

STUDENT SUCCESS PLAN

FACILITATION GUIDE

Helping Students Feel Safe, Seen, Soothed, and Secure

This **Student Success Plan Facilitation Guide** is a practical, step-by-step tool designed to help leaders and facilitators host student-centered planning meetings grounded in connection, collaboration, and clarity.

The guide walks you through a structured process, from inviting participants to co-creating a student-led action plan. It includes:

- Clear directions for each step of the meeting
- Suggested facilitator prompts and pacing
- Sample language, reflection questions, and sentence stems
- Tips to keep the conversation strengths-based, supportive, and inclusive
- Pre-meeting checklists and follow-up guidance to ensure follow-through

Whether you're a school leader, teacher, or support staff member, this guide helps you plan, host, and document a success-focused meeting that centers the student's voice and turns insights into real, doable steps.

SOME BASIC BELIEFS ABOUT THIS PROCESS:

- Students do well if they can. If they can't, they need support.
- This work is a long game of relationship building, love, and persistence.
- It is all about helping the student feel safe, seen, soothed, and secure.
- You cannot learn about the communication behind the behavior without listening to the student.

HOW TO START

Invite a Circle of Support

Include the student, family members, teachers, and anyone who cares deeply about the student.

Schedule Thoughtfully

Choose a time that works for everyone and ensure the student can attend.

Create a Comfortable Environment

Pick a setting where the student feels safe, seen, and supported.

Personalize the Invitation

Use the provided template to invite participants and adapt it to match your tone.

PRE-MEETING PREP

Goal: Set the stage for a connected and loving conversation.

❑ **Invite the student and their Circle of Support.**

Include family members, teachers, support staff, and anyone who plays a meaningful role in the student's life.

❑ **Choose a warm, safe, and student-friendly space.**

Pick a setting where the student feels seen, respected, and comfortable contributing.

❑ **Let the student know what to expect.**

Offer a quick overview of what the meeting will look like, who will be there, and why their voice matters.

❑ **Send a reminder the day before.**

Include the time, location (or virtual link), and purpose of the meeting. Keep it warm and welcoming.

❑ **Check accessibility needs.**

Ensure the space, materials, and communication supports are accessible to all participants.

❑ **Decide who will facilitate.**

Identify who will guide each part of the process—consider co-facilitating or sharing roles.

PRE-MEETING PREP Continued

❑ **Bring copies of the Action Planning template (Step 6).**

Ensure there's one for each person or a shared version everyone can see.

❑ **Have chart paper, sticky notes, markers, or a shared digital doc ready.**

Make the brainstorming and plan-building process visible and interactive.

❑ **Bring a printed or digital version of this facilitation guide.**

Keep it close for prompts, pacing, and reminders throughout the meeting.

❑ **Consider having sensory or grounding tools available.**

Items like fidgets, visuals, or calming objects can help students (and adults) stay regulated and present.

❑ **Review recent wins and challenges ahead of time.**

Come prepared with a few observations or reflections that may help guide the conversation, but remain flexible and open.

*See the Student Success Plan
for additional tips and tools*

*View the Student Success Plan for Michael
as an example*

MEETING FLOW

Total Time Needed: 60–75 minutes, depending on group size, pacing, and the depth of discussion.

Estimated Time Per Section:

- **Welcome & Purpose:** 5–10 minutes
- **Step 1: What's Working:** 10 minutes
- **Step 2: What's Not Working:** 10–15 minutes
- **Step 3: Select a Problem to Solve:** 5 minutes
- **Step 4: Brainstorm:** 15 minutes
- **Step 5: Evaluate:** 10 minutes
- **Step 6: Create the Plan:** 10 minutes

WELCOME & PURPOSE (5-10 MINUTES)

Say something like:

"We're here today because we care deeply about [Student's Name] and want to create a plan together that helps them feel supported, successful, and connected. This process is all about listening to [Student's Name], learning from each other, and creating something that works in real life."

Remind group:

- This is strengths-based, not problem-focused.
- The student's voice leads the way.

STEP 1: WHAT'S WORKING? (10 MINUTES)

In this step, explore what's working well by identifying the student's strengths, interests, and moments of success across school, home, and community. This helps ground the conversation in possibility, not just problems.

If team members are new to strengths-based language or need help reframing their thinking, share the [Language That Lifts](#) resource as a helpful guide for using affirming, student-centered language throughout the process.

Facilitator Prompts:

- What helps you feel ready to start your day?
- Which strategies or tools make schoolwork feel easier?
- When do you feel most focused and able to learn?
- What do your teachers or classmates do that helps you succeed?
- What's a recent moment when you felt really included?

