



Actionable Goal Setting Worksheet

Section 1: Uncovering The Goal

If you've been around Advocate Together a while, you might be familiar with SMART goals. SMART is an acronym that helps people to remember some of the things that are necessary for making achievable goals. SMART stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. We're going to keep SMART as an acronym, but we're going to expand on these definitions a little bit.

What's your ideal? But before we dive right in, it's important to have space to dream. In your ideal world, what would be happening? What wouldn't be there at all? Of course, this is focused on advocacy but that doesn't necessarily mean that you're limited to thinking about your child's academics. We've provided an example scenario filled out with a parent's possible thoughts and journey through this goal setting exercise:

Example: It would be so nice to have a more peaceful and connected home. I don't want anyone to fight, I don't want the daily battles and reminders about doing homework. I want our family to be spending our weeknights laughing and doing fun things, and I want our weekends to be full of family hobbies (like camping) and adventures.

What's your ideal?

You're likely here because you haven't seen that dream become a reality yet. So, let's spend a few minutes getting real about what the problem is. Let's spend a few minutes gathering clues from your parenting reality, which might give you a direction to go with your goal.

To help you explore this, we've adapted some of the questions from page D38 of the *Twice Exceptionality Guidebook*. Some of the questions might lead to some difficult feelings or truths; that's okay and a natural part of the process.

What's the issue? Summarize the tension or friction points that your family is experiencing right now.

Example: My child and I argue often about homework. Overall, there is this tension in the house because we spend so much time fighting and not nearly as much time on our family hobbies as we used to. I have to remind my child seemingly hundreds of times before they actually sit down to do their homework.

What's the issue?

What areas of life is this impacting and how is it impacting those areas? Areas impacted might include physical health, emotional well-being, academics or school life, extracurriculars, free time/pursuit of passions, home life/responsibilities, family relationships, and social relationships.

Example: There are a few areas that are likely impacted. Let's take them one by one –

- *Academics or school life: If my child doesn't do their homework, then they will get bad grades and be seen as a bad student.*
- *Emotional well-being: It's not fun to live in a house with so much tension. No one in the house feels like they can relax.*
- *Home/life responsibilities: We fight so much during the week about homework that it makes it pretty much impossible to do anything together, let alone something we love like going camping for the weekend.*
- *Family relationships: Sometimes I worry that I say more harsh words per day to my child than loving words. I wonder why they don't just do their homework since it will make things easier for themselves and for me.*

What areas of life is this impacting and how is it impacting those areas?

How often is this an issue? Is there a specific time of day, location, or circumstance that prompts this issue? If you're already noticing a pattern to this issue, you can use this space to talk that out for yourself. If you are still uncovering potential patterns, you can think about some of the similarities between the last few times you've noticed this. If you can remember, it might also be worthwhile to think about the first time you noticed this issue and compare it to what's happening right now.

Example: My child and I fight about homework every day. Sometimes my spouse and I argue, because they are worried about whether we need to do things differently. I'm not sure if there's a specific thing that sets this off, but I can replay the scenario in my head like clockwork:

I pick my child up from school. I ask them how school was and what they learned. They usually give me a very curt answer, or sometimes they don't say anything at all. Other times they blow up and say something like, "School is the same every day!" I don't know where to go from here or what to say, so we do the car ride in silence with the radio on. When we get home, I tell my child that it's time to do their homework. This is when the resistance begins. I try to let them choose to sit at the table or the kitchen island, but that usually sets them off. We go back and forth, usually until I send my child for a "cool off period" while I make dinner. After dinner there is usually some more resistance but not fighting to the same level as before. I think both of us are tired out by this point.

How often is this an issue?

How big is the impact from this issue? This is where you can talk about how big of a deal this is to you and your family. What are the ripple effects from this? This is a place where you can investigate some of the dominos that are falling because of this situation so to speak. If there's something going on that you just have a *gut feeling* about, even if you aren't sure if it's connected to this issue, discuss that here. You can also use this space to continue unraveling the patterns that you're seeing, this time expanding your view from the immediate issue to the bigger picture, if you can.

Example: I feel like this has had a huge impact on our family. Like I said, I feel like we can't relax anymore, and this is just a big wedge between us. I feel like since we've been fighting about homework more, our whole home is so tense that even the dog is feeling on edge! No one in the house is sleeping very well, and everyone seems exhausted. The fighting (or the emotional hangover) bleeds into dinner, and the rest of the family is starting to notice or withdraw. I am also noticing that I am, inadvertently, spending more time with my child than their siblings... But it's not good time, since we're bickering or fighting. My spouse and I have noticed more strain in our relationship: On our last date night we ended up fighting about this issue, even though we have boundaries that prevent us from "talking shop" about parenting on our dates.

