



IEP Goals for PDA Learners

By Dr. Destiny Huff, LPC, Non-Attorney Special Education Advocate & Mental Health Therapist

It's important to make sure your learner's **IEP Goals are S.M.A.R.T.** Always remember your learners IEP Goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely.

S – Specific

The goal clearly states what the learner will achieve – who, what, where

M – Measurable

The goal includes criteria to track progress and determine when the goal is achieved – frequency, accuracy, or level of mastery

A – Achievable

The goal is realistic and attainable for the student based on their current abilities and available resources

R – Realistic

The goal is directly related to the student's education needs and focuses on outcomes related to their overall educational journey

T – Timely

The goal has a clear deadline or timeframe within which the goal should be achieved

It is also important to make sure that your learner's IEP goals are neuroaffirming. The inclusion of executive functioning supports, sensory supports and motor supports assist in making the goals neuroaffirming. It is also important for school staff to honor all forms of communication (AAC, verbal, vocal, sign language, gestures, etc.). Lastly, to make the goals appropriate for PDA learners it is necessary that declarative language is used.

Below are examples of goals for different situations PDA learners may encounter. To tailor the goal to your PDA learners specific needs a template is provided below as well.



Example Template for IEP Goals

By *[date – typically this is a year from the IEP goal date]*, **the learner** *[insert learners name]* **will** *[skill – what skill is to be developed, what action is the learner supposed to do]* **when** *[trigger - what triggers the situation or during what time does the skill need to occur]* **using** *[supports – what supports will help the learner – executive functioning, sensory, communication, motor, staff]* **in** *[how often will the learner demonstrate the skill – 4 out of 5, 80% of the time, daily, etc.]* **as evidenced by** *[Data Collection - how will data be collected, i.e. teacher observation, log sheet, learner self-report, testing, etc.]*.

Example IEP Goals

Communication of Needs

By January 2026, the learner will communicate the need to help or clarification when faced with a challenging academic task, using multimodal communication (e.g., verbal requests, visual supports, gestures, AAC, etc.), in 4 out of 5 observed opportunities, as evidenced by teacher reports and staff observations.

Emotional Regulation

By January 2026, the learner will identify and use three preferred regulation strategies (e.g., co-regulation with a trusted adult, deep breathing, sensory tools, heavy work, etc.) taught through modeling and direct instruction, to support focus and engagement while completing multi-step math problems in 80% of observed opportunities in the classroom setting, as evidenced by work samples, learner self-report and staff observations.

Executive Functioning

By January 2026, during classroom activities when given executive functioning supports (e.g., access to a computer/tablet for typing, graphic organizers, etc.), sensory supports (e.g., fidget, access to a comfort item), and choice for how they engage (e.g., “Sometimes I like to stand up while working, what about you?” or “Do you want me to sit with you or check back in 5 minutes?” etc.) learner will begin the task within 1 minute on 4 of 5 opportunities.



Example IEP Goals, cont.

Flexible Thinking

By January 2026, the learner will select two alternative solutions to a given problem from a personalized choice menu they created in 4 out of 5 opportunities during structured problem-solving activities, as evidenced by learner self-report, staff report, and staff observations.

Interoception

By January 2026, in the general education classroom setting, learner, will increase their awareness of their own self-regulation by identifying their energy level using multi-modal communication (e.g., verbal, vocal, AAC, point to his visual, etc.) before high demand activities and will then choose a pre-taught strategy or tool (e.g., take a deep breath, access a sensory tool, take a movement break, etc.) to help them sustain their regulation and focus 75% of the time given one teacher prompt as measured by general education teacher or para observation.

Self-Advocacy

By February 2026, learner will use multi-modal communication (AAC, gestures, verbalize, etc.) to identify executive functioning supports (chunking, graphic organizer, fidget tools, noise cancelling headphones etc.) that work best for them when completing writing tasks as measured by the learner and teacher report in 4 out of 5 trials.

Social and Emotional

By February 2026, during large group instruction in the general education setting when given sensory and executive functioning support (e.g., fidgets, alternative seating, etc.), natural models of gestalts (e.g., I'd like to draw, "It's time for reading", etc.) and wait time, the learner will use multimodal communication (e.g., AAC, verbal, gestural, pointing to visuals) to demonstrate engagement on 4/5 opportunities across 4 consecutive data probes as measured by teacher observation and data collection.



Example IEP Goals, cont.

Transitions

By the end of April 2025 within the classroom setting, with the use of co-regulation and specific communication strategies (e.g. declarative language, natural modeling of scripts like “its time to start math work” etc.), taught self-regulation strategies (e.g., taking 5 deeps breaths, sensory/movement break, communicating needs for autonomy, etc.), executive functioning supports (e.g., visual schedule, being given a specific job, etc.) and no more than 2 visual, verbal or gestural prompts, learner will transition from activity to activity throughout their day with 80% success as measured by recorded observations and class participation.