



## Why setting goals is so important

It's a great idea to help set goals for sports. Goal setting helps improve kids' motivation and commitment, helps them stay focussed on what to accomplish and track, as well as notice their progress.

Effective goals are ones the children have chosen for themselves and are motivated to achieve. For this reason, as much as possible, let kids choose their goals and then guide them into making them manageable and most of all achievable.

Goal setting with young children should be simple and straight forward. It is important to keep goal – setting **S.M.A.R.T** that is, **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and with a **T**imeframe to achieve the goal. So what does SMART goal setting look like?

**Specific:** The main problem we all have with goal setting is where to start? A goal such as “I want to be the best swimmer in my class” is as unhelpful as no goal, because it isn't specific enough. It doesn't focus the goal setter on **WHAT** makes a good swimmer and **HOW** to be a better one.

The task of being a good swimmer needs to be broken down into a set of specific parts that can be learned in the appropriate order. These parts can then be used as weekly or session goals.

Ideally the weekly goals lead into a bigger term goal such as swimming one whole length with freestyle arms and bilateral breathing.

For example:

- Kick for one length with fast feet under the water without stopping
- Do seven arm circles in a row
- Do “bubble, bubble, breathe” for a whole length without stopping, with support
- Etc.

**Measurable:** Small, specific goals are easier to measure. Being the best swimmer is very hard to measure, there are a lot of variables in that. But it is easy for a child to measure if they have done seven arm circles in row or kicked for a length with fast feet under water.

**Achievable:** Small, specific goals are easier to achieve. There is nothing more frustrating and disheartening than a goal which seems beyond our reach. Once your child has chosen a goal double check that it is achievable, no matter how simple it may be. First time goals should be achievable within a day or two. For example “Kick the whole length without stopping” instead of “swim a whole length doing freestyle.” That may be a whole term's goal, while the weekly goal would be to master the kick, then the arms and breathing in separate goals.

**Relevant:** Your child's goal-setting will be more effective if it is meaningful to them. As much as possible give them ownership of it. Help them to set appropriate goals by talking about how to break the big skill of swimming down into manageable parts but don't take over!

For very young children, the first goals they identify, may be to do with self management in the pool (listening, looking, taking turns, etc.) which are still useful to the task of learning any new skill.

**Time frame:** It's very important to set a time frame within which to achieve the goal. This helps to stay focussed and gives a reason for making the extra effort to achieve the goal. Make sure you revisit the goals at the end of the agreed timeframe and talk about whether or not they were met. If not, make a plan to make the goal achievable, it might mean breaking it down even further, or just allowing a more realistic amount of time to achieve it. Small specific goals that can be achieved in a day or two are a great way to motivate children to continue their goal setting. Meeting goals on a daily basis is a wonderful way to get a sense of success and accomplishment while in the process of learning to swim, which takes time, perseverance and practice and cannot be achieved all in one go.

Acknowledge and celebrate the efforts your child makes to achieve their goal. Your encouragement will go a long way to helping them persevere.