communication, goal-setting, and the follow-up and review of family progress. Finally, the guide describes how your program can use aggregate (summarized) data from the Family Partnership Plans of all of the families in your program for continuous improvement and program planning.

As you use this guide, we invite you to reflect on your own work, talents, and skills. We hope that the *Family Goal-Setting Guide* will inspire you to partner with families to achieve meaningful goals in new and exciting ways.

We celebrate you for everything that you do for children and families in your communities.

Sincerely,

*The National Center for Parent, Family, and Community Engagement*



# The Family Partnership Process: Engaging and Goal-Setting with Families

## Contents

### Introduction

#### Phase 1: Recruitment and Enrollment

Gather and Use the Information that Families Share

#### Phase 2: Family and Child Assessment

Learn More about the Child and the Family

#### Phase 3: Communication With Families

Develop a Deeper Understanding of Strengths, Hopes, and Challenges

#### Phase 4: Goal-Setting With Families

Use the Seven Steps

- Step 1** Set a Goal
- Step 2** Identify Skills
- Step 3** Assess Strengths
- Step 4** Examine Stressors
- Step 5** Explore Strategies
- Step 6** Determine Support
- Step 7** Track Progress and Celebrate Successes

#### Phase 5: Follow-Up and Review

Revisit Goals and Measure Progress

#### Phase 6: Continuous Program Improvement

Use Family Partnership Plan Data for Planning and Continuous Improvement

### Goal-Setting Worksheets

### Additional Resources

# Introduction

The focus of this guide is successful goal-setting—and goal reaching—with families. Successful goal-setting relies on strong partnerships between staff and families. As we get to know families and become partners, we can identify priorities and set meaningful goals together. Building family partnerships and setting goals include several activities that are part of the Family Partnership Process.

A strong, meaningful, and authentic relationship between a staff member and family is the cornerstone of an effective Family Partnership Process. Successful partnerships between staff and families require cooperation and open, honest communication. Partnerships include trust and respect and a sense of shared responsibility for child and family growth. It's important to remember that it takes time and patience to develop strong and trusting partnerships with families.

Positive goal-oriented relationships with families contribute to successful partnerships. These relationships are grounded in a strengths-based approach that identifies, celebrates, and draws on the strengths of families. As staff and families build relationships, they can combine their strengths, skills, and resources to accomplish a common goal. This kind of planning and goal-setting with individual families is critical to achieving positive outcomes for children and families.

A successful Family Partnership Process is based on a relationship-based approach that values different perspectives and contributions, explores options, and honors all types of family progress. Six phases make up the Family Partnership Process:



# Phase 1: Recruitment and Enrollment

## Gather and Use the Information that Families Share

Head Start and Early Head Start staff begin to establish partnerships with families during the enrollment process. This process offers many opportunities to talk with families and learn about their strengths, hopes, and challenges and what they want from the program. Program staff can begin to establish a partnership with families when they:

- approach families with respect and care,
- learn about families and their children, culture, and language,
- begin with families' strengths,
- help families find and complete required paperwork,
- talk with families about program requirements, and
- connect families to other community resources.

Once children enter the program, staff and families can celebrate their first shared achievement—children are now part of a program that can change their lives. Congratulating families on their successful efforts to reach this goal helps to develop confidence and opens communication that will continue to strengthen the partnership. You can use the information you've learned in the enrollment process to inform the next steps in the Family Partnership Process.

A photograph of a woman with brown hair, wearing a yellow sweater, smiling warmly while holding a baby. The baby is wearing a white shirt and a patterned scarf. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting.

**“Enrolling  
the child is a goal  
achieved, or at least  
an objective. However  
you look at it, we  
can celebrate with  
families.”  
—Program Staff**

## Phase 2: Family and Child Assessment

### Learn More about the Child and the Family

Family and child assessments offer many opportunities for staff and families to have conversations that can strengthen their partnerships. Families often share important stories and information about themselves and their children. During these assessments staff learn:

- what matters to families and what they hope to accomplish,
- which services their family members already receive from other agencies, and
- what child and family goals they are already working on.

Family stories contribute to the overall picture that helps guide the goal-setting process and inform future planning with families. As we listen to families, we learn what they want to focus on now and in the future.

The child and family assessment process is an opportunity to build a positive, ongoing, and goal-oriented partnership with families. Staff, community partners, and peers can offer support as families decide what is important to them.

“Listen to the families. Don’t just tell them what you are going to do for them. Even if sometimes we don’t say it, too often we think it.”

—Family Services Manager



Explore guides for working with families from diverse cultures at the Office of Head Start National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic>.

