



# Adding Meaningfulness to Evaluations — BLOG POST

By [nicespeechlady.com](http://nicespeechlady.com) / September 1, 2019

It is a simple question. It doesn't take long. And, it is meaningful, builds purpose into the therapy sessions, and drives the reason we are there. The simple question that gives patients their "why" — their reason for working with us:

"What are your goals?"

Other ways to ask this question include:

- "What do you hope to achieve?" or,
- "What is your 'end-game' objective?" or,
- "What would it look like — for you to know therapy is effective for you?"

Answers can range from general statements like "I want to feel better," to a specific objective of "I want to attend my grandson's wedding in January."

Comments can be "I want to eat potato chips again" to "I want to have my feeding tube taken out."

Others may say "I want my speech to be understood," while others may state "I want to be living independently again."

Listed below are the reasons why asking a question about goals is so important. This question may not be listed in the electronic record, OASIS, standardized test or protocol of your organization. This question may not have been listed as one of the major questions to ask during the evaluation process when you were in graduate school. This question may not have a standard score, or a percentile ranking. This question may not be measurable, quantifiable, or traceable in terms of progress. However, it is a beneficial question to ask and document upon in evaluations and to check-in upon at a regular basis.

Reasons to ask every patient and involved family members this question are listed below:

- It builds meaning into therapy.

Asking what the goal of therapy would be brings importance to why the patient is participating in the evaluation, and it highlights the specific reasons for the tasks at hand. Also, it directs the focus of therapy and allows for therapy turns to occur in the directions that are indicated. The intent of the encounter together then becomes more significant. When this happens, patients open up more, become more vulnerable, and are more willing to share their hopes and dreams, their true reason for moving forward with the therapy.

- It is validating.



It is a benefit to the patient to return to focusing on their goals on a regular basis in order to show that therapists are interested in what patients are interested in. It is important for patients to realize that we are validating their experiences, their concerns, their interests. To the extent that therapy decisions are made based on patient preferences, in terms of direction and time spent on areas of treatment, this can be very validating to the patient. It is important to note that at any given moment, patients may not have others in their life validating them very much in the moment, and validation from health care clinicians at critical moments in during medical events can possibly result in significant improvements and turns in recovery. The opportunity just has to present itself by the clinician opening the door by asking the question, then listening and validating the response of the patient.

- It is motivating.

When patients have a chance to verbalize their “reason” — their purpose for making that next appointment, for performing that next task in therapy, for example, then they have their fuel for doing what needs to be done. They have their reason. This continues to fan the flames for the strength to face the next day with the courage for fighting against the difficult barriers to progress, once again. Any actions we can take as therapists that will aid in assisting patients to push through another day, despite challenges that await them, will benefit the patients, and is our duty as therapists.

- It is what we would want someone else to do for us.

There is no doubt that we would desire our own health professionals to query us about our goals, our desired outcomes, our wishes for recovery. Putting ourselves in the shoes of our patients, and responding in kind is what helps us be effective as clinicians. It is helpful to remind ourselves that we are also consumers of our own health system, too, and that we need to contribute to it in the way that we want to continue to receive services as well.

- It is caring.

Listening to whatever answer is given, without judgement in any way is important. Acceptance that this is the patient’s goal at this moment ensures that it is safe for the patient to share their changing outcomes in the future, too, if things change for the patient. Understanding that what the patient values is vital information in the evaluation is beneficial for a full assessment process. It is also very caring to patients who likely desire to need an understanding ear.

We may not fully agree with goals that patients set, but we can accept that there is where a patient is starting from at an evaluation, and we can receive and capture the best picture of where a patient is beginning by being straight forward about their goals — by asking about them on day one.

It is possible that clinicians could try to anticipate the goals of patients, based upon deficit areas, diagnoses, prior levels of function, and ancillary comments made. However, this is not as effective as asking the patient directly, nor does it result in the benefits listed above.

Envision our current health care system, where all clinicians and providers ask patients the question, or a variation of the question — “what is your goal?”



As clinicians, we have the option to do this. Imagine the transformation that will occur in building relationships, breaking down walls and allowing the possibility of serving patients in the best possible manner, from day one.

So, friend, as we ponder this idea today, I ask you: “What is your goal?”



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