

I'm so excited to be with you today to talk all about goal development. Goal development is very, very important for our students, and we are going to talk about what would make functional goals for our early learners with autism.

I feel like goal development is something that is a bit science and a bit of an art form. Over the past 20 years, I have honed that craft and I'm excited to share with you IEP goals that are really functional, that are going to help drive your intervention, and you're not going to be thinking to yourself, okay, what do we work on? How do I help my student? Our learning objectives are that you'll be able to list five questions to review when developing IEPs, you'll be able to list eight foundational skills that are important to consider for younger autistic students, and you'll be able to list eight functional and specific goals for younger autistic students. We are going to go over very specific ways that we can goal set.

Some of these areas when we are doing more play-based therapy and we're working with our own children, sometimes it's hard to know how do I take data on that? How do I write a goal for that? How do I goal set? How do we know that we're making progress? We're going to make some of these ideas like joint attention, play-based therapy become more concrete and more measurable, as well. I don't want you to feel overwhelmed. Sometimes we can be really overwhelmed, whether we're from a parental viewpoint and we're sitting in IEP meeting, and we're looking at these goals and we're thinking, okay, are these good goals? I don't know if these are good goals. Or we are the one doing the evaluation and making sure that we want to have great goals that are going to help our students increase their communication and start communicating.

We want to start here. Can you talk with parents to hear about their biggest concerns? We all know that parents are such a big part of the team for any child, but especially autistic parents. We need to make sure that our families who have an autistic child really have ongoing communication with either the school team, the early intervention team, the clinic team, because parents know their children best, and so it's really, really important for us to talk with them before goal set and say, "What are your biggest concerns?" Usually at this age for toddlers and preschool age students, it's just that their child is not yet communicating. Or one of the families that I work with, their child is talking a lot, but they were really concerned because their child, they feel, doesn't have functional communication, so they really don't have a lot of social engagement yet, and things like that. Then we've been targeting that in therapy. But it's really, really good, because if we don't ask these questions directly, then we're just kind of guessing. We're kind of guessing about what we need to be concerned about.

Can you talk with other team members to discuss the student's communication in other environments? It's very, very eye opening to talk to if the child is in a daycare, or if the child is in a school system. If the child goes to a clinic and is getting other services, it's important to be able to talk to those people and usually we have to have some kind of documentation about that, but it's good to really be in the loop. Because a child, just like we talked about how it's so important to do an observation as part of our assessment, we want to make sure that we are trying to get a really complete picture of how the child is functioning across environment. This is going to help us when we talk to other team members. Taking in all this information and the assessment is going to help us set really functional goals for our students.

Some things to consider when we're goal setting, what behavior are we targeting, is it appropriate for the client? Is it specific, is it observable, and what is the mastery criterion? These are things that we need to always be thinking about. This came from a really great article, and I'll have references at the end of this course, too, if you want to go and read some of the articles for further information. But I really love this, because I do a lot of consulting with professionals. I was talking to a speech therapist and she was working with a child who was in this age group and they were not yet communicating. She was seeing this student through telehealth due to the pandemic and she said, "You know what? I've

had a really hard time. The student's not very engaged." The student is nonverbal. One of the targets they were working on was prepositions, words like in and on and out.

We talked through what the assessment was for that student and the speech therapist after thinking about and analyzing the data said, "You know what? I don't think this is the most appropriate goal for my client. not right now. There's other things that we could be targeting." Sometimes it's hard for us when it's our own child or when we're in the trenches with the student to think, is this appropriate? Why am I working on this specific target? I got really clear on being able to describe why I was working on the goals working on when I worked in a non-public program. For most of my life, I worked in schools and non-public programs, so for students who had a lot of behavioral barriers. I would have special education directors come in. I was like 23 at the time and I remember them saying like, "Well, why are you working on this goal? What does that look like in therapy?"

23-year-old me was very nervous to answer those questions. And over the years I've flexed that muscle, right? I've been working it out. I've been in a lot of really kind of high-pressure meetings. And so, now I feel really comfortable saying, "Well, you know what? This is the assessment that we did. This was my observation. These are my clinical recommendations. And based on that, this is the goal, and this is how it's going for the student." That is something that I think comes in over time, making sure that something's appropriate. Sometimes we can make our best guess based on assessment and the student-parent input about what the goal should be, and we really just have to take that data to make sure, "Hey, it is appropriate." Or, "You know what? I think we need to shift gears here." These are some things to think about and things that I always ask myself when I'm putting together goals for my client.