## Phase 3: Communication With Families

### Develop a Deeper Understanding of Strengths, Hopes, and Challenges

Building partnerships with families is an ongoing process. Staff and families are always learning from one another in both formal and informal ways. As we develop our partnerships with families, communication is key. Every family is different and may have preferences for how you work together. Families may find questions that are direct, like “What is your goal?” intimidating or overwhelming. Consider ways to invite parents into the topic of goal-setting with such phrases as “Have you had a chance to think about what you’d like to focus on this year?” or “I would love to hear about some of your hopes and dreams for your family, yourself, and your child?” Some families might want more information about the Family Partnership Process before you begin to ask questions.

Conversations and patterns of discussion, including ways of asking and answering questions, are often influenced by different cultural norms. For example, families from different cultures have different expectations about relationships between families and teachers. We want to honor these expectations by taking the family’s lead. You might explain that the program values all families and wants to respect each family’s preferences for how to work together. Most importantly we want to communicate that our interest is in supporting them and their children, and that we are committed to their success.

Successful conversations involve listening and showing genuine interest in what each person has to say. We show our interest and respect when we listen to a family without interrupting, ask if we can take notes during a conversation, or follow up to check if we understand them correctly. Family stories can be personal, sensitive, and emotional. It is our privilege and responsibility to listen with the compassion and respect that conveys a spirit of partnership.

We also want to remember that families are unique, and each family may have a different perspective based on their past experiences, culture, place of origin, child-rearing practices, and family priorities. Gender roles may exist within different families and cultures as well.

#### Examples of Active Listening Strategies

**Be affirming and validating:** Affirm a family’s willingness and courage to be open and share personal information. For example, you might say, “Thank you for trusting me with that information,” or “I heard you say this... is there more you’d like to tell me?”

**Show sensitivity and compassion:** Be empathic when a parent is vulnerable or emotional. Sometimes the most powerful thing we can do is express our empathy rather than try to fix a problem. For example, you might say, “That sounds so difficult. I’m sorry you experienced that.”

**Ask clarifying questions:** Asking questions at the right time can show that you are interested and engaged. For example you might say, “You seem to be saying this... is that correct?” or “Now that you have shared this, are there ways that I can help?”

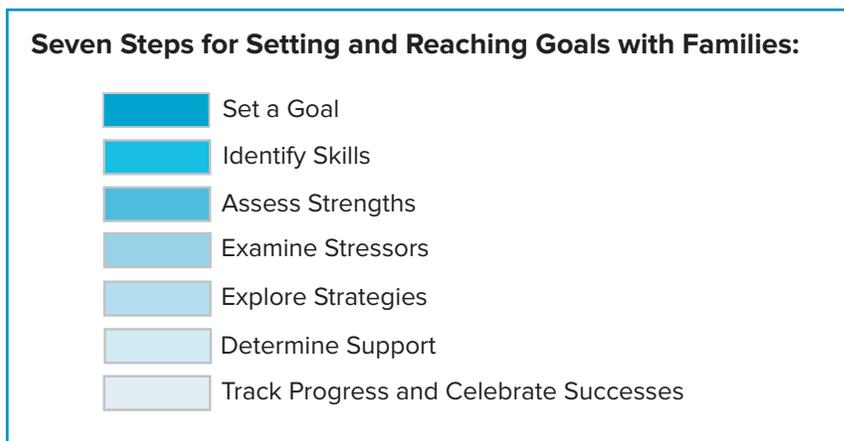
## Phase 4: Goal-Setting With Families

### Use the Seven Steps for Setting and Reaching Goals with Families

The goals of individual families have always been an important focus for Head Start and Early Head Start programs. From the very beginning, when a family enrolls a child in our program we start to establish and nurture a positive goal-oriented partnership. We create and maintain these partnerships by using the essential components of the Family Partnership Process:

- Gathering and Using Information Families Share,
- Assessing Children and Families, and
- Engaging in Open and Ongoing Communication.

To guide you in creating the Family Partnership Plan, we offer the Seven Steps for Setting and Reaching Goals with Families:



You can use these steps with families to generate ideas to prioritize their interests and goals. You build on what you learn in your conversations during the earlier phases of the Family Partnership Process. Together you can discuss the skills and strengths that each of you can contribute toward the family's goals and consider the stressors that may impact the process. These discussions help us work together to develop strategies and action steps for family members to reach their goals. The Seven Steps can help us discover the resources that families may need to achieve certain goals. Finally, we can look at family progress, revisit priorities, and celebrate goals as family members decide what success is for them and their family.

The following pages explore the Seven Steps and provide examples of how each step might look in a real-life situation.

