

Child Outcomes Summary (COS) Process Quick Reference Guide



Ultimate Goals for Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education

- To enable young children to be active and successful participants during the early childhood years and in the future in a variety of settings: in their homes with their families, in childcare, in preschool or school programs, and in the community.
- To enable families to provide care for their child and have the resources they need to participate in their own desired family and community activities.

Outcomes

- An “outcome” is defined as a benefit experienced as a result of services and supports received. An outcome is neither the receipt of services nor satisfaction with services, but rather what happens as a result of services provided to children and families.
- It is understood that a service system cannot guarantee the achievement of any outcome since services are only one factor that influences outcomes. Nevertheless, early intervention and early childhood special education should strive to achieve the outcomes for all of the families and children involved in the program.

Child Outcomes

What are the Requirements?

States are required to report on the percentage of infants and toddlers with Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) or preschool children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) who demonstrate improved:

1. Positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships),
2. Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills (including early language/communication [and early literacy*]), and
3. Use of appropriate behaviors to meet needs.

These are sometimes referred to as the three global early childhood outcomes.

What are Characteristics of Child Outcomes?

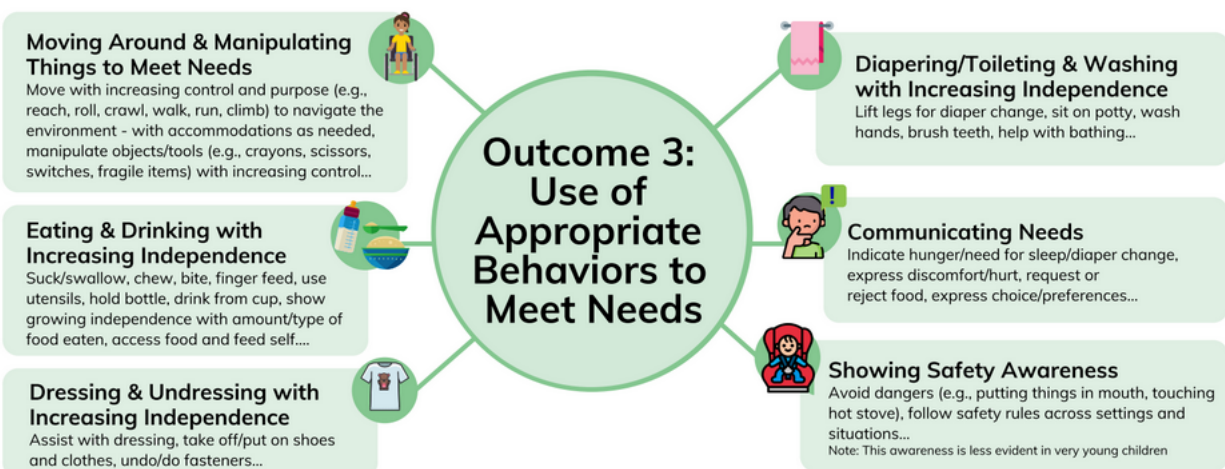
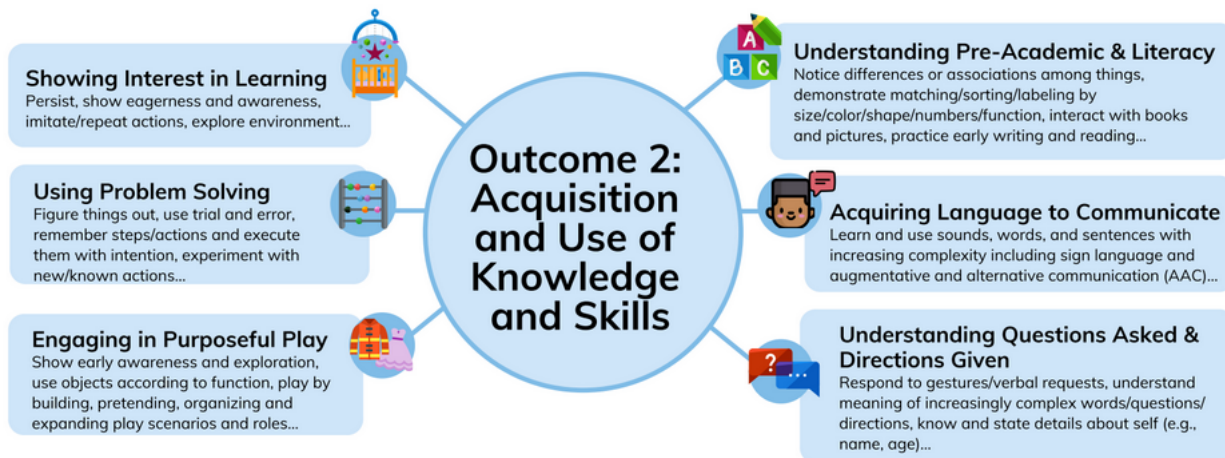
- **Integrated across domains:** Child outcomes include skills from multiple developmental domains, drawing on functioning that bring together skills across domains in complex and interconnected ways.
- **Functional:** Functional skills are those skills a young child uses to complete tasks and participate in meaningful activities in everyday life. When skills are functional, the team can easily identify the child’s intent and purpose when using a skill. Functionality is not inherent to a skill itself, but it can be found in a child’s meaningful use of that skill. Skills that are *not* functional are often referred to as discrete skills. Many assessment tools measure discrete skills.
- **Global, not individualized:** Child outcomes are global benefits expected for all children participating in the program as a result of their experiences with the services; they are not individualized like IFSP/IEP outcomes or goals.
- **Interdependent with family outcomes:** Positive outcomes experienced by the family promote child outcomes, and outcomes achieved by the child benefit the family.