How big is the impact from this issue?

Who else is involved in this issue? It may help you expand on some of these ripple effects to talk directly about the other people involved in the issue. You can begin with some others that are more obvious. For advocacy goals, your child, the school, and your co-parent are good places to start. After that, you can expand your lens to see if there's anyone else that is feeling or experiencing this issue alongside you. Another way to think about this question is: whose perspectives matter here?

Example: I think the two main people involved in this are my child and myself. Despite this being a homework issue, the school isn't really involved because they don't see us fighting. My child's homework does get done (most of the time). I know that this quarreling impacts everyone in our family though. My co-parent and I have started to argue more. I notice that my other children are more tense and withdrawn from speaking at dinner. I also know that I haven't had the mental space for as much of their stuff because this homework issue with my child is eating at me so much.

Who else is involved in this issue?

What's your why? Now that you've done a little bit more digging into what the issue is, you might be thinking of all of the reasons why you want to change things. These reasons why (including your values) are helpful to outline and keep at the forefront of your mind during the goal setting and achieving process. If you aren't immediately coming to your why, you can think about some baselines: your love for your child, your desire to raise them well, and your personal/family values. These things can anchor you and help you to think deeper about the reasons for setting and achieving this goal.

Example: I love my child deeply; I want them to trust me with the world and I want them to understand in their bones that I am doing all I can to understand them deeply as they grow and change. One of our family values is connectedness, and I feel that since these arguments have gotten so frequent, we're losing the plot a little bit in terms of our connectedness. I don't want my children to feel like I am criticizing them more than I am building them up. I know that what I tell my kids becomes what they tell themselves (their

self-talk).

What's your why?

So, we've dreamed, we've explored the reality, and we've put the why at the forefront. Is it time to make an action plan yet?

As you know, there's no magic wand that can be waved to make our dreams into reality unfortunately. It can be helpful to lay bare the current reality of your advocacy life, as it can remind you how much work you've already done as well as let you see where there's more room to grow. Before jumping straight into an action plan, we're going to do some more reflection and investigation. The purpose of being so methodical and thorough is to really try and dig deep and get to the root of things. If someone makes a goal that doesn't address the root of the issue, then things aren't likely to improve even if they reach their goal because it's a band-aid solution.

Before going into the goal setting portion of the worksheet, it bears mentioning that one's frame of mind is crucial to the goal setting process. Dr. Ross Greene, as part of his [Collaborative and Proactive Solutions approach](#), asks parents to look at the child in front of them and try to understand them for who they are and what they need in this moment right now. It can be so easy to get "lost in the sauce" of parenting a bit and lose sight of the child in front of them when they are also seeing their newborn infant, their toddler, and now their child growing right before their eyes. But attempting to see the child in front of you opens your mind to one of Greene's other sayings that "kids do well if they can." Using the example above, if the parent believes that their child is resistant to homework for no reason, out of malice, or because they want to be, then it sets up a dynamic that can breed blaming, shaming, and distrust. On the other hand, if the parent can accept that their child is resistant to homework, not because they *want* to be, but because they are having some sort of problem, then it opens the parents mind to different solutions to the problem. Instead of wishing that my child could just do it, or instead of accusing them of being lazy, it could lead the parent to thinking that there might be some things that the family can work on to reduce homework struggles and live together more peacefully.

If you've made it this far, then you've likely tried some things before, even if they didn't work, and are dedicated to making change. You may have tried something multiple times, with the hopes that something will just be different the next time around. Since insanity can be defined as "doing the same thing and expecting different results," you don't want to just be doing the same things with a different attitude. Below is some space to explore things that you've tried and why they haven't worked in the past:

What I've tried	What was the result?	Why didn't that work for our family?	Why isn't that sustainable for our family?	Anything to bring into my plan going forward?
<p><i>Example: I've tried a reward chart for completing homework. Rewards were things like "Café date with Mom. Board game afternoon with Dad."</i></p>	<p><i>My child actually completed less homework when we had the chart.</i></p>	<p><i>It didn't help to incentivize my child to do their homework. Instead of arguing about homework, we started arguing about the chart.</i></p>	<p><i>It increased arguments and tensions instead of decreasing them.</i></p>	<p><i>I do want my child to be able to spend quality time with myself and their other parent. I do not want that to be seen as a reward, but as a necessity for the peace of our home.</i></p>
<p><i>Example: I have tried telling my child to do their homework.</i></p>	<p><i>This led to fights of varying degrees. The harder I nag, the more we argue.</i></p>	<p><i>It makes things tense long after the argument when we fight about homework.</i></p>	<p><i>Tension in the family prevents us from being able to rest, relax, and connect.</i></p>	<p><i>I have to change how I speak to my child, since (no matter how hard I try) I cannot control how they respond.</i></p>
<p><i>Example: I have tried avoiding the conversation of homework all together with my child.</i></p>	<p><i>They don't get their work done on time.</i></p>	<p><i>My student was not turning in their homework because they didn't get it done.</i></p>	<p><i>I do not want their academics suffering, the teachers to judge me, or my student to be othered for not doing their work.</i></p>	<p><i>Avoiding this only makes the problem worse. I do need to face this head on.</i></p>
<p>Your Turn:</p>				