## Phase 4: Goal-Setting With Families: Seven Steps

### Step 1 Set a Goal

The Seven Steps for Setting and Reaching Goals with Families begins with setting a goal. It's important for families to set goals for themselves. For families, the act of choosing their own direction can contribute greatly to their sense of ownership and motivation for reaching the goal. Goal-setting also presents an important opportunity for staff and families to strengthen their partnership through open, honest, and mutually respectful communication.

For some families, goal-setting may be a new and unfamiliar process, which can feel exciting, inspiring, or difficult, depending on a family's situation. Certainly the process of goal-setting can help families prioritize their hopes and dreams by identifying something important to work toward. However, setting goals can also feel overwhelming, especially if a family wants to get many goals accomplished, and at the same time has many stressors. Some families may also feel unsure about where to start in setting goals. To help set goals, family members and staff can gather important data through:

- enrollment processes,
- child and family assessments, and
- conversations about the family's strengths, skills, needs, interests, and challenges.

Staff can use this information to reflect on and share their own perspectives to answer these goal-setting questions:

- What is most important to the family at this point?
- What have we learned about the family during each of our interactions?

Staff may have ideas about goals that would benefit the family but it's important to start with the family's priorities. When family members develop their own goals, they are more likely to feel enthusiastic, motivated, and committed to following through. The essential components of the Family Partnership Process can help to create important opportunities to value the family's passion for their child and family, and to revisit shifting expectations and hopes for the future.

You may also consider the Family Outcomes (e.g., Family Well-being, Positive Parent-Child Relationships, Families as Learners) of the Office of Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework as a guide to help generate ideas and to structure goal-setting efforts. The PFCE Framework helps staff and families to realize that making progress toward all goals, large and small, helps families turn their dreams into realities.

**Note:** *When working with families, other program staff, and community partners, follow your program's confidentiality policies to protect sensitive family information inside and outside the program.*

## Phase 4: Goal-Setting With Families: Seven Steps



### Example

During the enrollment process, Mr. Alvarez mentions that he needs to get his son Angel into child care because he recently lost his job and needs to look for work. Early on, Ms. Turner, his family service worker, understands that Mr. Alvarez's first two goals are very straightforward: (1) enroll Angel into a program and (2) find a job. The enrollment process goes quickly. After five weeks of looking for a job and having multiple interviews, he is offered a job.

In conversations with Mr. Alvarez, Ms. Turner also learns that he wants to help Angel learn to read however he can. He is worried that he doesn't have the time or the knowledge to support him. He is a single dad, has recently moved to the area, and doesn't have a support network to help Angel with reading. Mr. Alvarez is also worried that Angel may have inherited his reading disability. Ms. Turner and Angel's teacher consider this sensitive information.

Mr. Alvarez and Ms. Turner agree that he and Angel will share picture books and simple stories at home. At school, Angel's teachers will reinforce activities with letter recognition and reading. Mr. Alvarez identified two clear goals for himself in the enrollment process. As his partnership with Ms. Turner grew, he was able to share his worries and establish an additional goal for Angel.

## Phase 4: Goal-Setting With Families: Seven Steps

### Step 2 Identify Skills

**Skills:** Specific talents and abilities that both the family and staff members have and share within a partnership related to the family's goal.

Skills develop over time through practice, training, and experience. A skill may be specific: operating machinery, designing a logo, or using a computer. A skill may also be broader: problem solving, project management, or coaching. As staff and families build their partnership, they learn about each other's skills and think together about how to combine them to reach a goal.

#### Example

Program staff are working with Ms. Wong, a mother whose goal is to work in a new field. Together the staff and mother identify applicable skills for the job search. Ms. Wong outlines the skills she is using in her current job that she might be able to transfer to another job. She also talks about a recent training that has inspired her to work in the new field. One of the program's staff members has the computer skills and experience to help with job searches on the Internet. Both Ms. Wong and the staff know about community partners who have resume-writing skills and offer help in this area. Each of the partners has skills to contribute to meeting Ms. Wong's goal.



## Phase 4: Goal-Setting With Families: Seven Steps

### Step 3 Assess Strengths

**Strengths:** Personal and unique qualities that positively influence our lives.

Strengths can help us to:

- make decisions,
- adjust to new changes,
- reach goals,
- create the life we want, and
- cope with strain or stress.

Family members and staff have unique strengths, both individually and collectively as a group. Individual strengths might include self-confidence or a positive outlook, and group strengths might be shared beliefs or a shared sense of humor that helps deal with stress. When staff and families share their stories and communicate regularly, everyone learns about their respective skills. Skills can also include the emotional and spiritual qualities they rely on in both good and bad times.

#### Example

Monique's grandmother is out of work and looking for a job. She is concerned about paying the bills and finding the time to continue volunteering at her granddaughter's Early Head Start program. Staff see how persistent and committed she is. Monique's grandmother is not easily discouraged, despite the stress of being unemployed. These qualities will help Monique's grandmother with her job search and to model healthy behaviors for her granddaughter.