Why Child Outcomes?

- Achieving each of the three child outcomes is key to supporting the ultimate goal of active and successful participation noted above.
- For many, but certainly not all, young children with disabilities, receipt of high-quality services will allow them to move closer to age-expected functioning than they would have been able to without those services.
- Documenting children’s movement toward age-expected functioning is one type of evidence that can be used to make a case for the effectiveness of early intervention and early childhood special education at national, state, and local levels.

* early literacy only applies for children ages 3-5 years.

What Skills Are Associated with Each Outcome?



The COS Process

- The COS process is a team decision-making process involving practitioners and family members who know the child.
- The COS process provides a consistent way for teams to rate a child's functioning relative to age-expected behavior at a specific point in time.
- The team discusses information about a child's functioning in three outcome areas, resulting in a rating on a 7-point scale for each of the three outcomes.
- The team synthesizes all the information they have gathered about a child. This includes what they have learned from assessment tools as well as from other sources. The COS form itself is **not** an assessment tool.
- It is especially important for the team to discuss with the family their cultural expectations and how culture shapes the opportunities and ways in which a child demonstrates functional skills. This discussion helps the whole team consider how similar or different the child's functioning is from what same-aged peers within the culture often do.
- Training and use of the decision tree and rating definitions are key for the process to produce consistent ratings.
- As a group, team members involved in the COS process have five essential types of knowledge:
 - Understand the content and breadth of the three child outcomes
 - Understand age-expected child development
 - Know the child's functioning across settings and situations
 - Understand age expectations for child functioning within the child and family's culture, and
 - Understand how to use the 7-point scale.

COS Ratings

- **Are a snapshot** of the child's overall functioning at one given point in time, informed by the full team of people who know the child best across settings and situations where the child spends his/her time.
- **Require information about the child's everyday functioning** across a variety of settings and from multiple sources. COS ratings represent global functioning and are not based on discrete skills only observed by the team only occasionally in isolated situations.
- **Synthesize information when functioning differs across contexts.** A child's functioning often varies across contexts, exhibiting different ways of interacting with different people and in places where different supports and expectations exist. COS ratings should reflect the mix of functioning observed.
- **Are based on functioning with the use of assistive technology.** COS ratings consider a child's functioning with whatever assistive technology supports may routinely be available (or not) in the settings where the child spends time.
- **Reflect functioning relative to same-aged peers.** COS ratings indicate the child's functioning relative to that of same-aged peers without disabilities. The use of entry and exit ratings together shows the child's growth trajectory and skills acquired over time relative to same-aged peers.
- **Consider culture.** When assessing a child's functioning, consider the family's culture. Consider how cultural practices influence opportunities for the child's functional use of skills in the outcome area and age expectations for onset of skills for children within the culture.
- **Are based on chronological age.** Teams do **not** correct for prematurity when considering ratings.
- **Are completed near entry and again near exit from the Early Intervention or Early Childhood Special Education program.** Children receiving program services in the state for less than 6 months may not need COS rating(s). Check state guidance.
- **Include a yes/no question about progress at program exit.** If the child makes any progress, even developing one new functional skill between entry and exit, the progress question will be marked "yes."
- **Are not intended for eligibility determination.** The outcomes reflect one measure of a child's functioning in everyday situations. For a variety of reasons, outcomes are not expected to mirror eligibility determination. Some children who are eligible for IDEA-funded services may demonstrate age-expected functioning across all or almost all settings and situations. That is, some children eligible for early intervention or early childhood special education have ratings of six or seven in one, two, or even all three of the outcome areas at entry. Children who may have sevens on all three outcomes at entry include those with sensory impairments who function at age-expected levels when assistive technology is in place and children with diagnosed conditions who display age-expected functioning for a period of time but for whom delays are likely to emerge later in development. Early intervention or early childhood special education for these children is trying to prevent delays in development from occurring.