S – Specific: What are the expectations associated with accomplishing this goal? Who is expected to perform? Is this based on the dream column or the reality column? Are any adjustments needed?

Example: Wow! Thinking about it, there's a lot of expectations associated with "doing their homework." When I'm saying that, I'm expecting my child to have executive functioning skills, self regulation skills, and a perfect organizational system in place... I think I might be expecting a lot from my child. I know that it can be difficult for me, an adult, to come home after a day full of meetings and immediately cook dinner. Seeing that perspective, there might be some adjustments needed to my goal to more specifically reflect my expectations on my child.

Maybe my new goal is something like: By the time my student graduates from high school, I want them to be able to do their homework. But that's really far away... How about: In the next year, I would like there to be less resistance to homework.

Specific:

M – Measurable: How can you quantify whether you're moving closer to achieving this goal? Does your goal need any adjustments?

Example: I thought I had a measurable goal, because if my student is doing all of their homework, that will be reflected academically. But working with the new version of the goal, I guess that I can track resistance to homework with another chart of some kind. Or I can make an agenda item for our family meeting where we all discuss and tally our homework quarrels for the week together. Or I can go off of vibes, because really, I just want it to feel more peaceful in our home, and I'm reaching a limit on how many times I can say the same thing.

For now, let's think about my goal like this: In the next year, I want my child to feel and act less resistant to homework. I want us to spend more time having quality time than fighting in the next year. I can measure that.

Measurable:

A – Achievable: What do you expect the results to be once you've achieved this goal? Who is going to be doing most of the work to achieve this goal? Where will they fit in time to perform tasks related to this goal? Does your goal need any adjustments?

HINT: If you're struggling to decide if this goal is achievable, you can think about things that are within your sphere of control. There are some things that are outside of your control, and all you can do is accept that and control the things that you can. In other words, if your goal has other people doing more work, then that's your idea for their goal, not your goal. Your goal is the place where you can do work to change things.

Example: When I have reached this goal, there will be more laughter than tears in our home. My child will not be bogged down for hours every day with the homework that they have to do. There will be more time for us to spend on family hobbies, like camping.

Thinking about my original goal, I think a lot of that work would have been on my child. But, it doesn't make sense to give them more work when we're clearly struggling with the amount of work they have already. So that means that I have to think about some steps to take to help achieve a more peaceful home. In order to make this goal achievable, let's think about it this way: In the next year, I want to spend more quality time with my child. I also want to help them implement a system that might reduce their resistance to homework.

Achievable:

R – Relevant: How is this goal helping you to advocate for your family values? In the final issues of Advocate Together for 2024, we asked if anyone was really having fun, and if not, how do we start moving towards a more expansive method of living? This is your space to think about that same question with your specific goal in mind. Is this goal relevant to the child in front of you? Does your goal need any adjustments?

Example: In the last year, our family was not having fun. There has been a lot of tension, though being on winter break has eased some of that. I don't want my child to be so bogged down by all of their school responsibilities. Over time, I'm worried that could dim the spark of curiosity inside of them.

Spending quality time with family is something that we put emphasis on in our home, and quarreling about homework so much makes that difficult. The system that we implement should reduce the struggle in doing homework, therefore reducing the amount that I have to remind my child about doing it (which causes fighting sometimes).

To ensure that this goal is relevant to our whole family, I can think about it this way: After having a family meeting and consulting my child, I want to help them implement a system that might reduce their resistance to homework. Additionally, I will prioritize spending quality time together to build up our relationship after this period of instability.

Relevant:

T – Time-Bound: How long will it take to see any results from this goal? How long will it take to fully achieve this goal? What is the weekly commitment for everyone involved to be able to complete this goal within the timeframe? Does this goal need any adjustments?

Example: In the past, our home felt more joyful when we prioritize quality time. I'm not sure exactly how long this will take, but I know that even for the rest of the day when there's quality time, everyone does better. We can take that day-by-day and re-evaluate come spring break. That seems reasonable.

