

# The Goal-Based Outcome (GBO) Tool Guidance Notes

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*"Setting goals makes you see where  
you need to go, makes you see what  
you are working on and what still  
needs to be worked on."*

Young person

February 2019



## Introduction

The goal-based outcomes (GBO) tool is a simple and effective method to measure progress and outcomes of an intervention. It grew out of work with children, young people and their families in mental health and emotional well-being settings but can be used in any setting, that is change-focused and goal-oriented – including adult and physical health contexts.

The tool tracks what is arguably *the* most important thing to measure in any intervention: “Is this helping you make progress towards the things that you really want help with?”

The term ‘young person’ is used throughout this document. It is used as shorthand to refer to any young person: ‘child’, ‘youth’, ‘parent/carer’, ‘adult’, who may come into contact with your service.

These notes are intended to give brief, essential guidance in using the GBO tool – for more detailed information on the GBO goals and goal-oriented practice, links to resources, further reading and different language versions of the GBO please visit [www.goals-in-therapy.com](http://www.goals-in-therapy.com).

This guidance is adapted and updated from Law and Jacob (2015) and Law (2018).



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Quote on front cover from Bromley & Westwood (2013, p. 43)

## Guidance Notes

### 1. The goal-based outcome (GBO) tool

- The GBO tool is a simple and effective method to **measure progress** and outcomes of an intervention
- It can be **used in any setting** that is change-focused and goal-oriented
- It can be used to track progress **session-by-session**, or just as an **outcome tool**
- The GBO is a tool that **measures the changes most important to the person** you are working with
- The tool was devised in **children and youth mental health** services in the UK but has been used successfully **internationally** and across **adult and physical health** settings

### 2 Shaping and setting goals

- Goals should be **agreed collaboratively** between the therapist, counsellor, clinician or practitioner, working with the young person or family and the person asking for help
- Once a goal has been set it is possible to **use any suitable (preferably evidence based) intervention** to reach it
- The first step is to **identify potential goals** and then shape these into agreed goals for the intervention
- At the point where you feel the young person/family have told you enough initial information, it can be helpful to **start to introduce goals** by saying something along the lines of:
 

*“That has been really useful to help me understand a little about what has brought you here today; next it might be helpful for us to think together about what your hopes for the future might be”*
- What comes out of the following discussion can begin to be **shaped into goals**:
 

*“So, from what you have told me so far, what would you say your main goals are from coming to this service? If we were to work together in a very helpful way, when we agree to stop meeting, what things would you hope to be different by that time, from how things are now?”*
- Once a goal has been agreed it is useful to **write it down** in a sentence that summarises it – ideally **using the young person’s own language**
- **Helpful goals** tend to be future-focused, positively framed and realistic

- Goals could **focus on**:
  - Change goals** – goals that focus on something someone wants to be different or change in their lives – most therapy goals are ‘change goals’
  - Learning goals** – getting ideas that might help with the issues even if these might not lead to (immediate) change
  - Exploration or understanding goals** – these might be goals that focus on the young person wanting to understand themselves better, or to explore who they are. These may lead to change but this is not the primary focus of the work
- Make sure the goal is **safe** for the young person and others
- Set up to **three goals**
- You can write the agreed goals on the **GBO ‘goals record sheet’**

### 3 Rating goals

- Once a goal has been set the next step is to get **the initial (time 1 or baseline) rating** for the goal. You may want to say something like:
 

*“Ok, now we have agreed the goals you want to work on, it would be helpful to get an idea of where you are now with each of the goals. This will help us get an idea of where we are starting from, and what you have already managed to achieve, and it can help us keep track of how far you have moved on, at a later date”*
- You may want to **specify at this point how often** you would expect to review progress towards the goal – every session, at review, at the end of the intervention, etc.
- You can **invite the young person to rate their goals** by saying something like:
 

*“Taking your first goal: on a scale from zero to ten, where ten means that you have fully reached your goal, and zero means you haven’t even begun to make progress towards it, and a score of five is exactly half way between the two, today what rating would you give your current progress towards this goal?”*
- It can help to **make the scale visual** by showing the young person the GBO rating sheet with the numbers on, or by drawing a line on paper or a white board
- Younger children might prefer a **visual metaphor** such as a ladder with the numbers 0 – 10 on the rungs
- It is important to **have the ending of therapy in mind** at the first rating of goals. Make sure the young person understands that you do not expect goals to reach ten-out-of-ten, but you intend the work to help them move at least a little way along the scale
- Write the agreed ratings on the **GBO goal rating sheet**

### 4 If goals change

- Goals can change** during the course of an intervention and the work should change focus accordingly, if this is helpful
- Use your **clinical judgement**, in conversation with the young person, before a decision to change focus is agreed
- Consider how **clinically helpful** it really is, if goals change regularly throughout an intervention
- It can be helpful to **discuss potential changes** in goals with a supervisor or a colleague
- Depending on the type of intervention you are working on with a young person, you may want to **formally reset the goals and start rating** the new goals
- Use your judgement as to whether it is helpful to **continue rating the original goals**