So I love this, "Do this, not that." Chelsea will increase her expressive language skills by labeling preferred items, a total of 12, without prompts over two consecutive sessions. This is something we want to do. This is very specific. It has 12 in there. It says what the prompting level is and it says over how many sessions. Very, very specific. This is a great goal. If you were passing this child onto me and I was doing therapy, I would have an idea of where to get started. I like that we start with preferred items, because for students who are new to labeling, we want to start with something really preferred. Okay? I used to have a student who loved Daniel the tiger. The owl I think is from Daniel the tiger, and so this was one of our targets for that student, because it was something they really, really loved. Is it important to be able to label pencil? Maybe eventually, but not initially. We want to start with preferred items.

We don't want to have a goal that says something like, "Chelsea will label with 80% accuracy." That doesn't give me enough information. It's too vague. I can't pick that up and implement it in therapy should Chelsea move. That's really always how we have to operate. We want to make sure things are specific. Because, too, from a parental standpoint, labeling might be something that your child is going to work on for different IEPs going forward if labeling is something your child is having a bit of trouble with and they need support. And that's okay, but we want to make sure that we have a number in there. We have an idea. We're working on preferred items. We're working on nouns in this objective or this goal, not actions yet. Those are all important things to note.

Do this, not that. Keep it functional. Okay. The student will request 10 preferred items or actions without prompting over three consecutive sessions. Okay, so we're working on requesting here. We're going to do this. It's very specific. We are not going to do the one below. "Chelsea will expressively identify prepositions." This is an example that I gave you before, but not to say that prepositions are bad to work on in therapy, it's just to say that there are other more functional language, speech and language targets, that we can address with our students before we get to prepositions. We want to make sure that our students are communicating. Right? The whole name of the course is start communicating today. We're going to start our communication by telling somebody something that we want. This is

how communication starts. It's not the only thing that we want to focus on, but it is one aspect. Okay? My little smiley and my little frowney face.

Some goals may include, now this is going to be completely dependent on your assessment, but these are some early learner skills that we're going to be about time and time again in the course, joint attention, a shared social activity, imitation, I do something, you do something, requesting, following one step directions, matching, play, so important for our kids, we're going to talk about a lot of examples of that, filling in the blank for functional phrases or fun phrases, and then labeling. These will be the foundational skills that we talk about time and time again that are embedded across the course. I learn best when there's a lot of repetition, and so we're going to talk about these a lot. In one of the modules, we're going to go over each area in depth so you can start working on these with your own child.

I, in this module, am going to give you some ideas if you are going to goal set for these. Okay? Whether it's your own child or you are the professional goal setting, I want to give you ideas. You're going to get a principle with very specific information that you can print off or save to your computer, however you like to do things. Okay, so for the first one, joint attention. Here's an example of a functional goal. "Nate will increase his joint attention skills by engaging in a variety of shared activities with the therapist for a duration of three minutes without prompts over two consecutive sessions." Those shared activities, this would be kind of the overarching goal and then we would have some different ideas underneath. We know that it's going to be three minutes. In our assessment we've probably taken a baseline, so Nate probably can engage for maybe 30 seconds or maybe this is really hard for him period. We know that joint attention, this social reciprocity, is so important for our students, for autistic students.

And so, these might be some of the objectives. We might target this while playing with preferred toys. We might have toys that the student really loves and enjoys and we might engage in those together. We might do this while looking at books. Books are huge. I always bring books for every session, but especially for my little ones. Very, very important. Then looking at turn-taking activities. Okay, so looking at turn taking activities that you might do with a student: playing a game, rolling a ball back and forth, jumping on a trampoline. If you're doing an activity together and it's a shared activity and you both know that you're doing that activity, we're working on joint attention. Okay.

Onto non-verbal imitation. "When provided with a model by the therapist, Benny will imitate actions with a variety of objects without prompts." This could be banging on a drum. We each have a drum. I do it, he does it. I have a car on a race track. We're going to talk about that a lot. These are simple toys that are good foundational things for you to have with your children. I have the car track, I have my own car, I push it down. Wee. Benny picks a car up and he pushes it down the track. These are learning how to learn foundational skills. Really important. When you're working on these imitation skills, you're working on so many things. You're working on learner engagement, it's joint attention, it's imitation, and so there's so much. It's play based. You're getting a lot of bang for your buck when you work on these different skills. That might be an example of how we goal set for them.

