

## Tools for Flexible Goals

### The Big Goals And Immediate Goals

**1. Identify your big goals for yourself.**

- **Turn the big goals into intentions.**
  - i. For example, “I want to be connected with my child rather than try to fix him/her.” “I want to free myself from fear around my child”.

**2. Identify your big goals for your child.**

- **Turn these goals into intentions** rather than goals.
  - i. For example: “I want my child to walk”, I want my child to talk” I want my child to become independent”

**3. Be ready to modify your intentions** for yourself and for your child as both of you grow and evolve.

**4. As your child grows, support them in forming their own goals.**

**5. Identify immediate goals for yourself:**

- Such as, “I’d like practice one of the Essentials each week and see how it helps me connect with my child”, or “I’d like to observe when I get rigid about wanting my child to accomplish something and what can I do differently”.

**6. Identify an immediate goal for your child:**

- For example, use different essentials to help your child notice differences, i.e. have their attentioning wake up.

**7. Focus on the Process, not the Goal:**

- Remember that no one, not even the healthiest child, reaches any new milestone by simply jumping to that point or solely by practicing that activity. Rather, we achieve new goals *through a process*.

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- Whenever you find yourself pushing your child achieve the desired goal directly, either by manipulating her body to do it or by asking her to do it, you deny your child's brain of opportunities for having the information it needs; you are limiting yourself and your child at that moment.
- Instead, look away from the goal, reminding yourself that you play a very active part in this process.
- Simply stop what you are doing, take a deep breath and look away from the goal to allow the child's needed process to take place.

**8. Wonder:**

- Whenever you are applying any of the Nine Essentials, *wonder* what your child will do next.
- Wonder leads to discovering previously unknown possibilities.
- Wonder how your child is going to react. Is she going to like or get interested in what you are doing with her?
- Wonder what small or large changes may occur.
- Wonder about the ideas and feelings you and your child are coming up with and experiencing, moment to moment.
- We never know in advance the way we will attain a goal or the exact path the child will take to attain a goal. When you allow yourself to wonder, you create space for that which you couldn't have known to be part of the solution. You keep the field of possibilities wide open for your child.

**9. Back Off:**

- Always put process ahead of outcome.
- You will find yourself in countless situations where you will be expected to go for narrow and predefined goals around something your child is presently unable to do. That might involve a goal that a doctor, therapist, or perhaps a teacher suggested through an individualized education program (IEP) conference.

**10. Be the leader:**

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- If another person accuses you of being neglectful of your child or risking your child's future because you have chosen to work with Flexible Goals, you will need to be the leader.
- Explain to others who work with your child how to employ Flexible Goals. Ask them to work with your child by tugging around the edges of her current ability, always looking for that edge where the child can experience success.

**11. Do the same for yourself:**

- Know when to back off with a goal that is too far ahead of what you are presently able to do; back off on any goal that is too hard, is too fast, or is introducing too much too soon.
- If trying to attain the goal creates discomfort, pain, or distress for you, back off.
- Anytime you put outcome ahead of process you risk having you and your child learn the limitation you are experiencing. This can eventually lead you or your child to give up on the possibility of ever achieving that goal or even more that you didn't know to expect.
- By not knowing when to back off, you risk falling into the belief that your child's failure is due to her condition, or your limitations – "your fault" - rather than seeing that the failure results from the path taken to help her.

**12. Play:**

- Let your path with your child be playful. Learn to *meander* with your child, spontaneously taking different directions in what might seem to you to be a waste of time.
- Keep the importance of aimless activity and randomness in mind, being always attuned with your child and guided by her responses.
- Know that every time you take on a goal for your child, you are both stepping into the unknown.
- Your child's brain will thrive with all the new information it gets, all the while discovering new possibilities.
- In this way your child might very well surprise you by improving and growing in

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ways you didn't even know to expect.

**13. Embrace Reversibility:**

- There might be times when unexpected opportunities will arise and you will want to adjust one or more goals for your child. At such times, be open to changing course on the spot, to change the intended goal—what I call *reversibility*.
- There may even be times, as your child's path unfolds, that you will want to totally change some of the goals, again requiring you to reverse your intended goals and any corresponding actions you are taking with her. So many great breakthroughs were discovered on the way to seeking something else.
- Your reversibility allows you to be responsive to your child, making it a priority over holding to a rigid goal or path.

**14. Let Go:**

- *Do not try to control the outcomes with your child.*
- You can have enormous influence and contribute in profound ways to the quality of your child's process, greatly increasing her chances of doing better and better.
- However, what your child does or is able to do, at any given moment is beyond your direct control.
- When we try to control the outcome, things begin to go awry.
- The child's brain needs freedom to create and integrate billions of bits of information; this is how we form the new.
- When we are too willful and rigid about trying to control the outcome, we are presuming to know what we cannot know; at best, our efforts to control limit the child and diminish the opportunities for new possibilities.

**15. Cherish the Connection:**

- Have what is happening in the here and now with your child guide you to what you do next. This will give your child's heart and mind what it needs from you to be able to better overcome her limitations—to be *seen by you*, to *feel the connection* between the two of you. You will both feel empowered through this focus.

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**16. Embrace Mistakes:**

- Allow your child—and yourself—the room to make lots of mistakes. Do not worry about doing the Essentials *right*.
- Don't worry about your child doing things right.
- Don't even worry about doing Flexible Goals right.
- Mistakes create a treasure trove of information from which your child's brain (and yours) can discover ways to achieve different goals and figure out how to attain the goals you have for your child.
- The brain is a self-organizing system that arrives at goals spontaneously through lots of experimentation and approximation.
- The greater and more challenging the goal, the more room your child needs for mistakes, self-correction, and self-discovery.

**17. Let's not let fear call the shots:**

- Having a child with special needs puts enormous demands on the parent. It creates extraordinary challenges that no one is ever prepared for in advance. There is lots of uncertainty and the unknown that can lead to fear, worry, and confusion. These feelings tend to push us toward adopting rigid goals in the hope of finding solutions and a sense of safety.
- As difficult as it may be, and despite your uncertainty and fear, come back again and again to Flexible Goals whenever you can. Don't let fear and uncertainty dictate either the goals you set for your child and for yourself, or the path you take in trying to help your child attain those goals.