

Well-formed Goals

1. Goals are important to the client.

- Goals are well formed when they belong to the client and are expressed in the client's language.
- This characteristic constitutes a practice principle that rests on the belief that clients whose goals are respected are more motivated than those whose goals are overlooked.

2. The goals are small.

- Small goals are easier to achieve than large ones.
- For example, it is easier to "fill out one job application" than to "get a job."

3. The goals are concrete, specific, and behavioral.

- Goals so characterized help both client and worker know when progress is occurring.
- For example, "going out to lunch with a friend twice a week" is preferable to "getting more involved with others."

4. The goals seek presence rather than absence.

- Clients, when asked about their goals, often tell workers what they want eliminated from their lives, for example, "feeling discouraged."
- Outcomes are improved when clients are helped to express their goals as the presence of something, for example, "taking walks" rather than the absence of something.

5. The goals have beginnings rather than endings.

- Clients initially tend to conceptualize their goals as end points, for example, "doing better in school."
- Workers aware that achieving goals is a process can help by encouraging clients to conceptualize the first steps to their desired ends, such as, "completing daily homework assignments."

6. The goals are realistic within the context of the client's life.

- This characteristic speaks for itself and is usually achieved automatically in the course of developing goals

7. The goals are perceived by the client as involving "hard work."

- Encouraging clients to think about their goals in this way is both realistic and useful for protecting the client's dignity.
- It is realistic, because goals call for changes in the client, and change is difficult.
- It protects the client's dignity because, first, if the client achieves the goal, the achievement is noteworthy, and second, if the client does not, it means only that there is still more hard work to be done.

Adapted from *How to Interview for Client Strengths*, by P. DeJong and S. D. Miller (November 1995). Social Work, Volume 40, Number 6, pages 730-731.