Record all responses on a large sheet or shared screen.

STEP 2: WHAT'S NOT WORKING? (10–15 MINUTES)

At this step, the goal is to gently explore what's not working—from the student's point of view—using neutral, curious language that invites honesty and builds trust.

During this step:

- Use calm, factual prompts to invite the student to share challenges.
- Listen with empathy—don't interrupt, correct, or explain.
- Write down what they say word-for-word, even if it's strong or emotional.
- Reflect their words back to check for accuracy: "Did I get that right?"
- Try to reframe the challenge using the student's own language.

Neutral, Student-Centered Facilitator Prompts for Discovering Challenges

Keep prompts as neutral and factual as humanly possible. Each prompt includes something you have noticed and an invitation to share their experience.

Example Prompts:

- I've noticed that you've been putting your head down during math. What's that like for you?
- I've seen that you haven't been joining recess with your classmates. Can you tell me more about that?
- I've noticed that transitions between classes seem tough. What happens for you in those moments?
- I've been wondering how homework has been feeling for you lately. What would you like us to know?
- I've noticed you've been quieter than usual in group discussions. What's going on for you during that time?

Facilitator Tips:

- **Write their words exactly as they say them—even if they're hard to hear.** This shows respect and helps the student feel truly heard, not edited or filtered.
- **Strong language often signals strong emotion.** What may sound offensive is often a sign of pain, frustration, or feeling invisible. Capturing it accurately allows the team to understand what's really going on beneath the surface.
- **Don't sanitize the story.** Watering down the student's words can make their experience feel dismissed. Write it as it comes.
- **When you reflect their words back, you build trust.** It shows the student you were listening closely—and that their voice matters in this process.
- **Paraphrasing shows you're listening—not correcting.** After writing the student's words, you can gently rephrase to check for understanding. Just be sure to get their approval: "Is this what you meant?"
- **Validating emotions builds safety.** You don't have to agree with the behavior to acknowledge the feeling behind it. Try responses like: "That sounds really frustrating" or "It makes sense that you'd feel that way."

Whether working with the student or meeting about the student, always use **language that lifts**. Language that lifts means choosing words that affirm a student's strengths, potential, and humanity rather than focusing on deficits or limitations.

Instead of framing students by what they "lack" or "can't do," we highlight their current competencies, envision their future growth, and describe challenges in ways that open possibilities for support and success. Put simply—it's shifting from labels that weigh students down to language that builds them up and creates a narrative of hope and opportunity.

STEP 3: SELECT A PROBLEM TO SOLVE (5 MINUTES)

This step helps the team narrow the focus and choose one powerful question to guide brainstorming and planning. It's not about solving everything—it's about finding an entry point for meaningful change.

After discovering both strengths and challenges, the conversation can feel wide open. That's why this step matters: it brings focus, clarity, and direction to the team's efforts. The right question should be actionable, not overwhelming; **hopeful**, not heavy; and **specific**, not vague.

What Makes a Strong Question?

A good guiding question should:

- Invite collaboration, not blame
- Be solvable within a short period of time
- Focus one real, specific challenge the student is facing

Avoid vague or frustrating questions like:

- *Why is this so hard?*
- *Why can't you just focus?*
- *Why can't you be prepared?*

Instead, try questions that open the door to possibility:

- *What steps can we take to make this easier?*
- *How might we better support you during transitions?*
- *What could help this feel better for everyone involved?*

STEP 3: CONTINUED

Sample Questions to Try or Modify:

- In what ways might we help you be more successful?
- How can we build on your strengths to solve challenges?
- What changes might make things better?
- How can this feel better for everyone?
- What would help you feel more connected, safe, or supported?

Or tailor your question to match the context:

- How can we reduce stress during [insert class or situation]?
- What strategies can we implement to support [insert transition, time, or behavior]?
- How might we improve communication between home and school?
- What steps can we take to ensure more access to grade-level content?
- How might we promote more belonging and connection?

Facilitator Tips:

- Offer just one question at a time to the group—or invite the student to help choose one.
- You can also adapt a question to fit the specific issue that was shared in Step 2.
- Write the chosen question clearly so that everyone can see it. This becomes the anchor for Step 4: Brainstorming Boldly. It should feel energizing—not exhausting. Keep it simple, hopeful, and solution-focused.

STEP 4: BRAINSTORM (15 MINUTES)

This is where creativity comes in! Help the group generate as many ideas as possible, without judgment. Record every idea—don't edit yet. You'll sort and refine in the next step. It helps to let everyone write their ideas in a separate place.

