

How Families and the Clinical Team Choose Goals

What an assessment is for, how your priorities shape goals, and why every plan is different.

Choosing goals is a shared process. Your family, your child or young adult (as much as they are able), and the supervising Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) each bring important information to the table. This guide explains what that process generally looks like, so you know what to expect and what to ask.

What an assessment is for

An assessment helps the BCBA understand where your child is today. It is a starting point for planning, not a label and not a prediction. Depending on your child's age and needs, an assessment may include:

- Conversations with caregivers about daily routines, strengths, and current concerns
- Observation in one or more settings, such as home, clinic, or community
- A review of records you choose to share, such as school or medical reports
- Structured activities or skills assessments selected by the BCBA
- Learning what your child enjoys, prefers, and finds motivating

The BCBA uses this information to recommend possible goals and explain the reasons behind each recommendation. Recommendations are reviewed with you before a plan begins.

Your values and priorities are part of goal selection

You know your child, your family, and your daily life best. Goal selection usually considers:

- What matters most to your family right now, at home and in the community
- Your child's own preferences, interests, and ways of communicating
- Safety, health, and quality-of-life concerns you have raised
- Your family's culture, language, schedule, and routines
- What other providers or your child's school have shared, with your permission

You are welcome to ask why a goal is being recommended, suggest changes, or ask that a goal wait until later. A goal that does not fit your family's life can be discussed and revised.

Services, goals, and progress are individualized. Nothing on this page guarantees a specific result, timeline, or authorization.

Goals are individualized

Goals are written for one specific learner. They are not taken from a standard list, and two learners of the same age or diagnosis may have very different goals. For that reason, we do not publish sample goal lists as a preview of what your child will work on. No type of goal is automatically right for every learner.

What a written goal usually includes

- A clear description of the skill or behavior the team will focus on
- How progress will be measured
- Where, and with whom, the skill is expected to be used
- How the team will check that the skill lasts and carries over to everyday life

Questions you can ask

- Why is this goal a priority for my child right now?
- How does this goal connect to our family's daily life?
- How will we know whether progress is happening?
- How are my child's preferences and comfort considered when teaching this?
- What happens if our priorities change during treatment?
- Can we pause, revise, or remove a goal?

What usually happens next

The BCBA prepares a written treatment plan and reviews it with you. Services begin only after you have had the chance to ask questions and give your consent. Some funding sources also review the plan before approving services, and their decisions are outside our control. Goals are revisited at regular reviews and updated as your child's needs and your family's priorities change.

Have a question about your child's goals? Talk with your BCBA. That conversation is always the right next step.

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