



Centre for Professional Practice

## What is SMART Planning?

SMART is an acronym to help in the writing of objectives. The objectives can be for managing performance or for developmental purposes or in the jobs we do, planning and implementing interventions for the children young people and families that we work with every day.

### **S** pecific

### **M** easurable

### **A** cheivable

### **R** ealistic or some use the term Relevant

### **T** imely

Our plans that we write all have outcomes that we want to achieve. Outcomes are what we want for the child or young person, that their needs are being met and that our concerns and risks posed to these children have lowered in order for them to be the best that they can be. This is our goal in writing our plans. A **goal** can be defined as “*The purpose toward which an endeavor is directed; an objective*” meaning where we want to be when we have finished working with this family.

Along the way, things change for children and families, new concerns arise, supportive mechanisms are identified and goals that we have set within our plans are completed. We need to make sure this is reflected in the plans that we write, there should not be one plan for a child in a year’s long intervention, new plans are formed as we review cases and tasks are completed.

By using the SMART process in our plans, we are making the concerns clear to parent’s carers and other professionals. We use jargon-free writing to make sure that everyone understands what their role is in the plan, that they are able to complete set tasks and this will have a positive impact for the child or young person. Parents and carers cannot say they don’t understand, that they didn’t know they were supposed to make changes or complete set tasks because they were part of the plan building as we check with them time and time again with each task...do you understand? What is your view on this?

In any professional picking up one of your SMART care plans, whether this be a child protection plan, a Child in Need plan, a Team around the Family plan, Pathway plan, what- ever plan you are writing, that professional will know what to be worried about, what we want for this child or young person and what they need to do to get them there. It is a key document in any child's file and something that has gravity to the child's wellbeing. A successful SMART plan can help bring about change needed to promote the welfare of a child.

So in writing a plan we must start at the end. What is it we are trying to achieve. This will tell us where to start. When you go on a journey in the car, you go knowing where you are travelling to not deciding along the way which turning to take, how much petrol you will need and how long it will take you. Start with the end in mind.

So when you write your objectives consider these key points...

**Good Outcome Checklist:**

**Concise** – statement should be to the point

**Specifies an expected effect** - may be a population health problem, risk or behaviour that we want to achieve – it is a positive

**Jargon-free** – use plan language, no acronyms

**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

**Declarative Statement** – simple, definitive statement.

Now write your plan....

## S.M.A.R.T. goal setting: Specific

What exactly do you want to achieve? The more specific your description, the bigger the chance you'll get exactly that. S.M.A.R.T. goal setting clarifies the difference between 'I want to be a millionaire' and 'I want to make €50.000 a month for the next ten years by creating a new software product'.

Specific means that the objective is concrete, detailed, focused and well defined. The outcome is stated in numbers, percentages, or frequency. Objectives should communicate *EXACTLY* what you would like to see happen.

Questions you may ask yourself when setting your goals and objectives are:

- What exactly do I want to achieve?
- Where?
- How?
- When?
- With whom?
- For whom?
- What have I got to do to get there?
- Limitations that may prevent us getting there?

## **S.M.A.R.T. goal setting: Measurable**

*Is it measurable and can we measure it?*

This means that the objective can be measured and the measurement source is identified. All activities should be measurable at some level. It could be something as clear as school attendance figures and statistical data to actually seeing a physical difference in a child's appearance from being poor/unkept to becoming clean smart presentable in appropriate/well fitted clothes. It needs to be something that you can compare with before and now. These changes and measured objectives need to be mapped to the goals set within what we are worried about and maintainable. So yes it's great that a child's appearance has improved and no longer unkempt, but the measurable aspect needs to be maintained.

To determine if your objective is measurable, ask questions such as:

- How much? How many?
- How will I know when it is accomplished?
- How will I know that the change has occurred?
- Can these measurements be obtained or maintained?

## **S.M.A.R.T. goal setting: Achievable**

*With a reasonable amount of effort and application can the objective be achieved??*

The objective or expectation of what will be accomplished must be realistic to be completed given the time period, resources allocated, etc.

When considering this aspect in your plan, it is important to be clear on who is accountable for tasks and clear on whether these aspects are agreed. If a parent feels that their use of alcohol is not a concern and feel no wish to change, then tasks and objectives about the risk this poses to the children are less likely to be achieved and therefore tasks should focus on steps to achieve this so for example raising parents' understanding of the impacts on the child before such interventions as a detox would work.