The family service worker working with Monique's family is well known for being creative and curious. Persistence, creativity, and curiosity are often needed for solving problems and finding a job. Together, Monique's grandmother and the staff member can work together to help her meet her goals: finding a new job and staying engaged with her granddaughter's program.

## Phase 4: Goal-Setting With Families: Seven Steps

### Step 4 Examine Stressors

**Stressors:** Events, people, and other circumstances that make people feel worried or anxious.

Stressors often create challenges to goal-setting. Families coping with the stressors of daily living can find it difficult to set aside time for planning and goal-setting. Families may have other stressors related to their unique family circumstances that interfere with goal-setting. For example, families may experience language barriers and the stressors associated with undocumented immigration status. Families with LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) parents may worry that their family will be negatively judged by other families. Families may face racial prejudice. These stressors can compound the demands of everyday responsibilities and worries. Programs can help by creating an environment that welcomes families from multiple backgrounds.

Families may also experience the multiple stressors associated with living in poverty: lack of health care, illness, financial insecurity, unsafe neighborhoods, and unsatisfactory living conditions. These stressors may leave families with little energy for future planning and make goal-setting feel impossible.

When families are faced with many stressors, staff can help them identify short-term goals and work to address immediate needs. Once the family feels more stable, family members may have the energy to think about longer-term goals and dreams for their family. It's important that staff pay attention to how stress affects each family and the impact of stress on a family's short- and long-term goals.

#### Example

The Taylor family is homeless, and a family member needs health care for a serious illness. The Taylors are anxious to get both issues resolved and want immediate help from the program. Monica, the staff member working with this family, feels compassion for them and wants to get them what they need as soon as possible. She also feels overwhelmed by the multiple stressors of their situation and is not sure how to help or where to start with the goal-setting process.

The Taylors are finding it difficult to carve out time to build a realistic and specific plan to address their immediate needs; they want Monica to fix their situation. Monica begins to worry constantly about this family. She wants to support them and recognizes that they need to work as partners to address the challenges. She realizes that her worries are affecting her well-being and that she needs to get support for herself. Monica brainstorms with colleagues and her supervisor about how to approach this difficult situation. With their help Monica identifies community partners that can help the Taylors access temporary housing and health insurance. She is able to maintain her professionalism and manage her stress, while still expressing her compassion and offering help to the family.

## Phase 4: Goal-Setting With Families: Seven Steps

### Step 4 Examine Stressors, cont.

Stress may also take a toll on staff members. As staff, you may be dealing with personal and work stressors; a sick child at home, depression, high caseloads, and/or challenges with colleagues. At times, interactions with families may remind staff of challenging personal experiences. In these instances, staff members need support from colleagues, supervisors, and others to understand and manage their own stress. You may choose to discuss and address the family's stressors during meetings with case management teams, community partners with mental health resources, or during reflective supervision sessions. Program mental health consultants are available to help staff members who are feeling overwhelmed and who need support.

It is always helpful for staff to realize and accept their own limitations when dealing with stressors related to a family's goal. When staff get support to manage own stressors, they are more able to help families.

Although the Seven Steps are meant for families and staff to review together, there may be situations when it is important for staff members to consider privacy issues when sharing information with families. If a staff member is experiencing a specific stressor that too closely echoes what a family is dealing with, it may be better for a different staff member to work with that family.

#### Reflective Supervision

Head Start, Early Head Start, and early childhood program staff strive to engage parents and families in healthy, trusting, and respectful relationships. It is equally important for program staff to have strong relationships with their colleagues and supervisors. Supervision involves the commitment to nurture and guide staff so that they have the tools to engage children and families successfully. Effective relationships between supervisors and staff members help staff reflect upon and cope with the stresses and demands of their work. Reflective supervision is an important aspect of building a safe and healthy climate for staff, families, and children.

Supervision is more than a program requirement for Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Like the relationship between a professional and a family, the relationship between a staff member and supervisor can offer qualities of mutual care and respect. Reflective supervision is an opportunity for leadership to use the strategies of reflection to foster growth, reinforce strengths, and encourage resilience. In addition to giving staff the encouragement and guidance they need, it also keeps leadership in touch with the real issues that programs face.

## Phase 4: Goal-Setting With Families: Seven Steps

### Step 5 Determine Support

**Support:** Help and assistance needed to achieve a goal.

Both families and staff members need support to do their best work and make progress towards a family's goals. The support both receive is critical to achieving those goals.