Verbal imitation, if your child or student is ready to work on verbal imitation, "Mallory will increase her overall expressive language skills by imitating one and two syllable words when modeled by the therapist or parent with 90% accuracy over two consecutive sessions." Verbal imitation, when my a child is ready, is something that I work on with them directly. It can be embedded in play, but it's something that we target, because students really need that practice with imitation.

Requesting. If you're working on requesting with your students, you might have a goal like this. "The student will request 10 preferred items or actions without prompting over three consecutive sessions." That might look like us having a lot of

different items out, and the student would request them, and we would work on that together. This would be an exciting skill to work on, and one that will show your child that their communication is powerful. That might mean that they are verbalizing the item or the activity that they want. It might mean that they're giving you a picture that has the item or activity on there. It might mean that they're signing it.

When my own children were very small, my children are all typically developing, but when they were small and they were frustrated because they couldn't communicate in a very specific way, I would work on sign language them. Baby sign language, a lot of people do that. And so, I would really work on very specific things. My one daughter, she loved apple, so we would work on apple. We would work on signing music. They loved that. Going for a walk. That's really, really important to see where your child is at, because a big part of our little ones feeling frustrated is that they can't communicate what they want and what they need throughout their day. And it is. It would be very, very frustrating if I couldn't tell you that I wanted to get Starbucks in the morning and I was relying on someone else to help me do that, it would be very, very frustrating. We want to make sure that we're able to support our little ones and we are able to help them get their wants and needs met across the day. This might be a way to goal set for requesting.

The really important thing to think about, too, is that if you have a child and you've given them a standardized test and requesting is not something that is assessed on that standardized test, that you want to include that as part of your observation. Is the student able to tell their mom that they want to eat something when you're in the home environment? Is the student able to tell their teacher that they want to play at a certain center time, that they want to go outside, that they want to go on the swing? These are things that are so important, because when our students are able to navigate their environment and request things that they want and need across their day, they start to understand, okay, I do something, I get something. I do something, I get them get something. That shows them that their communication is powerful. It's absolutely amazing to see.

The thing that we want to be really cognizant of is that we want to start with specific targets. We want to start with requesting specific items or actions or activities that our children really love and enjoy. This is going to help them differentiate between different things that they want and it's going to help build their vocabulary. We do not want to start with very specific requests. We do not want to start with more. I see that a lot, so I want to bring that up. We don't want to start with more because a lot of students will over generalize that, and then they will have nothing in their area, and they will be signing more. The person who is the listener in that conversation will think, well, what do you want more of? You don't have anything. And so, a lot of students will over generalize that. Now, once your child has more ways to communicate, it's fine to teach some of those general signs, but we want to start with things that are very specific at first so we don't have any confusion about that.

All right. Following one step directions is another really wonderful goal and one of our foundational skills for the course. This is how I might goal set for that. "In the classroom environment, the student will follow functional one-step directions, a total of," we're going to put a number in there, "based on the student's assessment and how they're learning with 90% accuracy over two consecutive sessions." Some examples of this might be, "Come here," "Can you throw this away?" "Can you get a marker or get a crayon?" And, "Can you grab a book?" These are things that the students in the classroom environment might just be working on. Our students, based on their assessment, may mean more direct instruction with following these one step-directions. We want to think about how are these one step directions that we're potentially targeting either in the home environment or the school environment, can they be generalized to other settings? That's really, really important.

There's going to be times where you work on specific ones to each environment, and that's fine, too. I have a student who I see in his house and his mom and sister and dad are always present, and so one-step directions was very new for

the student. And so when we started working on it, I would maybe have like a little Toy. the student would play with it or maybe it was something he actually really wasn't that excited about and didn't mind giving it to somebody else, and so I would say, "Can you give this to mommy?" And then, because this was hard for the student, he wasn't able to do it at first, I would have the item, and I would point. I would point to mommy. "Can you give this to mommy?" "Oh, you gave it to mommy. Wow. Can you give this to sister? Nice job. You gave that to your sister."