Facilitator Tips:

- Say: “Let’s think of as many ideas as possible—creative, wild, tiny, huge, whatever!”
 - Use the [20 Wild Ideas Generator Questions](#) to spark new thinking.
- Encourage everyone (student first!) to share 10–20 ideas. Or share their favorite 5!
- Use sticky notes or a big list where everyone can see and share their ideas.
- Invite everyone to keep ideas focused on connection, inclusion, joy, and success.
- Encourage bold, compassionate thinking: nothing is too silly, too small, or too big to consider.
- Ideas can be shared out loud, added to a shared doc or chart paper, or brainstormed silently first—then combined to spark as many creative ideas as possible.
 - Team members can even use Artificial Intelligence to help them extend ideas and generate an exhaustive list.



STEP 5: EVALUATE (10 MINUTES)

In this step, the team will shift from idea generation to focused action. The goal is to choose one or two ideas that feel the most promising—especially to the student—and begin shaping those ideas into clear, doable steps.

This is not about picking a perfect solution. It's about choosing something **possible, supportive, and worth trying** in the short term. By co-selecting ideas with the student, you build ownership, trust, and momentum. The goal of Step 5 is to select one or maybe two ideas to try out.

Start by running the brainstormed ideas through this set of questions:

- **Which of these ideas do we like?** (circle them)
- **Which of these ideas do we not like?** (cross them out)
- **Of the ideas we like—which will increase belonging and connection?** (checkmark them)
- **Which ideas does the student like best?** (star those and give them more weight if possible)



Facilitator Tips:

Compare final idea(s)/solution(s) to 5 questions. Ensure the ideas/solution(s) promote inclusive educational opportunities.

1. Does this solution make the student feel good and align with their preferences?
2. Does this solution support learning without segregating or isolating the student?
3. Does this solution reflect our commitment to inclusion, belonging, and access to general education?
4. Does this solution help build and maintain positive peer relationships?
5. Does this solution seem logistically feasible to implement?

Let the student lead where possible. Ask: “Which idea feels best to you?” or “Which one would you want to start with?”

STEP 6: CREATE THE PLAN (10 MINUTES)

After choosing 1–3 ideas, get specific: What needs to happen to try them? Turn each idea into a clear, step-by-step plan.

The Action Plan Should Include:

- What actions will be taken
- Who is responsible
- When it will be done
- How success will be measured

Action Step	Who is doing it?	By When?	How will we know if we are successful?

Facilitator Tips:

- **Clarify roles and timelines.** If you hear a great idea like “start every day with music,” ask: “Who will set it up? When will we start?”
- **Don’t overcommit.** One thoughtful, well-executed idea is better than five that never happen.
- **Pause for a quick check-in.** Ask the group: “Do we feel good about trying this? Anything we need to adjust?”

HOW TO END

As the meeting wraps up, your goal is to ensure that everyone leaves with clarity, connection, and a shared commitment to follow through.

Before ending, be sure to:

- **Review the plan out loud** and confirm each action step, timeline, and person responsible.
- **Celebrate the work done together.** Acknowledge the student's voice and the team's collaborative effort.
- **Set a date to reconnect.** Ask, "Does it make sense to meet in a week to see how things are going?"

AFTER THE MEETING

- **Share the written plan with all** participants, including the student.
- **Send gentle reminders** about action steps and timelines.
- **Check in.** Plan a short follow-up meeting or reflection to assess what's working and what needs adjusting.
- **Repeat as needed.** If something isn't working yet, come back together and try again—this is a flexible process, not a one-time fix.

INVITATION TEMPLATE

Subject: You're Invited: A Circle of Support for [Student's Name] or adapt for confidentiality

Dear [Name or Team],

We're coming together to support [Student's Name] in a meaningful and connected way—and we would love for you to join us.

We are creating a Student Success Plan, which is a process centered around listening to [Student's Name], identifying strengths, understanding challenges, and collaboratively designing supports that help them thrive—at school, and at home.

Your voice, care, and ideas are important in this process. Whether you're a teacher, family member, friend, or part of their support team, your insight and relationship with [Student's Name] can help shape a plan rooted in love, connection, and possibility.

Meeting Details

Date: [Insert Date]

Time: [Insert Time]

Location: [Insert Location or Link if Virtual]

Please let us know if you can attend. If you have any questions or suggestions before we meet, don't hesitate to reach out.

We hope you can join us in making this a supportive and empowering experience for [Student's Name].

Warmly,

[Your Name]

[Your Role/School/Contact Info]