Families can receive support from personal friends, other families, church communities, cultural organizations and neighborhood connections, individual professionals, and family support agencies, such as health centers, social services, and schools. When families enroll in your program, they may already be receiving support from these sources. You can encourage and strengthen these connections through additional collaboration. Working with family support partners may:

- help to avoid duplication of services, and
- enhance family progress towards meeting goals.

Staff members may receive support from these resources as well as from their teams and supervisors. These resources can provide additional support to staff members who are feeling the challenge and stress of working with families. Staff members may benefit from a supervisor's support and from professional development by getting new ideas to help families meet their goals. The OHS PFCE Framework emphasizes the need for leadership and ongoing professional development in our work with families.

#### Example

Mr. Jackson wants to go back to school and is making progress toward that goal. Unexpectedly his car breaks down. His priorities quickly change. He needs temporary help getting his son, Benjamin to the Head Start Center before work until he can afford the car repair expenses. There is no public transportation. The father has a new short-term goal that is important to him and his family: getting Benjamin to the program and still getting to work on time.

Mr. Jackson and staff start to review options together. Mr. Jackson has a retired friend with a flexible schedule who might be able to help out a few times a week. Another parent in the same classroom who lives nearby overhears Benjamin talking about the car and offers to help. There are also several church members who can pick Benjamin up at the center. A community organization offers vouchers for short-term transportation needs. Together Mr. Jackson and staff put together a short-term plan to meet his needs and get him back on track with his plans for school.

## Phase 4: Goal-Setting With Families: Seven Steps

### Step 6 Explore Strategies

**Strategies:** Methods or action steps used to achieve the family's goals.

After assessing and discussing combined skills, strengths, stressors, and available supports, families and program staff can develop the strategies and actions steps needed to achieve the family's goals. As the family makes progress in achieving goals, family and staff members may make changes to the strategies and action steps they have identified together. This kind of flexibility ensures that the family and staff members stay focused on the family's goals.



#### Example

Mrs. Grant wants to take three classes to further her education and finish her college degree. As she researches the college's courses she discovers that the classes that she wants to take are only offered in the morning. To make this work for her family she would have to switch to the night shift at her current job as a waitress. Mrs. Grant realizes that she cannot make this work with her husband and children's schedule.

Mrs. Grant needs to find a way to keep her earlier day shift and take classes in the afternoon, on weekends, or online. She gets frustrated and overwhelmed. As her partner in goal-setting, Reggie, her family's service worker, helps Mrs. Grant research online courses and sits with her as she calls the college about scheduling. Reggie encourages her to stay focused on her goal. Mrs. Grant adjusts the steps and time frame. With Reggie's support she is able to practice facing the challenges in the situation so she can reach her goal.

## Phase 4: Goal-Setting With Families: Seven Steps

### Step 7 Track Progress and Celebrate Successes

**Success:** Achieving something desired.

Success can mean very different things to different people. Family members and program staff may have different definitions of success. When you understand what success means to a family, you can help families to celebrate each time they meet their vision of success. Strengthening a partnership with families may include a conversation about how each of you view what it means to be successful. This discussion offers an opportunity for both staff and families to share their insights, ideas, and experiences related to meeting goals.

Motivation and appreciation are two important factors for success. If the family and staff experienced success in ways they both planned, value, and appreciate, they are more likely to remember and repeat the steps that led to that progress. We all feel good and are motivated to do our best—and even try a little harder—when we experience success and are recognized for our accomplishments. We can remind ourselves of this when we support family members on their journey to reaching a goal. Success is rarely accomplished by reaching only one end point. It includes smaller successes along the way. In our positive, ongoing, and goal-oriented relationships it's important to celebrate the steps in the process of reaching the family's goal.

What if success doesn't look the way the staff and family expected? As staff, we want to reflect on our own expectations and choose how to respond. A disappointment for us may be a victory for a family. Successful, positive, goal-oriented partnerships are flexible, accept and celebrate the progress that families have made, and make room to readjust priorities—and definitions of success—when necessary.

#### Example

Mr. Fuentes wants to achieve an advanced degree at school but hasn't been able to complete all of the coursework according to the schedule he has set for himself. He is disappointed and discouraged. Marcus, the HS staff member working with the family, sees the father's situation differently. Marcus acknowledges that Mr. Fuentes has already completed several courses and is on his way to reaching his goal. From Marcus's perspective, going back to school counts as a success and places Mr. Fuentes one step closer to receiving that advanced degree—and getting a better job in the future. Mr. Fuentes may not be exactly where he had hoped, but considers this new perspective from a trusted partner. He is able to appreciate and celebrate the progress he has made and feels more confident and motivated as he moves toward his goal.