When I think of things like that, I think, okay, this is really functional. This could be generalized to a functional routine across the child's day. There are going to be times where he needs to give to something to mommy. There are going to be times where he needs to give something to his sister. When I pick out specific targets for my students, I'm always thinking to myself, how is this functional? Why am I teaching this? There was a conference I went to and the speaker said, "One time I saw an autistic child, or maybe it was an adult, I can't remember, that had a shirt on and on the front, it said, I have autism, and on the back it said, don't waste my time." And I love that. I love it so much, because that is how important I think goal setting is.

If you're a parent and you're looking over an IEP or you're looking over goals from your provider and you're confused on why they've been set, it's absolutely important for you to speak up. It's not unprofessional. You absolutely have to advocate for your children. And likewise, if you're a clinician and the parents really, really want something and you feel like, oh, but you know, there's X, Y, and Z that maybe we feel like we have to do first, it's good to have that dialogue. It's good to have professional dialogue. We don't have to agree about everything. Oftentimes there are going to be things that we are going to disagree about, and that's okay. It's just good to have that ongoing communication from both sides of the table.

All right, matching. "Leena will increase her overall receptive language skills by matching identical pictures when presented with a field of three pictures and given it a targeted picture to match without prompts over two consecutive sessions." This is very, very important. We are going to talk about how we can work on matching with identical pictures. We're going to talk about matching a mini object to a picture. Matching is such a great skill to work on with students because it's another one of those areas. When we're and we're working on matching, we're working on our scanning skills, we're working on looking at different items, we're working on something that's more teacher-led or therapist-led or parent-led, and so there's a lot of things that we can work on skill wise just with matching.

There's so many areas of your life where matching is important. Even my own little kids, they try to put together their laundry. Right? Okay. "We're matching our socks." Right? This can help with laundry time. My preschool-aged son helps with that. He doesn't love it, but it's something that's functional. And so when we're working on these tasks, we have to see the scope and sequence. Like, why are we working on matching? Well, we're working on matching because it's great for vocabulary enrichment. It's great for overall receptive language skills. It's great because that matching generalizes to other functional routines in my student's day. Maybe the student's going to play memory with a friend at a center time. That's matching. Matching just permeates throughout our day when we really think about it.

Play. Play is so, so important. "Lee will increase her independent play skills by engaging with a variety of novel toys, Legos, playdough, sound puzzles for a duration of five minutes without prompts over two consecutive sessions." Sometimes independent play is something that's really important for our children, and so sometimes our kids may kind of get stuck in playing with the same toys all the time, and they may play with certain toys in a certain way, which is okay. But what I try to do when I see my little ones in the home environment and in the school environment is I make sure that I have a variety of different toys. I don't bring the same thing each time.

One of the families I work with was asking me like, "Well, why do you bring different stuff all the time?" Because I want to work on that flexibility. I want to work on increasing this child's repertoire of play. That's so important. Play is how we explore the world when our kids are younger. Play-based sessions are how I work with my little ones. I've had parents say, "Well, this other speech therapist does things very differently. She makes my child sit in a chair. He can't get up. That's how the session's run. He doesn't really like it. He whines a lot."

Well, that's not how I run my sessions. You can use applied behavior analysis and speech therapy and you can have a play-based sessions where you're working on a lot of different skills systematically. I have some students who the whole session is very play-based and then I have some students where the whole session is play-based and a portion is it a table. It really just depends on the student, so don't think that you have to go one way or the other. You're going to get into a groove in working with your own child or with children this age. There's a lot of different methodologies out there. But what I urge you to do is think about these functional skills, these foundational skills we're talking about in this course, take data on them and analyze how's your child doing? Are they communicating now? If they're not, what can we change about our intervention? That's what's so important is that we need to make sure that we're analyzing how our kids are doing.

All right. Fill-ins. Love working on fill-ins. A goal for a fill-in might look like this. "When presented with a fill in the blank phrase, Rylee will fill in the blank with a logical answer with 90% accuracy over two consecutive sessions." This is a really great goal for working on fill-ins. This is kind of the basis, the very bedrock basis for this kind of back and forth talking together. An example of a fill-in might be "A, B, C ..." the student says, "D." "One, two, three ..." the student says, "four." If I'm singing a song with a student, (singing). They say, "Star." (singing). They say spider. This is where I say something, you say something. I say something, you say something.

