

## **What if We Can't Reach Consensus?**

### **Suggestions for Reaching Consensus**

- Team disagreement is a common concern, but this doesn't happen often.
- Structure the discussion to minimize the likelihood of reaching an impasse.
- Adopt a policy/procedure for dealing with these situations. Possible options:
  - Majority rules
  - Supervisor decides
  - No rating is given (ECO doesn't recommend!)
- Focus most of the discussion on the child's skills related to the outcome; don't go to selecting a rating number too quickly.
- Discuss the rationales for the differing ratings; focus on concrete descriptions and explore how these support a rating.
- Include more discussion on what skills and behaviors you would see in a typically developing child this age to provide more background for the discussion of this child.
- If unresolvable differences are occurring fairly frequently, revisit how the rating is being decided.

### **Possible Conversation Prompts for Groups Having Difficulty Reaching Consensus**

Suggest that they re-visit documents that give examples of the breadth of content covered in each outcome. Have they discussed the child's skills regarding those aspects of the outcomes? Are the comments being considered relevant to the outcome up for rating discussion? Conversation prompts may include the following:

"I hear you describing the child's skills with regard to [insert content], what information do you have about the child's skills in [insert another relevant setting or situation or outcome component that hasn't yet been discussed]?"

"Tell me about the kinds of evidence that suggest to you this child has [insert modifier] age-expected behavior or has [insert modifier] immediate foundational skills?"

- When have you observed or documented those skills?
- In what situations?
- How frequently does that occur?
- Were the accommodations/supports available in that setting those that are usually available to the child? What were they?
- You identified this as an immediate foundational skill. Are there other steps in the sequence of development that need to occur between developing this skill and the age-expected skills in this area?
- Is there other information you need or want to be better equipped to make this decision?

- Has everyone on the team had a chance to talk about the skills they have observed and the evidence they are considering in reaching a rating? (Is any one person dominating conversation and that is part of the problem?)”

“What do most [insert child’s age] year olds do with regard to this skill [or this outcome area]?”

“How does the child’s disability/the child’s delay/the change in the child’s approach to these skills impact his/her ability to function in achieving this outcome RIGHT NOW?”

“Ratings are based on the child’s functioning RIGHT NOW at one point in time. Thinking about the child’s skills that have been discussed...

- Right now is the child showing skills that are expected for his/her age?
- Right now, is the child showing skills that are immediate foundations for the skills that other peers his/her age are showing?
- How often? Can you describe what they are and when and where they occur?”

“What is the key difference between a X vs a X [insert numbers of ratings that are sources of disagreement]? What skills (or lack of skills) stand out in making you choose that number [or insert differentiating language associated with number]?”

“I hear a lot of discussion about wanting ratings to agree with eligibility. With some kids and in some states there is a lot of overlap between achievement of functional outcomes and eligibility; with other kids and in other states, there is not. Eligibility may focus a lot on testing done in contexts that differ substantially from those common in everyday functioning. Eligibility may or may not allow certain kinds of accommodations or supports; to the extent that these are available to the child in everyday situations, then they would be allowed in considering outcomes ratings. Eligibility usually is organized around specific domains whereas the functional outcomes are organized in a different way that could lead to different conclusions. Eligibility may assume corrections for prematurity; while this is a state decision, in many places outcomes ratings are based on a true chronological comparison. Taking all this into account, let’s set eligibility decisions aside for a moment (though not necessarily the data you got to help make them), what do the child’s skills and actions suggest about the child’s functioning right now with regard to the outcome?”

*Was this handout useful? Please share comments, suggestions, or questions with us at [staff@the-eco-center.org](mailto:staff@the-eco-center.org).*