GOAL4 IT! Quick Guide

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GOAL4 IT!™: A quick guide for direct service staff

Goal4 It! is a way of delivering services designed to evoke clients' motivation and activate their commitment to change. Every Goal4 It! interaction becomes an opportunity for the client to develop his or her self-regulation skills through pursuing goals. The model centers on three core strategies for improving outcomes for children and families: reducing sources of stress, creating responsive and supportive relationships, and building core skills.[1]

Goal4 It! is grounded in evidence from neuropsychology, behavioral science, and social science research. In addition, practitioners from workforce and human services programs across the country tested and refined it. Program directors, supervisors, and direct service staff have helped create Goal4 It! and ensure that it is grounded in the day-to-day realities of programs.

How is Goal4 It! different from what I do now?

Goal4 It! focuses on activating a client's motivation and commitment to change by reframing every interaction with a client to explicitly focus on his or her goals. Whether exploring a new goal, revising the specific plan, or reviewing progress since your previous meeting, this approach shifts the emphasis away from transactions—like checking in on hours or providing a gas card—and toward more meaningful, skill-building opportunities.

You can use a set of Goal4 It! tools to encourage more intentional planning, promote action, and facilitate accountability with your clients. Your role is to coach rather than to enforce—to support clients as they explore goals they wish to achieve and identify concrete plans to take action. A plan goes beyond simply identifying a series of action steps; it also incorporates an "if, then" statement—a science-informed technique to proactively identify a potential obstacle to the plan and a corresponding solution to overcome it.

As the client takes action, accountability centers on the plan, rather than on compliance with program rules: reviewing progress as defined in the client's plan, assessing what went well and what did not, and planning next steps. This approach emphasizes learning, personal growth, and skill-building by dissecting how well (or not) the client carried out the plan he or she created, rather than focusing exclusively on whether or not the client achieved the goal.

How will Goal4 It! change my work?

For many staff, Goal4 It! will change the relationship between you and your clients. Standard approaches to case management typically begin with an assessment designed to draw out detailed information about the client's history and current challenges. In contrast, Goal4 It! focuses on relationship building from the start by inviting clients to discuss their goals, interests, and motivations. There is no comprehensive assessment, and the barriers or challenges clients face will come up naturally during the conversation. Initially, this might seem challenging, and you might find yourself uncomfortable without all of the details and information you used to have about the client from the start. However, with time, this approach tends to become increasingly more comfortable for staff, more respectful toward clients, and promotes greater trust and transparency on the whole.

With Goal4 It!, your conversations will focus more on what the client wants to accomplish. Rather than unstructured discussion of the client's challenges, program activities, or participation requirements, meetings with clients aim to facilitate a more structured interaction that builds the client's skills to take action. Goal4 It! provides this structure through a four-step process: Goal, Plan, Do, and Review. By following this process, you give greater focus to your meetings with clients. And, by modelling this process for your clients, you help them form positive habits that they can use for themselves and with their children.

What should I expect as Goal4 It! rolls out in my organization?

For Goal4 It! to succeed in the long term, changes will likely be required in areas other than direct service delivery. Here are three key aspects of rolling out Goal4 It! that extend beyond *how* you work with clients:

A mindset shift. Goal4 It! tends to challenge some long-standing assumptions and cultural norms in human services programs, away from an emphasis on compliance and toward a more client-centered approach. Goal4 It! embeds a level of intentionality into every staff–client interaction that promotes a new way of thinking about your work. Your focus is on facilitating a process of self-discovery and skill building, and so the way that you think about and carry out your work will likely evolve. In addition, a parallel process for you to engage in with your supervisor complements Goal4 It!—the same goal-pursuit process you use with clients applied to yourself.

Reviewing the broader program environment. Every program operates in a unique policy and regulatory environment—navigating a web of federal-, state-, and local-level rules. This environment can have major implications for how Goal4 It! is implemented. Without careful attention to these factors, they can undermine or even negate the intended effect of Goal4 It!. So, it is important to consider how existing processes and ways of doing business throughout the organization either support or violate the core principles of Goal4 It!: reducing sources of stress, creating supportive and responsive relationships, and building core skills.

Going beyond case management. Programs typically offer a range of services beyond the case management you provide to clients. Referrals to other vendors or agencies and participation in workshops or job clubs form the fuller picture of a client's experience. A key to reinforcing the core principles of Goal4 It! includes expanding clients' exposure to supportive and skill-building interactions. For example, ensure that referrals to other staff or service providers are anchored by the goals your clients have set for themselves and are pursuing. Or, consider how Goal4 It! might provide a structure for worksite supervision and building skills as part of work experience, community service, or on-the-job training placements.

When and with whom should I use Goal4 It!?

Goal4 It! is for anyone and everyone. You should use Goal4 It! with all of your clients—including those who you consider to be in crisis. However, the exact approach you take with any given client will vary. For example, you might simplify the language you use, focus on only one very near-term change, and limit the use of any tool for a client in crisis. On the other hand, a client who is ready to explore a career pathway might be ready to use multiple tools and set long-term goals that involve a complex series of action steps. Goal4 It! is about meeting clients where they are, when they come in that day.

This will require tailoring your approach and the language you use, not just by client, but by session. Regardless of the individual's circumstances, the principles of Goal4 It! apply, as they seek to reduce sources of stress, create responsive and supportive relationships, and build core skills. You can even use Goal4 It! for yourself, your family, and your friends! The more you use it, the better you will be at facilitating it.

Endnotes

[1] Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. "Building Core Capabilities for Life: The Science Behind the Skills Adults Need to Succeed in Parenting and in the Workplace." Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2016.