# Phase 5: Follow-Up and Review

## Revisiting Goals and Measuring Progress

Through the Seven Steps for Setting and Reaching Goals with Families, families and staff identify a goal, work together to make progress, and celebrate both small and large accomplishments. The follow-up and review phase creates an opportunity for you and the family to look more closely together at the specific progress they have made. Family progress looks different for each family and may not always look like what you would expect. This step helps you revisit the initial goal to determine whether you are on track or want to make adjustments. In this phase, families and staff:

- review progress,
- revisit and readjust goals as needed, and
- finalize or reevaluate the Family Partnership Plan.

The timing for follow-up and review depends on the family and the program. The first review may come at the end of the Seven Steps. Has the family met the goal they set? What progress has the family made? Are there changes to be made? How can things be adjusted to make additional progress? What will be in the Family Partnership Plan?

Staff and families may repeat the follow-up and review phase multiple times. Families are changing and growing all the time. Staff and families may need to revise the Family Partnership Plan as families' goals and circumstances change. They may want to talk about changing the pace or the tasks for reaching the goal. Plans and goals work best when they reflect and honor the dynamic nature of a changing family. In addition, program policies and procedures may guide the specific timing for the follow-up and review phase.



# Phase 6: Continuous Program Improvement

## Using Family Partnership Plan Data for Continuous Improvement

The process of family goal-setting can inform our overall program planning and continuous improvement efforts. We can look at the Family Partnership Plan for individual families and we can aggregate and analyze the goals of all families or subgroups of families in the program. We can use the summarized data to shape our goals at the program level. For example, a program decides to examine the types of goals that families set and finds that a high percentage of families have set an educational goal. In response, the program sets a program-level goal or objective to support families' educational goals. Another program finds that many families have health and wellness goals. The program responds and makes building partnerships for more health care services in the community a program-level goal. Programs can also use their aggregate data to honor families in one of three ways—by setting program goals, objectives, or family objectives that support school readiness goals. Foundations for Excellence: Planning in Head Start Topic No. 5: Program Planning and Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/operations/docs/planning-topic-5.pdf>) clarifies the process for setting goals and objectives related to family outcomes.

Programs can use Family Partnership Plans to inform decisions about programming for continuous improvement. Aggregate data from these plans can help programs identify the efforts that are working well and key opportunities to strengthen families' progress toward desired outcomes. For example, if a large number of families reach their goal to strengthen their household finances, a program may see a change in the financial data related to the expected outcome, "Family Well-being." Based on this finding, programs may decide to expand existing programming to further strengthen families' financial capability. Programs can also look at trends and patterns over time in the goals that families set. These trends can serve as markers of the program's progress in partnering with families toward expected family outcomes. Finally, programs can use data from Family Partnership Plans to inform program goal-setting and decisions about continuous improvement as well as to track and celebrate progress for families and for the program.

## Conclusion

Family goal-setting is essential to the work we do in Head Start, Early Head Start, and all early childhood programs. As we build relationships and form strong partnerships with families, we can help families set goals and work together to achieve those goals. Successful goal-setting is done in the context of the Family Partnership Process and relies on the information that programs gather through family assessments and ongoing communication.

The Seven Steps for Setting and Reaching Goals with Families offer you a new way to outline goal-setting with families, work effectively to reach goals, and develop a Family Partnership Plan. Staff and families can revisit goals, review progress, and refine the Family Partnership Plan to reflect current goals and plan for how to move forward toward the goals together. Strong, strengths-based partnerships, shared experiences, and frequent recognition of small and large successes can support families as they make progress toward their goals and dreams for their children and their family.

# Seven Steps for Goal-Setting

As you prepare to use the Seven Steps for Setting and Reaching Goals with Families, we invite you to reflect on your experiences throughout the first 3 phases of the Family Partnership Process—Recruitment and Enrollment, Family and Child Assessment, and Communication with Families.

Consider the information (data) you have learned from your families through the assessments and stories they shared. What have you learned? What has changed and what has stayed the same? What have the family members experienced? What is important to the family now?

Use the worksheet and questions on the following pages to guide goal-setting with families. The worksheet provides sample questions to guide you through each of the Seven Steps. As you work through each step with families, you can review the Staff Partner Reflection questions to reflect on your own contributions to the process. Each step is intended as a building block to establish flexible and strengths-based partnerships. Families may choose to reflect on each step individually or may want to discuss them with you.

While the Seven Steps are intended to promote ongoing dialogue with families, we encourage you to make careful decisions about what to share with families. You can consult your colleagues, supervisor, and program's confidentiality policies if you have questions or concerns.



## Seven Steps: Sample Worksheet and Questions

Use the following worksheet and sample questions to guide family goal-setting. Each step and sample questions offer an opportunity for private reflection and follow-up discussion with your staff or family partner.