Age Anchoring

- Age anchoring is the process of examining a child’s functional abilities, skills, and behaviors to determine how close that functioning is to the functioning expected for the child’s chronological age.
- It is important to focus on functional abilities rather than isolated (or discrete) skills that a child may have demonstrated only during assessment.
- Functional skills refer to abilities that are meaningful to the child in the context of naturally occurring routines and that the child integrates to achieve everyday goals.
- Children acquire functional skills in predictable developmental progressions. Think of it like a staircase:



- **Age-Expected (AE) skills** are skills and behaviors expected for the child’s chronological age.
- **Immediate Foundational (IF) skills** are the skills that occur developmentally just before age-expected functioning in the sequence of development.
- **Foundational (F)** are the skills that develop much earlier or are farther from age-expected on the developmental progression; they develop two or more steps before age-expected skills in the sequence of development.
- **The mix of AE, IF, and F determines COS ratings.** The 1-7 COS ratings have criteria representing the mix of AE, IF, and F skills that the team observes the child using in the course of everyday functioning.
- **The thought process for assigning AE, IF, and F to skills.** Teams discuss functional skills the child uses across settings and situations and then considers if these skills match what is expected for the child’s chronological age. If they do, then those are Age-Expected (AE) skills. If not, then the team considers if the child is using skills that come just before what is age-expected in the developmental sequence. If they are, then these are Immediate Foundational (IF) skills. If not, then the team considers if the child is using skills that come in much earlier in the developmental progression (at least two steps earlier than age-expected functioning). The skills that emerge two or more steps before age-expected are called Foundational (F) skills.
- **Age-anchoring resources.** It is recommended that teams reference resources that provide the actual ages at which most children exhibit a specific behavior or type of functioning and include that information in the discussion. Note that assessments showing age ranges for basal and ceilings on items do **not** directly relate to the age at which a skill should be anchored.

The Decision Tree

- **The Decision Tree** helps teams consider questions about the extent of AE, IF, and F skills across the full breadth of the outcome to determine a rating. The national version of the decision tree is found later in this resource. Note that some states may have produced a version with slight variations from the one shown such as by using culminating statements rather than numbers at the bottom of the tree.
- The first question asks if the child “ever” functions in ways that are age expected with regard to this outcome. In this instance, “ever” means that the child has an AE skill in his/her repertoire and uses it in a meaningful way with some consistency (that is, at least occasionally), even if it is not observed in every setting or situation. “Ever” does **not** mean that the child has performed an AE skill one single time or at any one point in their lives.

Thinking about skills that emerge early and continue to be used at older ages

- Some functional skills emerge early and may become more polished over time but are not replaced by a new skill. Examples are making eye contact, walking, and eating with a spoon.
- For these types of skills, the team should focus on how the child uses these skills in a functional way and incorporates them into the more complex routines and activities expected for his or her age.
- When teams consider if the child has any age-expected functioning, the presence of a skill that emerges early and persists is **not** a strong enough example to, by itself, justify that the child has some age-expected functioning. Seeing a 3-year-old walk around at childcare is **not** enough to count if it is the only evidence that the child is showing some age-expected functioning.