That's kind of the very basic way that we start having conversations. I'm blowing bubbles. And I say, "Ready, set," and the child says, "Go!" And I blow all the bubbles. I love that. Bubbles are so fun. This is a very important thing to think about. Oftentimes I'll see on Facebook groups and other different forum, "Oh, my autistic preschool-age student is really having a hard time with comprehension questions, they're not able to answer them." I always think to myself, if I was able to talk to that person who's having that trouble or if I was part of that child's team, I'm always thinking to myself, well, can they fill in the blank for functional phrases? (singing). You know? Things like that. Because this fill-in is a really great foundational skill that is going to help scaffold our students ability then to eventually answer questions. This is a great foundational skill for that. This is really the basis in the foundation for more advanced conversation, which is super fun, too.

Labeling. Okay, labeling. If your child is at a spot where they are working on labeling, we want to make sure that we're working on labeling preferred items or preferred actions or preferred people. The goal might look something like this. "When shown a picture, the student will label preferred items." I usually, for my autistic students, do put a number in there. A total of six. Now, this is merely based on how well I know the child right now and how well with the assessment. We're making our effort to say how many we think we're going to do. I like to do that, because for an autistic student, if labeling is something very new for them, and maybe in that first IEP year, that first clinical year, that first documentation of the goal, maybe they are able to do 10 different labels. It doesn't mean that on that next time that we goal set for them that we're not going to work on labeling anymore.

It's totally fine. I have students who are a little bit older and they're working on labeling because it's still a very good skill if we need to support our students' expressive language. And so, we want to make sure that these things are really, really fun for the student. We don't want to start working on labeling pencil for our preschool student who's really having a difficult time with writing. We don't want to start working labeling bathroom with our four year old who's still working on potty training. We don't want to do that. We want to start working on labeling fun things, things the student

loves and enjoys. Will we eventually get to a time where we're working on labeling things like spoon and fork and cup and functional items? Absolutely. Absolutely. But it's not where we're going to start. Okay? It's not where we're going to start.

When we're working with autistic students, and any student who has a complex communication delay, we know that communication's tough. It's hard. And we want to keep our sessions fun and functional. How do we do that? We keep it fun by working on things that are preferred. Yes, preferred things. We keep it functional by making sure that we analyze the targets that we're working on with our students. These might be some potential items: showing a picture, if you can, of the items, of bubbles, of a book, of an elephant. That's a great way to work on that.

Oh my goodness. Okay. That was a lot of information about goal setting. Goal setting is something that's so very important, whether you are doing your own assessment, analyzing that assessment in goal setting, or whether you're a parent who has just been given whole information about goals that your child is going to be working on at intervention. It's very, very important to think about. How are these tied directly to my assessment? How are these going to help us have a scope and sequence when we're working with our children in our sessions? And what should we be focusing on? I think that's the hardest part, especially if we have a student who is not able to complete much of an assessment. If we have a student who's not yet communicating, it's really hard to know, well, where do we start? So, we really need to think about these foundational skills.

We will talk about each one of those foundational skills at length in the different modules. Okay, Rose, I heard you talk about joint attention and it's very important, but how do we work on it? What does it look like if I'm the mom and I want to work on increasing my child's joint attention? How do I get started doing that now? I'm going to give you a bunch of different ideas for that. I'm excited to share. You're going to love that module. Okay, so with this, you are going to get a principle which is going to be a goal bank, and it's going to be a PDF. You can save it to your computer. You can print it off. It's really great information that you can have. It just gets you started in thinking about this. Sometimes you need to individualize, obviously, for your own children or for your own clients, but it's going to have the different foundational areas and how you can goal set for those. IEPs can be very hard to write in goals.

The next module, I'm so excited about. It's getting started with materials. I think sometimes it's hard to know, okay, well, I know I need to work on these skills, but where do I even get started? How do I even begin? I do a lot of different consulting with different business owners and different families, and one of the main things that we talk about is, "Okay, well, what materials do I need? How do I get started?" I'm going to share with you a little neat peek into my favorite go-to items when I'm working with toddlers and preschool-aged students who have autism. You don't want to get overwhelmed in needing all these different things, but it's good to have a basis of, "Okay, these are our foundational skills. This was our assessment. Now we have our goals. Okay, I'm excited to get ready, Rose, on communication today, but where do we start and what do I need?" Some of the stuff you may just completely already have laying around, but some of the items may be new to you, too.

And so, that is what we're going to talk about in the next module. I'll see you soon.