### 5 Session-by-session monitoring of goals

- Goals **can be rated every session** using the GBO to track progress throughout an intervention
- Use your judgement, in conversation with the young person, about when in a session the **right time to rate goals might be** – usually this would be in the first half of an appointment
- It might be helpful to **introduce rating of goals each session** by saying:
 

*“OK, let’s have a look at where you feel you are now, with the goals we agreed on at the start of the work together. Let’s look at goal one first, which was to... (insert goal summary sentence) – on a scale from zero to ten...etc..., today how would you rate your progress on that goal?”*
- Once the rating has been obtained it may be helpful to **compare it to last week’s** rating and discuss as appropriate
- Keep a record of progress by writing the ratings on the **GBO goal progress chart**
- By connecting the ratings on the GBO goal progress chart **you can create a simple run chart** that can be shared with the young person and/or in supervision
- Tracking and discussing progress regularly allows the therapist and young person to **monitor progress together**

- When using the GBO session-by-session, the intention should be to **rate goals every time you meet** with the young person. However, there may be times when it is not possible, or when it does not feel clinically helpful to rate goals in a session – use your clinical judgement, in conversation with the young person, to decide whether to skip rating for a session
- Sharing the information in sessions can lead to **helpful discussions about what, and who is helping the young person to reach a goal** and how this progress can be maintained. Conversely it can flag if there appears to be no progress, or if things appear to be moving away from a goal. This can lead to helpful discussions about what or who else might help

### 6 Lack of progress towards goals

- If there is a **lack of progress towards goals** it can be helpful to revisit the goals themselves:
  - Are the goals set at the start of therapy still **relevant to the young person?**
  - Has the **context around the young person changed** and affected their goals?
  - Are the goals **too ambitious?**
  - Are they **focused** enough?
  - Does the young person **understand how the therapy might help** them reach their goals?

### 7 Psychometric properties

- The GBO is an **'ideographic'** measure, this means that as everyone's goals are different and unique to them, so what is measured using the GBO is unique or particular to that person
- The GBO scoring is **'ipsative'**, meaning that changes in ratings are compared to the initial ratings by the person. You are comparing the ratings with themselves, rather than with some external 'objective' change score
- The tool has **good 'face validity'**, in that it makes sense to people using it, that it is measuring progress to their goals
- Changes in GBO ratings have been shown to **correlate well with symptom change measures** using other tools such as the SDQ (see Wolpert et al 2012)
- The GBO has a suggested **reliable change index (RCI) of 2.45**. (Edbrooke-Childs et al. 2015)

## Goals and goal-based outcomes (GBOs) Goals record sheet



In coming to this service, what are some of the problems you want help with or goals you want to get to? *(List up to three goals)*

Goal Number	Goal Description
1	
2	
3	

If you have any other goals, please list them here

Completed by (tick below):

- Child/young person
- Parent/carer
- Other (please specify):

Service ID/NHS number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Goals and goal-based outcomes (GBOs)

## Goal rating sheet



### How close are you to the goals you want to get to?

On a scale from zero to ten, please circle the number below that best describes how close you are to reaching your goal today. Remember a score of zero means no progress has been made towards a goal, a score of ten means a goal has been reached fully, and a score of five is exactly half way between the two

#### YOUR FIRST GOAL

Enter brief description of goal and goal number as recorded on the [Goals Record Sheet](#)

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Half way to reaching this goal

Goal not at all met	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Goal reached
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#### YOUR SECOND GOAL

Enter brief description of goal and goal number as recorded on the [Goals Record Sheet](#)

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Half way to reaching this goal

Goal not at all met	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Goal reached
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#### YOUR THIRD GOAL

Enter brief description of goal and goal number as recorded on the [Goals Record Sheet](#)

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Half way to reaching this goal

Goal not at all met	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Goal reached
---------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	--------------

**Completed by** (tick below):

- Child/young person
- Parent/carer
- Other (please specify):

Service ID/NHS number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Goals and goal-based outcomes (GBOs)

## Goal progress chart



This is one of up to three goals to track.  
You can turn this chart on its side for a quick look at progress over the sessions.

Goal No:

**GOAL:**

**Session**   **Date**   **Today I would rate progress to this goal:** *(please circle the appropriate number below)*

*Remember a score of zero means no progress has been made towards a goal, a score of ten means a goal has been reached fully, and a score of five is exactly half way between the two*

Session	Date	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**Whose goal is this** *(tick below):*

- Child/young person
- Parent/Carer
- Practitioner
- Other *(please specify):*

Service ID/NHS number:

Name: *(optional)*

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