Rating		Rating Definitions/Criteria	Sample Statements Used to Summarize Rating Rather Than Numbers (Culminating or Descriptor Statements)	Documentation Considerations
Overall Age-Expected Skills	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child shows functioning expected for his or her age in all or almost all everyday situations that are part of the child's life. No one on the team has concerns about the child's functioning in this outcome area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relative to other children Calvin's age, he has all of the skills that we would expect of a child his age in the area of (<i>outcome</i> [e.g., <i>use of appropriate behaviors to meet needs</i>]) Calvin has a good mix of age-expected skills in the area of (<i>outcome</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide examples of the child's age-expected functioning. Indicate: "No concerns."
	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child's functioning generally is considered appropriate for his or her age, but there are some significant concerns about the child's functioning in this outcome area. Although age-appropriate, the child's functioning may border on not keeping pace with age expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relative to same age peers, Calvin has the skills that we would expect of his age in regard to (<i>outcome</i>); however, there are concerns with how he (<i>functional area that is of concern/quality of ability/lacking skills</i>). Aside from the concern regarding Calvin's _____, he is demonstrating skills expected of a child his age in the area of (<i>outcome</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide examples of the child's age-expected functioning. Note concerns. <i>Evidence should not include any functioning that is not age expected for a 6 or 7.</i>
Decreasing Degree of Age-Expected Skills	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child shows functioning expected for his or her age some of the time and/or in some settings and situations. Child's functioning is a mix of age-expected and not age-expected behaviors and skills. Child's functioning might be described as like that of a slightly younger child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For an #-month-old child, Calvin has many skills expected of his age, but he also demonstrates some skills slightly below what is expected at this age in the area of (<i>outcome</i>). Relative to same age peers, Calvin shows many age-expected skills, but continues to show some functioning that might be described like that of a slightly younger child in the area of (<i>outcome</i>). Calvin is somewhat where we would expect him to be at this age. This means that Calvin has many skills we would expect at this age in regard to (<i>outcome</i>), but he does not yet have all of the age-expected skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide examples of the child's age-expected functioning. Provide examples of the child's functioning that is not age expected.
	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child shows occasional age-appropriate functioning across settings and situations. More functioning is not age-expected than age-expected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At # months, Calvin shows occasional use of some age-expected skills, but more of his skills are not yet age-expected in the area of (<i>outcome</i>). At # months, Calvin shows occasional use of some age-expected skills, but has more skills that are younger than those expected for a child his age in the area of (<i>outcome</i>). Calvin has a few of the skills we would expect in regard to (<i>outcome</i>), but he shows more skills that are not age-expected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide examples of the child's age-expected functioning. Provide examples of the child's functioning that is not age expected. <i>Evidence should show more functioning that is not yet age expected.</i>
No Age-Expected Skills and Decreasing Degree of Immediate Foundational Skills	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child does not yet show functioning expected of a child of his or her age in any situation. Child uses immediate foundational skills most or all of the time across settings and situations. Functioning might be described as like that of a younger child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relative to same age peers, Calvin is not yet using skills expected of his age. He does, however, show many important immediate foundational skills to build upon in the area of (<i>outcome</i>). In the area of (<i>outcome</i>), Calvin is nearly displaying age-expected skills. This means that he does not yet have the skills we would expect of a child his age. He has the immediate foundational skills that are the building blocks to achieve age-appropriate skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide examples of the child's functioning at an immediate foundational skill level. <i>Evidence should not show age-expected functioning in the outcome for a rating of 3.</i>
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child occasionally uses immediate foundational skills across settings and situations. More functioning reflects skills that are not immediate foundational than are immediate foundational. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At # months, Calvin shows occasional use of some immediate foundational skills that will help him move toward age-appropriate skills. More of his functioning displays earlier skills in the area of (<i>outcome</i>). Relative to same age peers, Calvin is showing some immediate foundational skills, but has more skills that developmentally come in earlier in the area of (<i>outcome</i>). For a #-month-old little boy, Calvin occasionally uses immediate foundational skills but has a greater mix of earlier skills that he uses in the area of (<i>outcome</i>). Overall, in this outcome area, Calvin is just beginning to show some immediate foundational skills which will help him to work toward age-appropriate skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide examples of the child's functioning at an immediate foundational skill level. Provide examples of the child's functioning that is not yet age expected or immediate foundational. <i>Evidence should show more functioning that is foundational than immediate foundational for a rating of 2.</i>
Not Yet Age-Expected or Immediate Foundational Skills	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child does not yet show functioning expected of a child his or her age in any situation. Child's functioning does not yet include immediate foundational skills upon which to build age-appropriate functioning. Child's functioning might be described as like that of a much younger child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relative to same age peers, Calvin has the very early skills in the area of (<i>outcome</i>). This means that Calvin has the skills we would expect of a much younger child in this outcome area. For a #-month-old little boy, Calvin shows early skills in the outcome area. He does not yet show age-expected skills or the skills that come right before those. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide examples of the child's functioning that is not yet age expected or immediate foundational. <i>Evidence should not show functioning that is age expected or immediate foundational for a rating of 1.</i>

Decision Tree for Summary Rating Discussions

