

What is it and why is it important?

When developing any plan to meet the needs of a child, young person or their family, (including Early Help, Child in Need, Child Protection and for Children Looked After) plans should be SMART.

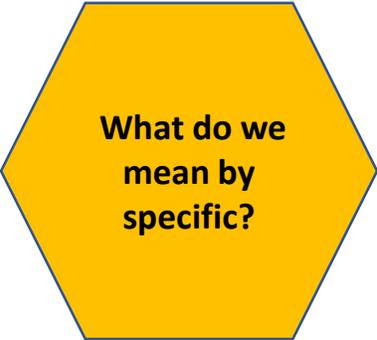
SMART planning principles are 'specific', 'measurable', 'achievable', 'realistic' and 'timely'.

Nationally, Serious Case Reviews have consistently raised concerns about issues with planning including: lack of focus; plans not reflecting identified concerns; over optimism; and disguised compliance which prevents needs, risk or issues being appropriately addressed.

Case audits, feedback from frontline practitioners along with recent OFSTED inspections have focused on this and have identified similar issues and concerns.

SMART principles help families and practitioners develop plans that are clear and address the identified risks and needs. The development of the plan is everyone's responsibility; practitioners and the family.

It should draw upon the resources available to both the family and the practitioners; their skills, expertise and knowledge and should demonstrate the wishes and feelings of the child. Practitioners should feel able, and committed, to challenging each other about aspects of plans that they feel are not SMART. This is supported by Key document 3 Practice Standards.



What do we mean by specific?

All aspects of the plan should be as specific as possible – for example, if a service is identified to meet the need, the plan should state: when the service will be provided, how frequently, what exactly will be provided, and what the goals of providing the service are.

Being specific enables families and practitioners to clearly understand what the concerns are and what is expected of them. The plan should also be specific about who is responsible for what aspects of the plan (a named practitioner or family member); how often they should meet including frequency and date of next review); and the date when they would be expected to have the work completed.

What do we mean by 'measurable'?

All aspects of the plan should be measurable – this enables both families and practitioners to be clear about progress made and quickly identify when a plan is not working. Some aspects of the plan will be more easily measured than others – for example, attendance at sessions can be numerically recorded. However, concerns about a child's emotional well-being are not as easy to measure but there are many creative ways of measuring progress for these concerns. The views of the child and young person about progress should be obtained in addition to parents and other workers. However, self-reporting as the only verification of progress is not a safe way of concluding that an objective or goal has been met and should be cross-referenced with other information.

What do we mean by 'achievable'?

Plans are most likely to succeed and actions achieved when agreed by children, parent / carers and practitioners; making people feel that they are part of, and take ownership for the plan. We should take into account the child or young person's wishes and feelings and try to ensure their inclusion and agreement throughout the planning process. This aspect of SMART planning enables people to find creative solutions to issues that are affecting them that avoid blame, retribution and punishment.

Practitioner agreement, commitment and ownership to the plan are essential to achieving successful outcomes for children. Agreement should not, however, be seen as a passive process and it is important for all practitioners to offer constructive challenge when planning for children. If any aspects of a plan are not agreed then this should also be recorded and the implications for this non-agreement would need to be considered in the overall assessment of risk and likelihood of achieving change.

What do we mean by 'realistic'?

Plans should be realistic and based upon our knowledge and understanding of the family and the specific developmental needs of the child or young person. For example, it would not be realistic (or indeed safe) to expect a parent with long term alcohol misuse issues to suddenly stop drinking. This aspect of the plan would need to be carefully developed with the input of a specialist practitioner who could best inform what would be realistic. Plans which are realistic are more likely to succeed in meeting the identified outcomes and long term goals.

What do we mean by 'timely'?

All aspects of plans should contain realistic set timescales with some being broken down into stages to make them more achievable. This will enable everyone to be clear what is expected of them and by when, as well as allowing progress to be monitored. Timescales should be considered at each review of the plan and amended as necessary.

Key points when writing objectives

Good Outcome Checklist for children and their families:

- ✓ **Concise** – statement should be to the point
- ✓ **Jargon-free** – use plan language, no acronyms
- ✓ **Specifies an expected effect** - may be a population health problem, risk or behaviour that we want to achieve – it is a positive
- ✓ **Easily Understood** – Family, parents, young people and professionals should be familiar with concepts written in the goal
- ✓ **Framework for Objectives** – objectives need to fit within the scope of the overall goal



And Finally...When you sit down in a multi-agency setting to review your plans you should be reflecting over these key aspects... 1. Am I doing what I planned? 2. Is my work having the impact I anticipated (producing or moving toward the result targets established by my objectives)? 3. Are changes needed in my plan?