

Functional Goals that Prepare Students for Life After School

Purpose & Overview

Functional goals address the skills students need to live as independently as possible, both during and after their K–12 years. While academic goals remain critical, IDEA requires that IEPs prepare students for *further education, employment, and independent living*.

This worksheet provides practical guidance and ready-to-use sample goals with benchmarks across multiple domains, ensuring that students leave school with skills that truly matter for daily life.

Why Functional Goals Matter

- **Legal alignment:** IDEA emphasizes functional goals as part of transition planning.
 - **Life readiness:** Students need skills like communication, time management, and daily living to thrive beyond school.
 - **Equity:** Functional skills increase opportunities for independence, employment, and community participation.
 - **Balance:** Academic and functional goals together create a more complete, student-centered IEP.
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Functional Goal Areas with Examples & Benchmarks

Communication

- **Goal:** Within 36 instructional weeks, given visual supports, the student will independently initiate a request or comment with a peer or adult at least 3 times

per day in 4 out of 5 school days, measured by staff data sheets.

- **Benchmarks:**

- Use sentence frames or AAC to request preferred items with 80% accuracy.
- Respond to peer initiations with one-word answers in 4 of 5 opportunities.
- Initiate a peer conversation during structured group work twice per week.

Social Skills

- **Goal:** Within 36 weeks, given role-play practice and visual cues, the student will use a taught conflict resolution strategy (e.g., “Stop–Think–Choose”) in 4 out of 5 opportunities across three consecutive weeks, as measured by teacher observation.

- **Benchmarks:**

- Identify personal feelings using an emotions chart in 80% of observed situations.
- Role-play conflict resolution with 2 prompts in 4 out of 5 trials.
- Independently use a coping phrase (e.g., “Let’s take a break”) in 3 of 5 real situations.

Self-Care

- **Goal:** Within 36 weeks, given a visual checklist, the student will independently complete a 4-step daily hygiene routine in 4 of 5 school days across three consecutive weeks, documented by staff logs.

- **Benchmarks:**

- Complete toothbrushing with one prompt in 4 out of 5 opportunities.
- Select appropriate clothing for weather in 3 out of 4 opportunities.

- Independently follow a 3-step hygiene routine with 80% accuracy.

Independent Living

- **Goal:** By June 2026, given direct instruction and practice, the student will independently create a simple weekly budget and record three expenses with 90% accuracy across three consecutive trials, measured by teacher review of work samples.
- **Benchmarks:**
 - Identify coins and bills with 90% accuracy.
 - Accurately match items with price tags during a mock shopping activity.
 - Record daily spending in a budget log with 80% accuracy.

Vocational

- **Goal:** Within 36 weeks, given visual prompts and modeling, the student will complete a multi-step vocational task (e.g., collating, organizing, stocking) with 85% accuracy across three consecutive data collection sessions.
- **Benchmarks:**
 - Follow a 3-step task analysis with 80% accuracy and 1 prompt.
 - Accurately clock in/out on a time sheet in 4 of 5 opportunities.
 - Maintain task engagement for 15 consecutive minutes across three sessions.

Community Access

- **Goal:** Within 36 weeks, given explicit instruction and rehearsal, the student will independently navigate from school to a designated bus stop and ride the bus to a

planned destination with no more than one prompt across three consecutive community outings.

- **Benchmarks:**

- Identify key community signs (e.g., stop, exit, restroom) in 4 of 5 opportunities.
- Independently ask for directions using a taught script in 3 of 5 practice opportunities.
- Correctly identify exact bus stop in 4 of 5 trials during community instruction.

Common Pitfalls & How to Avoid Them

Pitfall	Better Practice
Treating functional goals as “extra”	Prioritize them equally with academic goals.
Writing goals too broadly	Focus on specific, observable routines.
Over-reliance on adult prompts	Build in independence by planning prompt fading.
Ignoring family input	Ask families about skills that matter most for life beyond school.

Action Starter: Try Tomorrow

- Review one student's IEP for the presence of **functional goals**.
- If none are present, identify **one skill the student needs right now** (e.g., hygiene, communication, budgeting).
- Draft a measurable goal with **three clear benchmarks**, using the models in this worksheet.