Another key point here is considering the amount of work tasks that a person must complete in time frames set. Is it going to be achievable for a parent to make several changes whilst also providing items for a child's bedroom all in a short space of time? No. Don't set people up to fail, consider if it could be achieved and what is needed to achieve.

Consider these pointers...

- Can we get it done in the proposed timeframe?
- Do I understand the limitations and constraints?
- Has anyone else done this successfully?
- Is this possible?

## **S.M.A.R.T. goal setting: Realistic**

*Can you realistically achieve the objectives with the resources you have?*

To be realistic, it must represent an objective toward which you are all willing and able to work. Objectives that are achievable, may not be realistic, however, realistic does not mean easy. Your objective is probably realistic if you truly believe that it can be accomplished. It is realistic that a child shall have their basic needs met by their main care giver. It is not realistic to expect a life long heroin user to become clean within 48 hours and remain clean for the rest of their lives. Yet this is still needed so how to we address this? We use our plan to create stepping stones to make this achievable. Is it physically possible to raise a childs attendance at school from 25% to 95% over the space of one week? No its not, so again we need to consider the steps we take to achieve.

Our plan needs to be robust and clear so that it can be used as a working document to affect change, it needs to be reviewable in such as seeing when something may become realistic but also all points within the plan need to be relevant to the aim of the plan, the needs of the child or young person in question. Is it realistic to their needs?

Ask yourselves these questions when considering if your plan is realistic...

- Have you accomplished anything similar in the past?
- What conditions would have to exist to accomplish this objective.
- Can we do this with the resources we have?
- Do you need to revisit priorities to make this happen?

## **S.M.A.R.T. goal setting: Timely**

*When will this objective be accomplished?*

This means stating clearly when the objective will be achieved. Deadlines create the all-important sense of urgency but also make it clear when something needs to be done in the interests of the child.

In setting timescales on tasks and outcomes, it is important to think about actual dates. Ongoing could be from now until the end of time, ASAP could be today tomorrow or right now this very second, for those who are busy there “as possible” could be in a months time. These aren’t clear they aren’t SMART ways of planning for our children.

But then we must also think, all of our tasks and outcomes are important, making change in the interest of the child in question is important, but in order to achieve, can they all be done at the same time? Does some tasks need to be completed before others? Support workers doing direct work cannot fulfil this aspect until the referral has been made by the relevant professional. Steps to achieve need to be considered here. Further more if you set a parent/carer umpteen tasks all needing completing within 1 week, this will likely scare them encourage disengagement and not bring about change that is needed. Prioritise according the needs of the child.

The most important aspect of being timely within care planning is that of the child’s timeframe. A child’s needs cannot go unmet, they have basic requirements that must be fulfilled. Our plan is to support the family in the care of the child, keep them safe and promote their welfare. But we must be realistic to the likelihood of change, and change in the child’s timescale. For example is a long time chaotic heroin user able to make and sustain significant changes in a short space of time in order to care for a new born baby? The answer is unlikely. Furthermore if we have been planning and providing interventions for the same family over and over for a number of years and no change has been made, is it ok to set another month or two within your plan to try again? Consider the child’s journey, their needs and what is realistic to the child’s wellbeing in terms of timely and long term affects on their development.

Ask yourselves these questions?

- Are there clear time frames attached to the objective?(e.g. specific dates)
- If the objective goes beyond the review period, have you set milestone dates?
- Are there other objectives which will depend upon the completion of this one?
- What could impact / compromise the deadline? How can you mitigate these if they are of a concern?
- Is the deadline realistic?

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Some methodologists have used this method and taken it further to create the use of *SMARTER* planning

So taking the SMART objectives as above with the added bonus of

## ***Encompassing***

Empowering, Ethical , Evaluated, Engaging

And...

## ***Reviewed***

Research based, Relevant, Resources, Recorded

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?

When you have your review meetings and these are minuted reflecting over your plan these should guide you in completing a new plan. Remember to check off those completed or achieved tasks or outcomes; this is a sense of achievement for the family and for your hard work. You are affecting change to better a child or young person's life. If this child or young person comes back in 20 years to view their file, they will see the work that was completed and the impact it had on their lives.

Remember to also add in new tasks, as we all know things change, people come and people go. So through the times of our intervention it is more than normal that new plans will have achieved outcomes as well as new outcomes and tasks being added. But in each review you must again reflect over these three points, as well as considering the needs of the child within the SMART principles.