As far as the homework struggles, I anticipate that it will take some trial and error to get a system that works for our family. I'm still not sure why my child is so resistant to doing their homework, but hopefully coming up with a system will ease some of the resistance. I think that a re-evaluation at spring break will also work well here. At that time, I think I might have a better idea of a full timeline.

Time-Bound:

Section 3: Investigating Obstacles and Gathering Information

One of the other important parts of fleshing out one's goals is anticipating and planning for potential obstacles. This isn't necessarily a full "plan b" although it might be, depending on your goal and the potential obstacles that you uncover.

Something that is worth analyzing during this phase of obstacle investigation is where those obstacles are coming from. Sometimes, external obstacles pop up, like logistical constraints.

Other times, we face internal obstacles that prevent us from achieving our goals. When faced with an obstacle, some questions worth investigating might be:

- Where is this obstacle coming from?
- What exactly is this obstacle preventing me from doing to achieve my goal?
- Are there expectations associated with this obstacle? Are those expectations in line with my personal and family values? Do I want to uphold those expectations?

This is a place where you might feel yourself getting into “well, I *have to* do [insert thing].” If you find yourself talking like that, it might be worthwhile to investigate what the consequences are for not doing that thing. Once you’re aware of the consequences, you do have the choice to accept the consequences if they outweigh the benefits of upholding the expectations.

Here's what this reflection might look like, using our example scenario:

As I was reading this section, a few different things were coming up for me. The first obstacle that I see is that my student has to do homework. If they don't do their homework, their grades will suffer, and moreover, they won't learn. But, trying to dig deeper, it's the school's expectation that my student completes their homework. The school and teachers are the ones requiring my student to do work outside of their hours. My child says that the work in class is easy, which makes me wonder why the homework isn't similarly easy... I am worried that it will make me look like a bad parent if I don't make my child do their homework. At the same time, I wonder what the benefits of homework are and whether we can reduce the load that my child has to complete in the first place? Having so many arguments about homework is preventing our family from having close, trusting relationships to the degree that we'd like.

I want to dig deeper into that last thing a bit more. It is an obstacle to argue so much, because when we are arguing, that's not the kind of quality time I want to have. We don't have time to plan for family hobbies or do family game nights (and if we try, then it goes sour) when things are so tense in the house. I know that part of this is because whenever I say anything it causes a fight. I feel like I need to remind them to do their homework, and at the same time, broaching the subject itself feels so loaded at this point.

Another potential obstacle to prioritizing family time is that every single member of the family is quite simply busy. My spouse and I work full time, our kids are in school during the week, extra-curriculars on the weekends, and camps during breaks. That makes it difficult for us to all find time together when we're not totally worn out and needing rest. Hearing myself say that, it is within my control to help my family prioritize more time together, outside of our non-negotiable obligations.

What obstacles do you see your child and yourself on this journey?



One of the most common internal obstacles that we see parents facing is fear and insecurity. This is not a judgment, and, in fact, many parts of mainstream culture reinforce parental fear and insecurity. It's really easy to spiral to a place of "If I don't do [insert] for my child right now, then they will end up unhappy, unsuccessful, and/or in an unhealthy place." When fear is entering into one's internal dialogue or seeping into one's actions, it might be worth it to take a step back and deeply reflect on who is saying those things, whether you want to listen to them, and how strongly you believe their position based on outside evidence. This is a common occurrence with families who are trying their hardest and doing their best to raise their children. When a conversation to root out some of the fear is held, many families can attest to feeling more empowered and confident in their path, even if it's unique.

Often, when parents are faced with fear, they are faced with some unknowns about their child's future. It can be easy for the brain (especially if you're the planning type) to fill that space of "unknown" with worst case scenarios. This is a common thought pattern known as catastrophizing. One of the most impactful methods of countering catastrophizing is looking for counter evidence toward a more expansive view of the future. So, if we take the spiraling worry from the paragraph above, then to counter that spiral, the parent might look for counter evidence, evidence that shows that their child will be happy, successful, and/or healthy whether or not we do this *right now*.

