

SMART Goal-Setting

Goal setting is a simple but powerful way mentors can help students build motivation, confidence, and a sense of direction. When students have something clear to work toward, even in small steps, it can help them feel more focused and encouraged in their day-to-day school experience. Goals can absolutely be discussed out loud in conversation, but it is also helpful when either the mentor or student writes them down and checks in on progress together over time. These small follow-ups can make a big difference in helping students stay connected to their goals.

One helpful approach to goal setting is the use of SMART goals. SMART is an acronym that stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely. This framework simply helps turn broad ideas like “do better in school” into clearer, more manageable steps like “complete all math homework this week” or “ask one question in class each day.”

For mentors, SMART goals are not about creating pressure or adding expectations. Instead, they offer a supportive structure for helping students name something they care about and break it into realistic, doable steps. Whether a student is working on improving a grade, building a habit, strengthening a skill, or staying more engaged in school, SMART goals can help make progress feel more possible and more visible.

In this section, you will find age-appropriate ways to introduce SMART goals in mentoring conversations, along with examples and prompts designed to make the process approachable and meaningful for students at every grade level.



Goal Setting for Grades K-2

Focus: What I can do today or this week

1. "I Can Try" Goals

Ask:

- "What is something you can try to do better this week?"
- Examples: share toys, raise hand, be kind, clean up

2. Smile Goal

Prompt:

- "What is one thing you can do to make someone smile today?"

3. One-Step Goals

Help them choose one simple action:

- "My goal is to ____ today."
- (Examples: say hello, finish lunch, help someone)

4. Yes or No Goal Check

Give examples and ask if they are good goals:

- "Be kind to a friend" (yes/no?)
- "Ignore directions" (yes/no?)

5. Goal Finish Line

Ask:

- "When will you know you did a good job?" (end of day / recess / lunch)



Goal Setting for Grades 3-5

Focus: Clear, specific, short-term goals

1. “Make It Specific” Game

Start vague, then refine:

- “Be better in class” → “Raise my hand 2 times a day”

2. Goal Builder (SMART)

Ask step-by-step:

- What do you want to do?
- When will you do it?
- How will you know you did it?

3. Weekly Win Goal

Prompt:

- “What is one thing you want to improve this week at school?”

4. Effort Meter

Ask:

- “What would a ‘great effort’ look like in that goal?”

5. Break It Down

Take a goal and split it:

- “Finish homework better” → “Do it right after school for 20 minutes”



Goal Setting for Grades 6-8

Focus: specific, measurable, realistic, time-based thinking

1. SMART Check-In Game

Ask if the goal is:

- Specific?
- Measurable?
- Achievable?
- Relevant?
- Time-based?

2. Upgrade the Goal

Start with a basic goal:

- “Get better at math” → “Complete all math homework on time this week”

3. Timeline Talk

Ask:

- “How long will it take to reach this goal?”

4. Success Definition

Ask:

- “How will you know you reached your goal?”

5. Obstacles Chat

Ask:

- “What might make your goal hard and how can you handle it?”



Goal Setting for Grades 9-12

Focus: realistic planning, accountability, and reflection

1. SMART Breakdown

Have them walk through each step:

- Specific: What exactly?
- Measurable: How tracked?
- Achievable: Is it realistic?
- Relevant: Why it matters?
- Time-bound: When done?

2. Real-Life Goal Rewrite

Take a vague goal and refine it:

- “Do better in school” → “Raise my math grade by one letter by the end of the quarter”

3. Barrier Planning

Ask:

- “What might get in your way?”
- “What is your backup plan?”

4. Progress Check Strategy

Ask:

- “How will you check your progress each week?”

5. Short vs. Long-Term Goals

Discuss difference between:

- Daily habits vs. semester/year goals

6. Motivation Connection

Ask:

- “Why does this goal matter to you personally?”

7. Adjust the Goal

Discuss:

- “If this becomes too easy or too hard, how would you adjust it?”

