



GUIDE

GROWING TOGETHER:

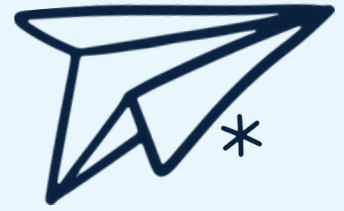
A guide to goal setting and reflection

Discover tips to help early childhood educators set meaningful goals, reflect on their progress, and stay inspired in their daily work!

Brought to you by your pals at

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MOVING FORWARD



You play a vital role in shaping the lives of young children. Your creativity, patience, and commitment spark joy, curiosity, and lifelong learning. That's a big deal — and it's why your growth and well-being matter just as much as the children's.

Whether you're part of a bustling childcare center or running a cozy in-home program, this guide is packed with tips, activities, and ready-to-use templates to help you keep growing, one step at a time.

When you feel supported and inspired, that energy flows into your classroom — and the ripple effect starts with you.

WHAT'S IN HERE

Pages 2-8: Tips, tricks, and activities

Pages 9-29: Activity printables



GOAL SETTING MATTERS



Setting goals and growing professionally isn't just about training hours — it's about finding purpose in your work and feeling confident in your practice. **Goal setting can help you:**

Stay Motivated and Avoid Burnout

Setting meaningful goals helps you reconnect with why you do this work in the first place. It brings focus, clarity, and a sense of progress — all of which can protect against burnout and keep your passion alive.

Strengthen Your Skills

Goals give you direction. Whether it's improving your classroom routines, exploring new learning strategies, or understanding child development on a deeper level, goal setting keeps your skills fresh and your practice evolving.

Feel accomplished and proud

There's nothing quite like the feeling of reaching a goal you set for yourself. It builds confidence, reminds you of your strengths, and reinforces the value of your daily efforts.

Better outcomes for every child

At the heart of it all: the children. As you grow in your role, you're able to create richer learning experiences, respond more thoughtfully to their needs, and support their development in even more meaningful ways.

START WITH REFLECTION



Before jumping into goal setting, take a moment to pause and look inward. Reflection is how we grow roots before reaching for something new—it helps us notice what's working, what's changing, and what we want more of.

- What's something that's been working really well lately?
- What's been a bit of a struggle?
- What's one thing I'm curious to try?
- How do I want to grow — professionally or personally?
- What brings me joy in my work?
- What do I need more of right now?
- What felt especially meaningful this week?
- What's one habit or mindset I'd like to shift?
- When do I feel most confident in my role?
- Is there a moment with a child or family that stayed with me — and why?



Pro tip: Try this reflection during a team meeting, personal development time, or as a self-guided exercise. Use our Guided Exercise on page 10 to get started!

Early Childhood Goal Guide

Use these four goal types to guide your growth, support your students, and take care of yourself along the way.



1 Professional Development Goals

- Focus on your growth as an educator. Staying informed keeps your practice fresh and your confidence high.
- Examples: Attend a workshop or conference, complete an online course, or read a professional article each month.



2 Classroom Goals

- Aim to create a more engaging, inclusive, or effective learning environment.
- Examples: Rearrange your classroom for better flow, try a new play-based strategy, or improve your documentation of learning.



3 Personal Goals

- Yes, your well-being matters! Personal goals help you recharge, prevent burnout, and show up fully for the children in your care.
- Examples: start a mindfulness routine, make time for a hobby, or use journaling or voice memos to process your day.



4 Student-Centered Goals

- Care for yourself so you can care for others. Personal goals help prevent burnout and keep your spark alive.
- Examples: Start a mindfulness routine, make time for a hobby, or journal about your day.

Goal-Getting Made Simple



To make your goals easier to reach, try turning them into SMART goals:

Specific

Clearly define what you want to accomplish so it's easy to focus your efforts.

Example: "I want to learn about positive discipline."

Measurable

Decide how you'll track your progress and know when you've reached your goal.

Example: "...by completing an online course..."

Achievable

Set a goal that is realistic for your schedule and resources so you can succeed.

Example: "...that fits into my weekly schedule..."

Relevant

Make sure your goal connects to your current role and priorities as an educator.

Example: "...to help with my classroom behavior support."

Time-bound

Give yourself a clear deadline to stay motivated and on track.

Example: "...by the end of the next two months."



SMART Goal Example: "I will complete the online course 'Positive Discipline in the Classroom' by October 1st to feel more confident in managing behavior challenges."

SIMPLE GOAL SETTING ACTIVITIES

These quick, thoughtful activities are here to help you check in, celebrate progress, and keep growing—one small step at a time.

1. The “Now, Next, Later” Chart

Use this to organize your goals without feeling overwhelmed:

- Now: Try a new transition song
- Next: Watch a classroom management webinar
- Later: Attend a conference about challenging behavior

2. Three Stars and a Wish

Use this during staff check-ins or personal reflection:

- Something I did well
- Something I’m proud of
- Something I noticed in a child or colleague
- One thing I’d like to try or grow in

3. Monthly Goal Tracker

Each month, jot down:

- One goal I’m working on
- One challenge I faced
- One success I’m celebrating
- One thing I want to focus on next



Pro tip: Adapt these tools to fit your day—use them in team check-ins, during planning time, or even with children to help them build routines and confidence too.

KEEP GROWING

You are doing incredible work—**and it matters.** Setting intentions and taking time to reflect isn't about being perfect; it's about showing up with heart, staying curious, and giving yourself the same care and attention you give to the little ones in your classroom.

Goal setting doesn't need to be big or formal. A simple thought jotted down, a quiet moment to check in with yourself, or a shared intention with a teammate can all be powerful steps forward. Whether your goals focus on improving classroom routines, strengthening family connections, or taking better care of yourself—they all matter.

Celebrate what's working. Adjust when things feel off. And keep going—you're doing the work that makes all the difference. **Set goals that inspire you, give yourself grace, and take it one small step at a time.**



Activity Printables



ROOTING YOURSELF IN REFLECTION

Before jumping into new goals, take a few moments to pause and look inward. You don't need an hour — just a quiet corner, a pen, and maybe a warm cup of coffee.



What's been working really well lately?

(A moment, a routine, something that just clicked?)



What's been a bit of a struggle?

(What's felt heavy, frustrating, or unclear?)



What's one thing I'm curious to try?

(A new idea, tool, or way of doing things?)



How do I want to grow — professionally or personally?

(What kind of educator, coworker, or human do I want to become?)



What brings me joy in my work?

(What moments light you up?)

Remember: You don't need perfect answers — just honest ones. Reflecting is a way of taking care of yourself and your practice.



Small Steps, Big Wins

Map out your goals and celebrate each step forward.



Now: _____

Next: _____

Later: _____

Small Steps, Big Wins

Map out your goals and celebrate each step forward.



Now: _____

Next: _____

Later: _____

THREE STARS AND A WISH



Something I did well:



Something I'm proud of:



Something I noticed:



One thing I'd like to try:

Goal Sheets

ONE MONTH PER PAGE



GOAL TRACKER

JANUARY

Goal in Progress:

Challenge I Faced:

Win I'm Celebrating:

Next Focus:

GOAL TRACKER

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Goal in Progress:

Challenge I Faced:

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Goal Sheets

ALL MONTHS PAGES 27-29



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COLLABORATION

BUILT BY EDUCATORS, FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

This resource was created in collaboration with dedicated educators and school leaders who brought their experience, ideas, and insight to every step of the process. We're grateful for their partnership in building tools that truly make a difference in schools.



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WE'RE SO GLAD YOU'RE HERE!

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