Seven-Steps	Family Partner Name _____	Staff Partner Name _____
<b>Getting Started</b>	<i>Reflect on the follow questions in advance of a meeting with your staff partner or discuss the questions together.</i>	<i>Reflect on the following questions privately, with co-workers, or with a supervisor in advance of a meeting with your family partner.</i>
<b>Step #1 Set a Goal</b>	<p><i>Considering the enrollment process, strengths &amp; needs assessment, and communication with staff:</i></p> <p>What did I discover about myself and/or the program during the Family Partnership Process?</p> <p>What are my priorities?</p> <p>What do I want to work on?</p> <p>What's important to my family and me?</p> <p>Given my priorities, which can I list as number one?</p>	<p><i>Considering the enrollment process, strengths &amp; needs assessment, and communication with families:</i></p> <p>What have I learned from recruitment, assessment, and communications with this family?</p> <p>What information did I discover from the family's sharing?</p> <p>What does the family want to work on?</p> <p>Do I clearly understand what the family wants to work on?</p> <p>Do I understand the family's #1 priority and why this is important?</p>
<p><b>The Family's Goal</b></p> <p>My goal is to . . .</p> <p>My objectives are . . .</p> <p>Projected Timeframe(s):</p>		

## Seven Steps: Sample Worksheet, cont.

Seven Steps	Family Partner <i>Name</i> <i>Goal</i>	Staff Partner <i>Name</i>
<b>Step #2</b> <b>Skills</b>	<p>Thinking about my goal, what are my past experiences dealing with similar situations? What did I do?</p> <p>Do I know what I need to accomplish this goal?</p>	<p>What experience do I have when it comes to supporting this family to achieve this goal?</p> <p>Do I know enough about what this family needs to accomplish? If not, how do I learn more?</p>
<b>Step #3</b> <b>Strengths</b>	<p>What individual strengths do I have to help me to accomplish my goal?</p> <p>What other qualities do I that could help me meet my goal?</p>	<p>What strengths do I have as a person that will guide me while I support this family?</p> <p>What other qualities do I have that could help me support this family? What can my team offer?</p>
<b>Step #4</b> <b>Stressors</b>	<p>What are some of the challenges that I face?</p> <p>How can I cope with the stress created by my situation and still reach my goal?</p>	<p>What worries me about this situation?</p> <p>Am I overwhelmed? Why? How might this anxiety affect my relationship with this family?</p> <p>How can I cope with the stress created by my situation and still reach my goal?</p>
<b>Step #5</b> <b>Support</b>	<p>What kinds of resources do I need to achieve my goal?</p> <p>Who are the people in my family and my social network whom I can count on to help me meet my goal?</p> <p>Are there any other sources of assistance I may have overlooked?</p>	<p>Where can I get the most appropriate help with this issue?</p> <p>Who is the most appropriate person or agency to support this family's goal-setting process?</p>

## Seven Steps: Sample Worksheet, cont.

Seven Steps	Family Partner <i>Name</i> <i>Goal</i>	Staff Partner <i>Name</i>
<b>Step #6 Strategies</b>	<p>What are ways I can reach my goal?</p> <p>How can I go from where I am now to where I want to be? (Create a list.)</p>	<p>What options are available to support this goal?</p> <p>What are the ideal steps to take to achieve this goal?</p>
<b>Step #7 Success</b>	<p>What do I want to accomplish?</p> <p>What would make me proud and satisfied with my accomplishment?</p> <p>How will I accept any changes I make along the way and continue to progress?</p>	<p>What would I see as success related to this family's goal?</p> <p>What adjustments would need to be made to help them achieve the goal?</p>
<b>Follow-up and Review</b>	<p>How do I feel about my progress?</p> <p>What successes can I celebrate?</p> <p>Are there parts of our goals or objectives where I would like additional support?</p> <p>Have any of my priorities or goals shifted?</p>	<p>What have you learned recently from the family about their progress toward their goal(s)? What have you learned about the family through this process?</p> <p>What can you do to help celebrate progress with the family?</p> <p>Are there ideas or support you can offer for the family to consider as they continue working toward the goal?</p> <p>Are there any changes in the family's life that have required a shift in their goal or priorities?</p>

We encourage you to revisit this worksheet as you make progress toward the family partner's goals.

