

# Teaching Ten Important Lifetime Goals to Children and Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Suggestions for staff, administrators, teachers, specialists and families  
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All children and adults need to accomplish goals that result in safe and productive lives. Here are some guidelines for identifying and addressing essential life goals.

## 1. Using only safe behavior:

### Target the elimination of dangerous or potentially dangerous behavior

- the criteria for institutionalization against your will and choice is:  
*Danger to self, danger to others*
- could be misunderstood, viewed as a criminal, victimized
- teach alternate behaviors

Be sure to teach

- crossing the street with someone or knowing when to move forward into the street with someone else
- moving away from danger

List behaviors that the child or adult uses that are dangerous or could become dangerous.

List alternate behaviors that should be learned.

## 2. Taking complete care of her/his own body:

### Everyone needs to be independent in the bathroom

- will not be able to get jobs if have to be taken to the toilet
- others usually do not like to live with someone who cannot toilet or bathe on their own (exception of physical needs)

- being clean and acceptable in our society (appearance is important)
- potential for sexual abuse is VERY high among people with disabilities
- Once they know where they cannot touch others, they can learn who can touch them where. Leads to better protection from abuse.

Be sure to teach:

- rules regarding privacy for self and others
- independence in the bathroom and while getting dressed or undressed

What skills in self-care does the child or adult need to acquire? Be specific.

### **3. Touching others and being touched appropriately:**

#### **Who to hug, touch, kiss, and continue to talk to, or follow**

- “circle of friends” concept can be used to teach many different concepts
- need to know when being brushed off and go away and leave the person alone
- need to be able to take no for an answer
- need to learn who to touch, how and when
- need to learn who can touch them, how and when

Be sure to teach:

- what to do if you are not sure if someone should touch you or you should touch them
- how to move away from someone who does not want your attention
- how to move away from someone who is bothering you and get help

What behavior and skills related to touching, being touched and showing interest in others does the child or adult need to learn?

### **4. Respectful use of property:**

#### **How to touch or use other’s property and knowing how to ask first**

- asking can be verbal, gestural, printed, etc. does not depend on speech
- know how to use property properly and put it back in good condition

Be sure to teach:

- some way to ask before taking something that belongs to someone else
- some way to know the difference between your property and someone else's
- treating things with respect and care

How does the child or adult currently react to the property of others? Does s/he understand the underlying concept of property/possessions?

What behaviors and skills does the child or adult need to learn in this area?

## **5. Knowing two different responses to give when people tell you YES or NO**

- won't develop necessarily, automatically but CAN be learned
- use of charts, social stories, choice making charts and physical coping skills (deep breathing, stretching, walking, singing)
- need to practice in many environments
- need to practice for new social situations that may arise in the future

Be sure to teach:

- who to approach to talk with after receiving an undesired answer
- how to move away and do something else when someone tells you "no"

How does the child or adult respond when someone says either yes or no when the child or adult wants to hear the other answer?

What kind of coping/communication skills does the child or adult need to learn in this area?

## **6. Knowing who to ask for help and how and when**

- need to be taught efficient and effective ways of getting adult assistance in all settings
- teach in each situation many different times until they get the concept or provide them with the information if the concept never develops
- create rules (first ask a person with the store uniform or a name tag, for

example)

- have a system of identification that every child or adult carries
- teach each child or adult to carry a current list of all medications (amounts, types and times administered) being taken
- need to know how to respond to commands of police officers or other authority figures

Be sure to teach:

- the “signs” that mean the child or adult needs help
- a way the children or adults can tell their name and address to persons in authority, tell that they need help
- an efficient way to and give information upon request by authority figures
- who to call to help them if they are having problems
- how to decide who is safe to approach to ask for help in many environments

Note: do not depend on the child or adult’s ability to speak in a crisis. Everyone’s ability to use language decreases under stressful conditions Think outside the box! You could use something written, taped on a small tape player, carried in a wallet, etc.)

What does the child or adult do when s/he needs help in public? How does s/he identify who can help them? How does s/he ask for help?

What skills does the child or adult need to learn in this area?

## **7. Learn to identify internal states and express them**

- describe feelings or sensations in terms of intensity and level of ability to cope
- a problem coping is not a tantrum: language to describe is important here
- need to become aware when they may be ill or uncomfortable and need medical help, and be able to communicate it to others
- need to have a plan to avoid upsetting stimuli and find safe places in all environments for when they become overwhelmed

Be sure to teach:

- pointing or other symbol for something hurts inside
- how to cover ears, dim lights, etc. to increase comfort level
- Moving away from an unliked stimulus instead of toward it. (Repeated exposure to something that you cannot tolerate does not make you able to

tolerate it!)

- Words, signs, or symbols to use. Practice using these signals during a time of low or no stress. Then apply it during emotional/highly stimulating situations
- Watch for situations and provide words/symbols for “You feel... (best guess).” “You need to.... “Be sure to provide rewards when individuals talk about internal states.
- refer to the book How Does Your Engine Run by Williams and Shellenberger to teach self-regulation and self-understanding

How does the child or adult identify internal states and communicate about them?

What skills does the child or adult need to learn in this area?

## **8. Learning to express empathy, sympathy and caring**

- friendships become more intimate and meaningful as people share their feelings with one another; it is important to express feelings appropriately to the right person and be a good listener
- while a person may be competent at a job, s/he will not be well-liked if s/he appears “cold” or uncaring
- peers and workmates expect others to be sensitive to their feelings and needs; negative perceptions can affect success on the job and in social settings
- being a team player involves understanding and valuing the thoughts and feelings of others; this is a highly valued trait in business culture

Be sure to teach:

- that others have and express feelings “just like me”
- that sometimes people feel the same things I do at the same time

- that sometimes people are feeling a different feeling than me at the same time
- that others like it when we care about their feelings
- physical signs of emotion in others (body language, facial expression) and correct responses
- “danger signs” when someone is angry and could get out of control
- specific ways to show empathy and learn to comfort, such as offering a Kleenex to someone who is crying
- The boundaries and rules of expression of feelings: what can be shared, with whom

How does the child or adult show that he understands the feelings of others?

What behavior and skills related to empathy, recognizing and responding to the feelings of others does the child or adult need to learn?

## **9. Giving Negative Feedback**

While many people can learn to follow a sequence of events or a plan, they do not know how to appropriately express negative things such as

- I don't want to \_\_\_\_\_
- I don't like \_\_\_\_\_
- I disagree with you
- I think you are wrong

Be sure to teach

- To identify the feeling when “negativity” is building up
- To find a way to name and express the negative thought or feeling that is not harmful
- To decide on and practice options for handling emotion in “negative” situations
- how to choose words that let someone know that you do not like what they are doing or saying, but you still like them

In what situations is expressing negative feelings or aversions a problem for the child or adult?

What skills does the child or adult need to learn to express negative feelings appropriately?

## **10. Making Plan B...Fixing situations and dealing with the unexpected**

- there will always be unexpected occurrences
- people with ASD do not automatically learn how to change their minds or change plans
- these skills must be systematically taught

Be sure to teach:

- what “unexpected” feels like while it is happening
- to develop options to fix the problem
- how to stop and say, “this is something unexpected”
- to stop and think about the options, and then choose one
- to anticipate the “unexpected” and invent their own options in advance
- that we can choose another option and we are still OK when something unexpected happens

In what situation does the child or adult “fall apart” when something unexpected happens?

What routines does the child or adult have that cannot be changed without upset?

What skills does the child or adult need to learn to be able to cope with the unexpected?