

## Evaluation of goal-setting tools for children who receive early supports

Early supports are part of the NDIS Early Childhood Approach. They are delivered by early childhood partners and their staff (early childhood coordinators). Early supports are how the NDIS works with children younger than 6 with developmental concerns who are not NDIS participants.

Early supports aim to build the capacity of families and children to do everyday things in and out of the home. Early childhood coordinators work with families in goal-focused ways to meet concerns about a child's development.

The [National Guidelines for Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention](#) recommend measuring how much these supports help children and families achieve their goals.

By measuring supports, the NDIA and people supporting children and families can see if needs are being met. This information also helps design and organise services that lead to better outcomes for children and families.

We use tools to measure these goals. To trust the results, they must be:

- valid – it measures what it is meant to
- reliable – the results are stable under different conditions
- responsive – it is responsive to change
- acceptable – people who use it will find it suitable.

This evaluation identifies which tools best achieve the four properties above. We assessed common goal-setting tools, the Goal Assessment Scale (GAS) and Goal Assessment Scale-Light (GAS-Light). We also tested the Parent Empowerment and Efficacy Measure (PEEM) to see if it is suitable for measuring parents' confidence and their capacity to connect to other supports.

We compared scores from the PEEM, GAS and GAS-Light to data the NDIA already collects from children younger than 6. The Paediatric Evaluation of Disability Inventory-Computer Adaptive Test (PEDI-CAT) was used.

### Our approach

The evaluation happened in 2022 and involved:

- Enrolling 7 early childhood partners and 123 families into the study.
- 59 families provided data from one of the goal-setting tools. Low recruitment meant another goal-setting tool could not be assessed as part of the evaluation.
- 9 focus groups and 29 online surveys with early childhood partner staff.

- A survey of parents after setting goals (called the goal-setting phase) and after reassessment.
- 40 parents and carers completed the survey after setting goals and 31 after reassessment.

## What we found

### Responsiveness

- The GAS and GAS-Light scores increased from goal setting to reassessment. This suggested that over time, children moved closer to achieving their goals.
- It showed GAS and GAS-Light can detect and measure change over time.

### Validity and Reliability

- When measured over the same time and for the same children, the GAS and GAS-Light scores increased but the PEDI-CAT and PEEM scores didn't change much.
- The PEDI-CAT scores in the Responsibility Domain went down a little.
- The GAS and GAS-Light scores were helpful in predicting if children went on to access the Scheme after receiving early supports. This suggested they aligned with the assessment processes used to access the NDIS.
- Early childhood coordinators (people providing early supports to families) said that both the GAS and GAS-Light are useful tools for goal setting, and measure things they think are important to families.

### Acceptability

- Early childhood coordinators found the GAS-Light quicker and easier to use with families.
- Families and caregivers also showed a slight preference for the GAS-Light. They found it easier to complete when they began receiving early supports.
- Some early childhood coordinators said it was hard to develop goals when using the tools. They also said how the tools measure children and family goals is confusing. They told us scoring could be easier (for example, by only using positive numbers) and what factors may influence scoring. Better training and small changes to the scoring could help many of these problems.
- Early childhood coordinators said the PEEM didn't take long to complete. Families also felt it was brief and acceptable. While some early childhood coordinators thought the content may be confronting for families, some said doing the PEEM with the family helped structure conversations and was a good chance to talk about family dynamics.

## Next steps

- The results from the trial will help us understand how to better measure outcomes in early supports.
- The tools we are suggesting partners use help support best practices in the Early Childhood Approach.
- The Agency can use information from the tools to improve the way it supports young children and families.