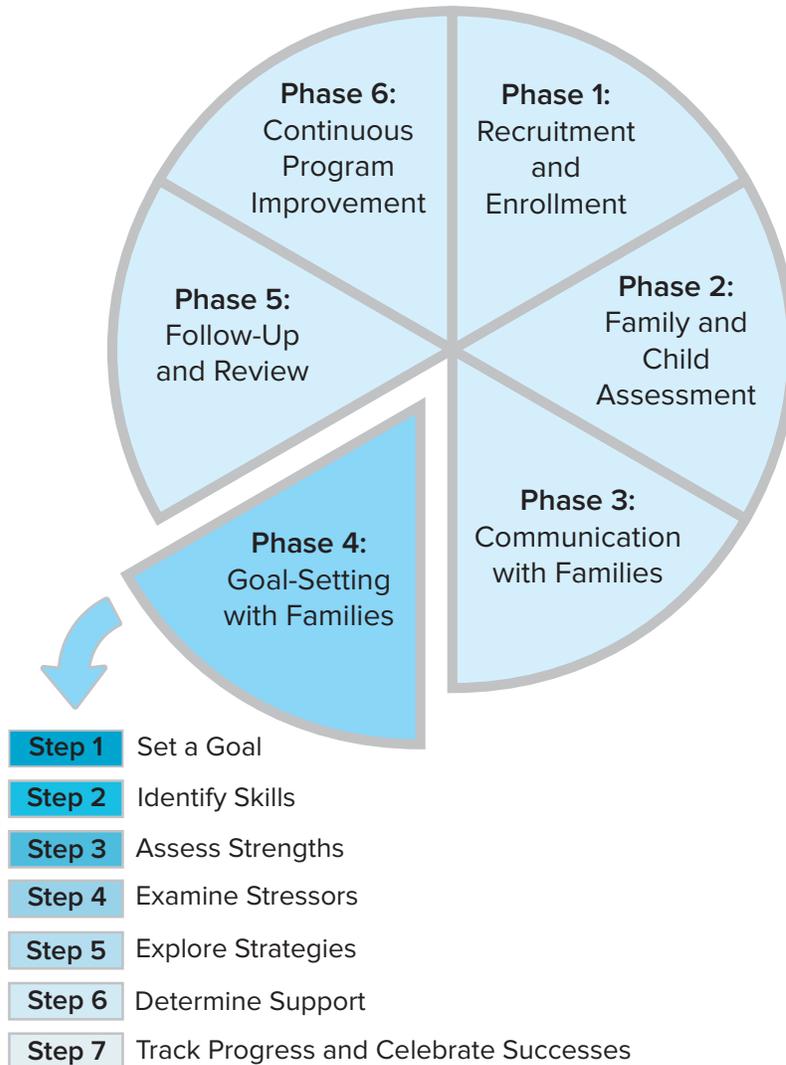
# Seven Steps Worksheet Template

Use this worksheet to record your combined responses and guide family goal-setting.

Seven-Steps	Family Partner Name _____	Staff Partner Name _____
<b>Step #1</b> Set a Goal		
<b>Step #2</b> Skills		
<b>Step #3</b> Strengths		
<b>Step #4</b> Stressors		
<b>Step #5</b> Support		
<b>Step #6</b> Strategies		
<b>Step #7</b> Success		
<b>Follow-up</b> and Review		

# Family Partnership Process and Seven Steps for Goal-Setting

*A successful Family Partnership Process is based on a relationship-based approach that values different perspectives and contributions, explores options, and honors all types of family progress. Six phases make up the Family Partnership Process:*



# Additional Resources

## OHS NCPFCE Resources

PFCE Simulation Series—Boosting School Readiness through Effective Family Engagement

[http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/center/pfce\\_simulation](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/center/pfce_simulation)

Building Partnerships: Guide to Developing Relationships (Interactive Tool)

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/pgor/>

Head Start and Early Head Start Relationship-Based Competencies for Staff and Supervisors Who Work with Families

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/foundations/ohs-rbc.pdf>

Understanding Family Engagement Outcomes: Research to Practice Series

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/center/rtp-series.html>

Best Practices in Family and Community Engagement Video Series

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/center/video-series.html>

Foundations for Excellence: Planning in Head Start

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/operations/docs/planning-complete-booklet.pdf>

## Related OHS Resources

Revisiting and Updating the Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs Serving Children Ages Birth to Five

[http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/resources/ECLKC\\_Bookstore/PDFs/Revisiting%20Multicultural%20Principles%20for%20Head%20Start\\_English.pdf](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/resources/ECLKC_Bookstore/PDFs/Revisiting%20Multicultural%20Principles%20for%20Head%20Start_English.pdf)

Cultural Backgrounders (Bhutanese Refugee Families, Refugees from Burma, and Refugee Families from Iraq)

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/refugee-families/cul-backgrounders.html>

Raising Young Children in a New Country: Supporting Early Learning and Healthy Development

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/docs/raising-young-children-in-a-new-country-bryc5.pdf>



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON

**Parent, Family, and  
Community Engagement**