

Break It Down: Turning Goals into Everyday Teaching Opportunities

Narrator: Welcome to this short presentation on turning goals into teaching opportunities. This presentation is about ways to break down children's learning goals into smaller parts. Breaking down goals into smaller parts can make teaching and learning easier and more manageable. This module fits into the roof of our house. We use the house framework to illustrate the essential features of teaching and learning.

The foundation represents engaging interactions and environments. There are two pillars: one represents research-based curricula and teaching practices, and the other represents ongoing child assessment. The roof represents highly individualized teaching and learning. All the features of the house are important for effective everyday teaching practice for all children.

We have learning goals for each child, and sometimes a learning goal is just too big. It may seem overwhelming, and we don't know where to start, or a child may not be making progress. We need to break down the goal into smaller parts. Sometimes, we break down big annual learning goals for children with IEPs or IFSPs. Sometimes, we break down big goals for children with behavior support plans. And sometimes, we break down big goals for children who simply aren't making progress for a variety of reasons.

First, we analyze the main concept or skill of a big goal. Then, we think about the smaller steps of that concept or skill. This helps us guide children through small, achievable learning steps toward a larger goal. After all, the reason we set learning goals is to help children master the concepts and skills that are important for success in school.

There are at least four ways to break down a learning goal and put the steps into an order that supports both teaching and learning. One way to break down a goal is to specify a smaller amount or quantity. You may want to limit the amount of time or the number of people or locations or items. For example, a child's goal might be to sort beads by color. We could start by having him sort the beads by just two colors. After that goal is reached, ask him to sort beads into three colors. Start small and gradually make the task more challenging.

Another way to break down a big goal and make it manageable is to provide help or assistance as you teach the steps. Think of this as temporary help or just enough help while the child is learning the skill. For example, a child might be learning to pour from a pitcher. We start by putting our hands over her hands while she pours. Then we provide less and less help over time, as she learns to pour all by herself.

Some big goals are complex. They have many steps in a sequence. We can break down the goal into smaller steps and teach them one at a time. For example, a child might have a big goal of riding a tricycle all by herself. There are lots of steps: Getting on the tricycle, putting feet on the pedals and hands on the handles, pushing down the pedal, and so forth.

We can start with the first step and gradually add more steps, one at a time. There's another way we can break down big goals. We can put the steps of a child's learning goal into a sequence that builds on what he already knows. Before learning a big goal like having a conversation with a peer, a child needs to learn to take turns, to listen to a friend, to make a comment or ask a question, and stay on a same topic. The teacher can put these steps into a logical sequence that builds on the child's skills and interests and then teach the steps one at a time.

In this short presentation, we learned about taking big learning goals, examining them, and breaking them down into smaller parts. That can make learning easier and a lot more fun. We learned about four ways to break down goals and teach the parts: Smaller amounts, provide help, step by step, and sequential order. All of these methods can be useful for children who need a bit more help learning their big goals.

Take a look at our longer in-service suite to learn more and to practice breaking down goals to create teaching and learning opportunities. Check out all of our tips, tools, and resources. Thank you for listening.