Teasing out fear and uncertainty for yourself: Although it might be difficult, this is the place where you can hang your self-judgements at the door. If you think that voice in your head saying "[insert negative thing]" is stupid and you wish it would go away, use this space to talk back to that voice. If you think that voice is secretly right, use this space to show yourself tangibly that it might not be right. If you find yourself in that place of far paralysis, where everything about this issue feels so scary, you can go back to the first section and tease out your ideal scenario some more. Or you can tackle this activity with just one of the fearful thoughts that's running through your mind; sometimes, talking through one fear is your emotional limit for the time being. The parent in the example likely has more than one fear to work through, but we want you to think through this in your own words:

The fear:	Reasons that I'm fearful:	Counter evidence that might expand my worldview:
<i>Example: I fear that my child will never learn to do their homework.</i>	<i>They can't do it right now. They don't seem to want to do it.</i>	<i>My child is young. My child is struggling, but that doesn't mean that they'll never improve their skills.</i>
Your Turn:		

Section 4: Creating an Action Plan to Achieve Your Goal

Okay, you've written a lot of information and dug into a lot! Finally, we're ready to make an action plan. This is a place for you to make a to-do list for yourself. It might be easier to write an action plan full of what everyone else needs to do, but you can't always control how others act. As hard as it might be, the most worthwhile place to put your energy into is in the things that *you* can do to get closer to your goals. As you're piecing it all together, remember these tips: You can do things in phases. You can check in and pivot as many times as you need. You can think of some substitutions for parts of the plan that might work depending on where you are at that exact moment. We've left room for you to make this plan in whatever way works for you, and we've begun to write a plan for our example scenario.

Example: Okay, this plan is going to be a lot different than what I expected. Phase one of the plan is information gathering:

- *Talk with the school about their homework policy*
- *Talk with my family about what they think would reduce homework struggles*
- *I found this article on the Davidson blog, "Communication in the Gifted and Twice-Exceptional Family" that has information and resources that I'm still combing through and digesting.*
- *Outline the core tenants of Family Time and begin to build in time during the family*

meetings to revisit and refine the definition

Phase two of the plan involves making some decisions as a family:

- *Plan out quality time on the calendar, making sure this is understood by every member of the family as non-negotiable. This is different from an obligation. Our non-negotiables have net benefits for us individually and as a family. An obligation is something that is done because others tell us to do it.*
- *Decide whether my child will continue to do their homework exactly as the school is asking (depending on their answers during the meeting).*
 - *If the school is flexible, then we will work with the education team and trial a new homework plan.*
 - *If the school is inflexible about homework, then our family will be discussing the next steps at that point. We would consider taking our advocacy up the chain of command and pulling our child out of that school if it comes to that.*
- *Make detailed notes or track this planning and execution in detail. This will be useful for checking in with myself.*
 - *This means that I will be tracking my school advocacy, moments of quality time with my child, as well as days that we still argue about homework.*

Action Plan:

Conclusion: Following Up and Celebrating

If you've made it this far, then you've probably realized that this worksheet isn't a magic bullet that's going to magically make your goals appear completed. This process is trial, error, and experimentation. How do you know if your goal is actually getting closer to completion? You can check in on your progress, and come back to the reflection questions throughout this worksheet. If, during the check in, things aren't going how you expected, then you have a chance (and maybe a backup plan) to pivot.

Here you can sketch out when and how you'll check in on your goals:

Example: I said that I'd check in at spring break on my child resistance to homework and reflect on our quality time at that point. Here are some things that I am hoping to reflect on at that time:

- *Where are we in the process of changing the homework routine for my child? What have I done with the school? What has our family done outside of school?*
- *Has the quality time made our home feel more joyful? Do I feel like I am building back some trust with my child? What has been my favorite memory so far? What has been my child's favorite memory so far?*
- *Does our goal need any adjustments after learning so much and trying some new things?*

Follow-Up Plan:

You might find that things are still the same in a few months, or you've made little headway on your goal at the first check in. This could be a sign that there's another pattern to uncover, or another obstacle that is getting in the way. It's not a failure to have to reformat your goal. It might be worthwhile to go back through some of the steps above with the new information that you've gathered.

As we're starting to wrap up this activity, there's one more pattern that's common when striving for goals that has potentially hindered other parents. Sometimes, it's easy to get lost in the goal-setting forest, so much that you stop seeing the trees (your progress). It might be a hopeful and motivating end to come up with some ideas for how you're going to celebrate the small wins. This doesn't have to be anything big, or even anything out of the ordinary. This is meant to help you take a beat during this process to let yourself feel some joy and satisfaction, since goal setting can be hard and serious and slow. In other words, how are you going to treat yourself along the way?

Example: This is a good idea. I didn't think about this since using a reward system for my

child didn't work. But this is different. It's a reward for me, or for our whole family.

- *Every day that we go without fighting I can write a positive memory about that day in a journal/safe place.*
- *Once we have a few weeks that are quarrel free under our belts, we're probably going to begin planning a family camping trip. Looking forward to this and getting excited for this trip will hopefully be motivation to keep the vibes positive in the house.*

Plan for Charting Progress and Celebrating Along the Way: