

Answering the “Ever” Question on the Decision Tree: Key Points and Practice Scenarios

Facilitator Guide

<https://ectacenter.org/eco/pages/decisiontree.asp>

Updated March 12, 2026

This resource, created by the [Child Outcomes Summary \(COS\) Learning Community](#), provides key points and practice scenarios for team decision-making when answering the first question on the [Decision Tree for Summary Rating Discussions](#) during the COS process.

The practice scenarios can be used by individuals in a self-directed format or to support team building and shared understanding. Facilitators and participants should be familiar with the essentials of the COS process as outlined in the [COS Process Module](#).

Additional resources that provide foundational information include:

- [Age Anchoring Guidance for Determining Child Outcomes Summary \(COS\) Ratings: Guidance for EI/ECSE Practitioners and Trainers](#), which explains the concept of *age anchoring*, including what is meant by foundational (F), immediate foundational (IF), and age-expected (AE) skills;
- [COS-Practice Scenarios \(COS-PS\)](#), which allow you to practice determining outcomes ratings using the Decision Tree; and
- [Resources for More Information about the Child Outcomes Summary \(COS\) Process](#).

The contents of this document were developed under a cooperative agreement, #H326P170001, and a grant, #H373Z190002, from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

ECTA Center Project Officer: Julia Martin Eile

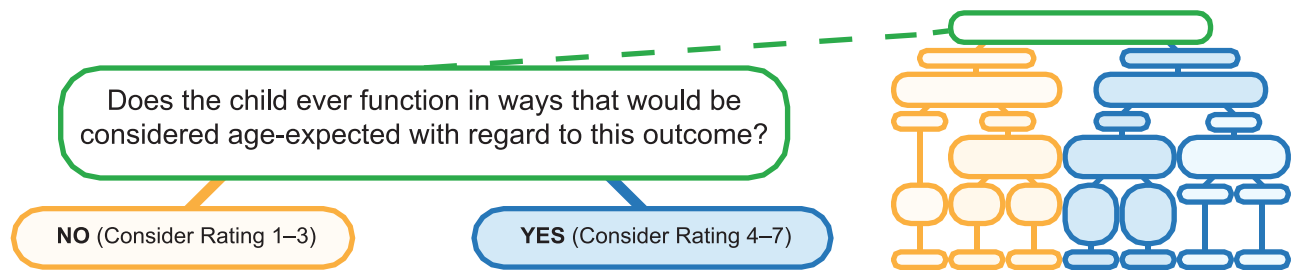
DaSy Center Project Officers: Meredith Miceli and Amy Bae



Office of Special Education Programs
U.S. Department of Education

Key Points

The “Ever” Question on the Decision Tree



This yes-or-no question is anything but simple, and teams must discuss specific examples of the child’s functioning within the outcome area being rated. By sharing examples, teams better understand the child’s functioning and reach consensus.

“**Ever**” means that the child has an age-expected (AE) skill in their repertoire and uses it in a meaningful way with some consistency—at least occasionally—even if it is not observed in every setting or situation. A Yes answer does not mean that everything the child does in an outcome area is AE.

“**Ever**” does not mean that the child has performed an AE skill at one single time or at any one point in their lives.

Gather Input and Discuss Examples

Rely on the team—with family input—to answer the “ever” question in each outcome area.

Discuss examples of the child’s functioning from different sources and team members. Determine if the examples are descriptive enough to convey the child’s functioning within the outcome area being rated:

- Across the breadth of this outcome area.
- Across different settings and situations.

Age Anchoring Discussions

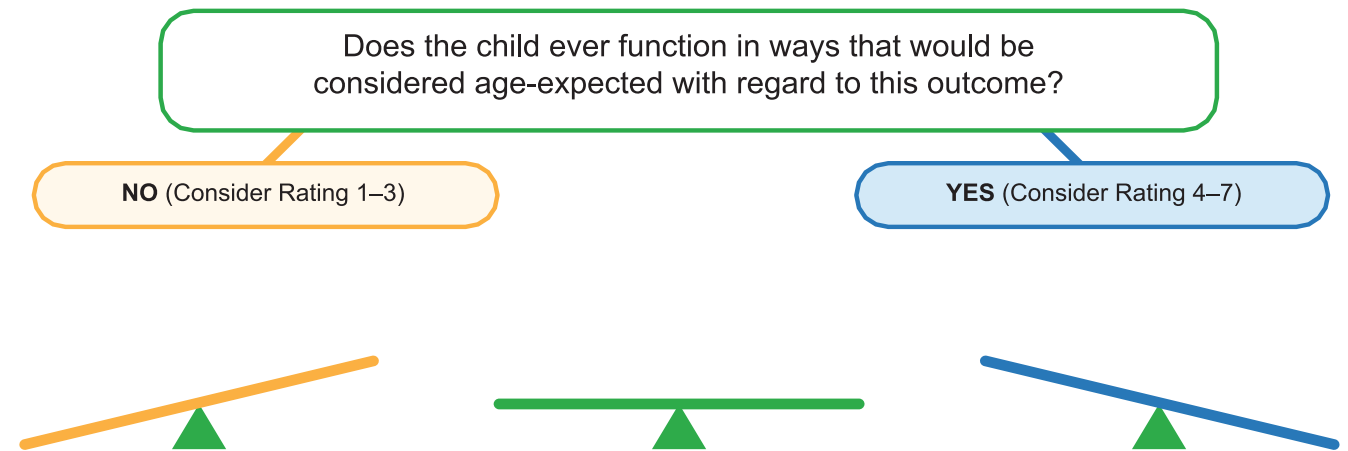
Practice quality age anchoring to reference how close or far a child’s functioning is to age expectations by:

- Discussing what the child is doing and what is AE for that skill. This includes if the child is doing those things and what degree of support is needed. Referencing functional skills expected for the child’s chronological age, as opposed to those skills that come in earlier and remain throughout development for example, maintaining eye contact.
- Avoiding dwelling on discrete or isolated demonstrations of a skill as opposed to considering other examples.
- Ensuring evaluation results or any diagnosis does not over-influence the team’s consideration of all skills in one of the Three Child Outcomes.

Demonstrating a skill during an evaluation does not mean it is not functional or “doesn’t count,” especially if the child has not had sufficient opportunity to demonstrate the skill in everyday settings or has achieved functional use of the skill at an AE level.

Tipping

Tipping is a metaphor for having sufficient information to determine if a child's functioning is AE or not. On the [Decision Tree for Summary Rating Discussions](#), sufficient information tips toward the **No** side of the tree if there are no examples of AE functioning and toward the **Yes** side if there are examples of AE functioning. When the information provided lacks a clear result teams may reasonably conclude that the information is **Not Tipping** toward either side.



No, Clearly Not Age-Expected

There is no instance of AE functioning in this outcome area.

The team cannot identify any examples of the child functionally using skills that developmentally emerge near this child's current chronological age across all the skills related to this outcome area.

The skills the child is using are clearly at a foundational (F) or immediate foundational (IF) level.

Not Tipping

Some aspect about the skill the team is considering—its quality, consistency, level of support provided, the child's health, or cultural issues around opportunities and expectations—makes it questionable, so it should not count as the only example of a functional AE skill on the outcome.

If an example is unclear, teams should not overthink, but instead think of other examples across the breadth of the outcome that might provide clarity.

Yes, Clearly Age-Expected

The team can identify example(s) of the child functionally using skills that are expected at the child's current chronological age.

There is at least one instance of AE functioning in this outcome area.

Practice Scenarios

The scenarios are organized around five themes: **Function**, **Consistency**, **Quality**, **Health**, and **Culture**. Each theme includes children ages birth-5 and the scenarios are ordered by increasing age of the child.

Identify each scenario using one of the following three options:

- **No**, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- **Yes**, Clearly Age-Expected
- **Not Tipping**

Provide the rationale for your selection.

Function

Scenarios 1–6

How is the skill used in a way that is contextually meaningful for the child?

These scenarios include situations in which the **function** of the child's skills is in question. Functionality refers to how the child uses a skill in a contextually meaningful situation.

Functional skills have a purpose, are displayed during meaningful everyday tasks, and can be thought about in terms of how the skill supports a child's participation in different settings, situations, and interactions.

The functionality of skills is an essential component, because the Three Child Outcomes are based on a child's current functional use of skills, not their discrete skill abilities with no functional reference.

Consistency

Scenarios 7–10

To what extent is the skill used with some degree of regularity?

These scenarios include situations when the **consistency** of the child's skills is in question.

Consistency is vital to explore during COS rating discussions, as the regularity in which children use functional skills often varies by situation, setting, and with whom the child is interacting.

For a skill to be considered AE, it should be used with some degree of consistency and not a skill that was only observed once or very rarely.

Quality

Scenarios 11–15

How well does the child demonstrate the skill?

Quality refers to how the child achieves their goals. Teams must consider the extent to which the quality of the skill allows the child to achieve goals relative to peers of the same age and how much it hinders their ability to use skills expected for their age.

The quality of a skill changes with development. Quality is an important consideration for skills that begin early and develop over time, like walking. The way an 18-month-old walks is qualitatively different than how a 5-year-old walks. For example, a child's walking quality might hinder their participation in an environment, affecting their ability to achieve the Three Child Outcomes.

Health

Scenarios 16–20

How does the child’s health or disability impact function, quality, and consistency of their skills?

These scenarios include situations when the child’s **health** temporarily, permanently, or inevitably affects or alters their ability to achieve the Three Child Outcomes.

When discussing specifics about a child’s health regarding their skills, consider these questions:

- Is there anything unique about the child’s health that needs to be considered to determine if this is AE?
- How are issues addressed under function, consistency, or quality contributing to difficulty in the team’s decision?

Culture

Scenarios 21–25

How do the family cultural group’s customs and values affect function, quality, or consistency?

Culture includes the behaviors, beliefs, and values accepted by one group of people and passed along as a way of life from one generation to the next.

Family culture shapes the opportunities and ways a child demonstrates functional skills, and practitioners frequently work with families whose culture differs from their own.

Age-expectations included in developmental assessments are not based on all cultures. When a cultural mismatch between families and team members or assessment tools occurs, efforts to determine whether a child’s functioning is AE or not can be complex.

As part of this process, it is helpful to consider if the skill or its absence is a unique family habit, or if it is a practice shared in a community or group beyond family. Practitioners must ask questions about families’ cultural expectations and practices in different situations to learn more about how similar or different the child’s functioning is from what same-aged peers within their culture display.

When discussing specifics about a child’s functioning within a child’s cultural context, consider these questions:

- To what extent does the child’s developmental progression look like children of the same culture?
- Does the cultural practice change the skill required in an activity, making age-expectations different?
- Does the cultural practice impede the child’s ability to achieve a functional skill, or does it just shift the timing or opportunity to develop the skill?
- How much does the child display the skill in other situations where different cultural expectations apply?

Facilitator Guide

In addition to suggested scenario responses, this guide provides facilitator notes and a plausible alternative for each scenario.

Facilitator's Notes:

The responses provided in the scenarios are not a definitive response for all children or situations with similar characteristics. Facilitator's notes identify items that inform team decision-making, and highlight pitfalls, or foster discussion regarding multiple interpretations.

Each scenario provides limited information about the child and teams would typically gather more information to address any identified gaps.

A Plausible Alternative

Where the team consensus is Not Tipping, additional considerations describe what modifications to the skills highlighted in the scenario might make the examples AE or not.

Participant Materials

Participant Materials in fillable PDF and MS-Word formats are on the [Answering the "Ever" Question on the Decision Tree: Key Points and Practice Scenarios](#) page of the ECTA Center website.

For group discussion and training purposes, a separate PDF with the **Practice Scenarios** is also provided. Be sure all participants have access to the Key Points and orientation to the Practice Scenarios on pages 2–5 of the Participant Materials.

Theme: Function

Scenario 1:

Balveer

Balveer is 10 months old.

At home, Balveer eats meals while sitting in his highchair. He often turns his plate of food over when he is finished eating his favorite foods, even if other foods, often vegetables, are left on the plate.

During the assessment, Balveer's mom said she thinks he turns his plate over to tell her he is done eating.

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Action to Meet Needs

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

Balveer functionally communicates he is finished eating in a behavioral way, without words, which is typical of his age.

Even if his mom feels this is an undesirable behavior, the communicative intent of Balveer's actions is AE and functional.

Facilitator's Notes:

In this example, the function of the child's behavior is more apparent, especially with the family input.

While the behavior might be undesirable, it is functional and therefore, can be age anchored.

This type of behavior (communicating needs through gestures and actions) is expected for a child 10 months old, which makes Balveer's behavior an AE skill.

The team should consider other examples of how Balveer communicates needs with gestures and actions.

Theme: Function

Scenario 2:

Kevin

Kevin is 17 months old.

Kevin has recently displayed frequent tantrums. His childcare provider reports that on a bad day, he has three to four tantrums.

Kevin's tantrums typically last ten minutes or less. The family and childcare provider have worked hard to understand more about these tantrums but have not identified a cause.

Outcome 1: Positive Social-Emotional Skills

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping (Correct Answer)

Rationale:

It is common for a 17-month-old to have tantrums, and the frequency and duration of Kevin's tantrums seem AE. But the function of the tantrum is unclear making it not functional.

Facilitator's Notes:

The function and context of Kevin's tantrums are not evident in this example. Additional details about what the child does are needed to understand the function of their skills and behaviors.

In the absence of other examples of AE skills, tantrums alone, especially those without a clear function, are not enough to answer the first question on the Decision Tree for Summary Rating Discussions.

Also, tantrums can be difficult to align with an outcome area if the detail and function is not clear. For example, Kevin's tantrums might be for communicating emotions (Outcome 1) or communicating specific needs (Outcome 3).

A Plausible Alternative

- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected

If the intent and function of Kevin's tantrum were apparent this could be AE.

Theme: Function

Scenario 3:

Katrin

Katrin is 30 months old.

Katrin is a number whiz. When interviewed, her parents said that she can name all the numbers from 1–100 and has number flash cards that she flips through naming the numbers.

During the evaluation, when asked to take one truck from a group, she took all the trucks instead.

However, when left on her own, Katrin will flip her number cards and name the numbers for over an hour at a time. Her strong focus on numbers interferes with her ability to play with other toys in their intended manner.

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping (Correct Answer)

Rationale:

Katrin's number ability is a higher-level skill, but she uses it in an atypical and nonfunctional manner, so it is not a clear AE skill.

Facilitator's Notes:

Atypical skills can be difficult to classify when determining COS ratings, as the function is unclear or they serve a different function entirely, for example, self-soothing. Skills performed in an atypical or repetitive manner cannot be compared to age expectations and are therefore not age anchorable.

When considering atypical skills during COS rating determinations, the team should discuss how they impact the child's overall functioning relative to each of the three outcomes. When reviewing Katrin's scenario, it will be important for the team to discuss the extent to which Katrin's interests are exclusively around numbers, and how this focus might interfere with her functioning in this and other outcome areas.

A Plausible Alternative

- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected

If Katrin were using her number awareness functionally such as trying to count things, even if the numbers are not in the right order or following directions to take one item from a larger group or hand out two snacks appropriately, then that would be functional and AE.

Theme: Function

Scenario 4:

Maja

Maja is 36 months old.

Maja's grandma reports that Maja has strong feelings about the clothes she wears. Maja wants to pick out her clothes and says "no," resists help, and sometimes throws tantrums when her grandma tries to put her in a dress or fancy shoes.

Maja only wants to wear tennis shoes and rushes to put them on. She puts her foot in and seals the Velcro well, but sometimes puts the shoe on the opposite foot.

Maja likes soft pants. When dressed in jeans with an elastic waist, she will pull them down and kick them off. She eagerly opens the drawer and helps put on soft material like sweats. She sometimes pulls her soft pants down too but only when she has to go potty, or when undressing for bath or bedtime.

Maja also prefers her yellow coat over her green one. When dressed in the green one, she unzips it and takes it off saying, "I want yellow." If the yellow coat is clean, Maja usually smiles and zips up the yellow coat happily once the zipper is lined up.

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Action to Meet Needs

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

While Maja's independence and clear preferences may be frustrating to her grandma at times, Maja's skills with putting on shoes, pulling down pants, and zipping and unzipping coats are all at AE levels.

Maja also clearly makes her wants known using both verbal and non-verbal approaches. Maja's actions have a clear purpose that is at an AE level.

Facilitator's Notes:

Maja's communication of her wants and needs and her efforts to undress and select clothes clearly have an intended purpose. Her ability to initiate undressing and dressing are at an AE level, as are her attempts to communicate her feelings to her grandma.

Sometimes dressing and undressing skills vary widely from one setting to another, depending on how difficult the clothes are to manipulate independently, the discomfort the child feels (for example, if a child with strong sensory reactions cannot remove a lace dress, they may act like a much younger child out of frustration), and the amount of choice or independence possible in different settings or with different caregivers.

Theme: Function

Scenario 5:

Tamara

Tamara is 36 months old.

Tamara eats her meals at a table with three other children at daycare.

Her teacher shared that when she serves Tamara chicken that is not in nugget form (for example, a grilled chicken breast), she throws her plate on the floor.

When Tamara throws her plate, she does not make any vocalizations to indicate her dislike for the food.

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Action to Meet Needs

Tipping (choose one):

- No**, Clearly Not Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Yes**, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping**

Rationale:

Tamara functionally communicates her dislike for chicken breast by throwing her plate, but she is not expressing her dislike in an AE manner.

At Tamara's age, we would expect her to verbally communicate her dislike for certain foods and express a desire for something different.

Facilitator's Notes:

In this example, the behavior is functional; it is being used to communicate Tamara's dislike of the food.

However, unlike Scenario 1, Tamara is 36 months old, and not using AE communication to express her needs.

Theme: Function

Scenario 6:

Emma

Emma is 38 months old.

During the evaluation, Emma stood on one foot for five seconds without support.

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping (Correct Answer)**

Rationale:

The function of this skill is not clear because it lacks purpose in a meaningful context. As stated here, it is an isolated skill without a clear purpose and cannot count as a functional skill that tips decisions one way or the other.

It is also difficult to effectively align the skill with an outcome area without knowing the function. For example, Emma's response to the request "Simon says, stand on one leg" would align with Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills.

Facilitator's Notes:

A team should not rely on an isolated discrete skill as an example of functioning in response to the first question on the Decision Tree for Summary Rating Discussions.

The team might discuss additional details or examples to show how the child uses the skill in a functional manner, for example, standing on one foot when playing hopscotch, or putting her pants on independently.

A Plausible Alternative:

- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected**

If the action was functional, such as standing on one foot to slip on her pants independently, this would be AE for a 38-month-old child.

Theme: Consistency

Scenario 7:

Hwan

Hwan is 10 months old.

During the assessment, Hwan's father reported that he goes into the bedroom to get Hwan in the morning, and half of the time Hwan says "apa" (father) and holds his hands up to indicate he wants to be picked up.

Other mornings, he is quiet, and only smiles when he sees his father come into his room.

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Action to Meet Needs

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

Hwan's ability to express his desire to be picked up by calling his father and holding his hands up is AE. At this age, the variance of this behavior is also AE and given the child's mood the response might be very different.

Facilitator's Notes:

This example shows the importance of analyzing the consistency of different aspects of the same skill, and comparing each aspect to what is AE.

When discussing AE skills, the team needs to consider if a certain skill is used in a single setting or across settings.

Depending on the child's age, it might be AE for certain skills to only be used in some settings, while other skills are expected to be used across all settings.

If the child has a functional AE skill that they use with some consistency (at least occasionally) within a single routine or setting, this generally is enough to answer the "ever" question with a Yes.

Discussions about a child's use of AE skills across settings are addressed in subsequent steps on the Decision Tree for Summary Rating Discussions.

Theme: Consistency

Scenario 8:

Ainsley

Ainsley is 36 months old.

Ainsley is an only child who started preschool a week ago. Previously, she was at home with her grandmother during the day and they would regularly go to the library story time.

At the library, Ainsley took turns while playing with the puppets and other children. However, her library experience was four months ago, and she no longer goes there.

Ainsley's preschool teachers report that, during her four days at preschool, Ainsley only plays by herself. When a few other children have tried to talk to her, she clutches whatever toy she is holding and does not respond.

Outcome 3: Positive Social-Emotional Skills

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping (Correct Answer)

Rationale:

Ainsley's behavior is inconsistent across settings over time. Given her prior library experience and brief time in preschool, it is difficult to understand her current abilities.

If there were another setting in which she regularly participates, the team could draw on that to understand how she is currently playing with peers.

Facilitator's Notes:

When examining the consistency of functional skills, teams must consider a variety of settings and situations. Analysis of how much exposure to—and the child's comfort level within—each of those settings and situations can help the team accurately determine what is and is not AE.

To answer the “ever” question with a Yes, the child must have an AE skill in their current repertoire and use it in a meaningful way with some consistency (at least occasionally), even if it is not observed in every setting or situation. Skills the child has not recently used may no longer be within the child's current repertoire of skills.

A Plausible Alternative

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected

Although Ainsley might have demonstrated AE abilities in her previous library experience four months ago, in her brief preschool experience, she is not yet showing AE skills in her play with peers.

If Ainsley was acclimated to preschool and was still not engaging in play with other children, the team might conclude she is not yet showing AE skills in this outcome area.

Theme: Consistency

Scenario 9:

Lakisha

Lakisha is 3 years and 6 months old.

Lakisha's teacher reported that she consistently points and gestures to communicate her wants and needs. She often combines sounds with gestures, as well.

During a visit to her classroom four weeks ago, Lakisha's Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) observed her say *"I want blue paint,"* as she reached for paint.

However, her teacher, SLP, and family have not heard her use that phrase or other true words to make requests since.

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

Tipping (choose one):

- No**, Clearly Not Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Yes**, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping**

Rationale:

Lakisha's sentence is not clear evidence of AE, as it was only demonstrated once. Answering the "ever" question with a **Yes** means the child uses any AE, functional skill(s) in this outcome area, with some consistency (at least occasionally).

Facilitator's Notes:

In situations like Lakisha's, the team should discuss what is happening in that moment and consider the frequency and other contexts in which the skill is used.

Discussing how Lakisha communicates a desire to paint or other similar activities at school and at home will be useful to examine consistency and understand if her skill is or is not AE.

The team might consider what additional supports evident in the situation helped Lakisha display this one-time higher-level skill. For example, rather than a spontaneous communication, had Lakisha just heard someone at the table say the sentence and then imitated that phrase?

Understanding what supports may be available can help the team see if the child was using the same AE level skill for which the team was watching.

Theme: Consistency

Scenario 10:

Jessie

Jessie is 5 years and 3 months old.

One of Jessie's favorite activities is playing on the playground. There are several playgrounds in the community that the family visits and a few of those are also used by the local preschool Jessie attends.

Jessie sometimes follows the rules to safely stay within the boundaries of the playground, even when a child he is chasing runs past it. Other times, he runs far past the boundaries. This happens across the different playgrounds and seems to vary day by day.

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Action to Meet Needs

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping (Correct Answer)

Rationale:

Jessie displays a mix of AE and not AE skills concerning safety awareness on playgrounds. If this is the only partial/inconsistent demonstration of AE skills in this outcome area, it is not enough to tip towards AE.

Jessie's inconsistency makes it difficult for the team to discern a pattern in his behavior, which further indicates his behavior should not tip the decision to either side of the Decision Tree for Summary Rating Discussions until Jessie's actions are better understood or more consistent.

Facilitator's Notes:

The team might want to ask questions to determine what leads to Jessie running off, for example, a dog ran by the park, a bee flew near him, he saw older children running outside the playground area, or he would have had to run through a flowerbed to leave the playground area.

If information is not apparent or if the team gets too bogged down discussing this information, they can look for more information to answer the "ever" question.

Be mindful of all the factors that go into deciding AE, and realize that some skills for some ages require a high degree of consistency to be at an AE level, like safely crossing the street.

A Plausible Alternative

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected

If Jessie was not following rules, even when repeatedly reminded during play outside at new and familiar playgrounds then the team would answer "no" to the "ever" question.

Theme: Quality

Scenario 11:

Mona

Mona is 13 months old.

At breakfast, Mona says “*miu*” to request her bottle of milk.

While others unfamiliar with Mona might not recognize this as milk, she does say it to mean milk and her parents clearly understand the request.

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Action to Meet Needs

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

Mona’s functioning is AE. Even though her word for “milk” is an approximation, her primary caregivers understand her request to mean milk. At this age, it is typical for a child to have a word, sign, or sound that is used consistently for “drink.”

Facilitator’s Notes:

If Mona used the sound “*miu*” without it referencing a specific thing that she wanted (milk) it would not be considered an AE skill.

If Mona were older (at an age where articulation is expected to be well-formed and understood by people less familiar with the child) this skill would not be AE.

This skill is considered AE because at age 13 months, most children are using word approximations in combination with real words to communicate.

Theme: Quality

Scenario 12:

Quinley

Quinley is 24 months old.

Quinley gets around her home by walking and running. She can keep pace with her almost 3-year-old sister when they play a chase type game around the loop between the kitchen and living room.

However, when Quinley walks and runs, she does so with a wide base of support (feet at shoulder width apart) and holds her hands out to her side. Quinley rarely falls unless she is going too fast when walking and running.

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Action to Meet Needs

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

Quinley's functioning is AE, even though her quality is different.

Facilitator's Notes:

When considering quality of skills, it is important to determine how well the child is achieving the function of their behavior. Even though the quality looks different, Quinley still achieves a level of functioning that is typical for a child her age.

If Quinley was not able to keep up with her peers and move about independently due to the different quality of her walking and running, this skill would not qualify as AE.

Theme: Quality

Scenario 13:

Raj

Raj is 4 years old.

Raj's father proudly reports that he speaks very clearly and uses many multiple word phrases. However, his preschool teacher reports that his language is unusual and not spontaneous, flexible, or adaptable.

Raj's teacher thinks he may be using scripted phrases rather than creating his own sentences. Examples include: "What is this?" "Red light stop." " or repeating Ryder's phrase from Paw Patrol "Whenever you're in trouble, yelp for help.

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping (Correct Answer)

Rationale:

The questionable quality of Raj's ability makes it difficult to definitively call this AE or not AE.

Raj uses multiple word phrases. However, it is difficult to know if he uses random scripted phrases that sometimes fit the situation or if he intentionally says phrases expected for his age.

To determine if the quality of Raj's language is AE or not, more examples of his language use across settings would be needed.

Facilitator's Notes:

When considering if Raj's phrases are AE it will be important for the team to determine if the quality of his language is flexible and at a level of sophistication expected for his age. If they were truly novel and intentional, then the phrases Raj uses could be expected for his age

However, based on the information provided in this scenario, there are questions about the quality of his ability to demonstrate the necessary flexibility to adjust to the given context.

More information and examples are needed to understand if Raj's phrases are always scripted, or if he can adjust his phrases as expected for his age.

A Plausible Alternative

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected

If Raj was only using scripted phrases rather than creating his own novel and contextually-relevant phrases, then this would be clearly not AE.

Theme: Quality

Scenario 14:

Ushi

Ushi is 4 years and 6 months old.

Ushi moves around very quickly and proficiently by crawling and butt scooting. She can even move about on the playground rather quickly and can climb part way up the sliding part of the slide.

However, Ushi is not yet walking and is unable to keep up with her peers when moving around the playground or playing tag.

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Action to Meet Needs

Tipping (choose one):

- No**, Clearly Not Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Yes**, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping**

Rationale:

Ushi moves around the playground, but she is not yet walking as expected for her age. She is also not using adaptive equipment to move in a way that allows her to keep pace with her peers.

Facilitator's Notes:

At Ushi's age, it is typically expected that children are walking, running, and navigating playground equipment.

If Ushi was using assistive technology (AT) to accomplish these functional abilities, the team could consider them AE, even though the quality of walking, running, and climbing would be different with the use of AT.

However, if Ushi is not given access to AT, or is unable to successfully use it, the team would consider these skills not AE.

Theme: Quality

Scenario 15:

Cezar

Cezar is 5 years old.

When Cezar was born, his thumb and index fingers on each hand were fused.

Every morning at school, the children sign in by writing their name on the roster provided. Cezar grasps pens, pencils, and markers between his index and middle finger (rather than using a tri-pod grasp).

Cezar can write the letters in his name in a recognizable way.

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

Cezar's functioning is AE as he completes the routine task of signing his name even though his quality is different.

Facilitator's Notes:

At 5 years old, Cezar's qualitative difference in his writing grasp has not slowed him down or kept him from achieving the same goals as his peers.

As Cezar gets older and the expectations for writing increase, it is possible that without additional support or tools, he will not be able to keep pace with the expectations in his classroom.

However, the rating must be based on current functioning relative to current age expectations. If Cezar's name was illegible because of his unique pencil grasp, the quality of his writing would lead us to conclude that he does not demonstrate this skill at an AE level.

Theme: Health

Scenario 16:

Diego

Diego is 7 months old.

Diego has been diagnosed with Down syndrome.

Grandma is Diego's caregiver during the week when his parents go to work. When his mom or dad drops Diego off at grandma's, he waves "bye-bye" by moving his whole arm and hand.

Diego does so consistently in response to his mom or dad saying bye as they leave.

Outcome 1: Positive Social-Emotional Skills

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

This is an AE and functional skill.

Consideration of Diego's diagnosis is not relevant and the use of his whole arm to wave does not alter the functionality.

Facilitator's Notes:

If a skill is AE but could be delayed in the future based on the prognosis of a given state of health, it is still AE. The team should focus on current functioning and not an anticipated delay in functioning.

Theme: Health

Scenario 17:

Dani

Dani is 16 months old.

Dani has a hearing impairment. She uses 15 different signs to make requests for food, drinks, toys, and other wants and needs like “*more*” and “*all done*”.

However, Dani is not verbally communicating any of these desires.

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

Between 12–18 months children typically have a vocabulary of 5–20 words comprised mostly of nouns and use them to express wants and needs.

Dani is functionally using 15 different signs, which are words. Recognizing that she has a hearing impairment and is learning sign language, the signs are functionally equivalent to using expressive language.

Facilitator’s Notes:

Whether Dani’s communication is clearly AE, clearly not AE, or Not Tipping, can be determined by varying details in her family and life.

Would this scenario be AE if Dani did not have a hearing impairment? Likely, “no,” since she is not using any verbal communication.

Would the scenario be AE if Dani’s family were deaf and used sign language as their primary form of communication? Likely, “yes,” since this would be AE for the family and their culture.

Would the scenario be AE if Dani had a cochlear implant? The answer would depend on her functioning and the timing and circumstances around the cochlear implant.

Theme: Health

Scenario 18:

Frenchie

Frenchie is 34 months old.

Frenchie and just received his bilateral long leg hip spica cast (casting on the pelvis, thighs, and legs). He will have to wear the cast for six months.

Before the cast, Frenchie was able to climb on the big slide and other playground equipment. The body cast has immobilized his hips and knees.

Now, Frenchie sits next to his mom and watches his older sister play on the playground when at the park.

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Action to Meet Needs

Tipping (choose one):

- No**, Clearly Not Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Yes**, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping**

Rationale:

Frenchie is not able to move about in an AE manner, even though the cast is temporary.

Facilitator's Notes:

Frenchie's current functioning is not AE, and his previous skill level is not demonstrable at this time.

It would be especially problematic to focus solely on Frenchie's temporary limitation of his climbing and mobility skills when answering the "ever" question on the Decision Tree for Summary Rating Discussions.

This scenario emphasizes the importance of looking at other examples of functioning in this outcome (functioning beyond moving independently in Outcome 3).

Theme: Health

Scenario 19:

Tyree

Tyree is 4 years old.

Tyree and uses Assistive Technology (AT)—a walker—to move around the classroom independently.

Tyree keeps pace with his peers, although he sometimes bumps into the cabinets.

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Action to Meet Needs

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

Tyree moves around using his walker, and keeps pace with his peers, thus this skill is AE.

Facilitator's Notes:

When considering a child who uses an AT device, it is important for the team to consider a child's functioning across settings and situations with the AT device, where applicable.

On the other hand, if Tyree could not keep pace with his peers or was unable to move independently (for example, does not use his AT device), then this would not be AE.

Theme: Health

Scenario 20:

Tabitha

Tabitha is 5 years and 3 months old.

Tabitha was recently diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury (TBI) after falling from the playground jungle gym three months ago. While in the hospital, she acquired aspiration pneumonia that required treatment with a heart-lung bypass machine for a week.

Before the TBI, Tabitha was very coherent and answered various questions. As she is getting ready to transition into kindergarten, she is easily distracted and less able to focus.

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping (Correct Answer)

Rationale:

This scenario focuses on Tabitha's medical condition and complications versus specific functional skills making it a Not Tipping example. While it is important to understand the nature of her current medical condition, this scenario does not include her current functioning related to the outcome area being discussed (Outcome 2). Teams should focus on a child's functioning and not make decisions about functioning based on a particular medical condition or complications.

Facilitator's Notes:

Teams should look at current functioning rather than past or future functioning. The uncertainty of Tabitha's TBI makes this challenging, especially when this rating is occurring at exit. Regardless, ratings are based on functioning not medical condition.

A Plausible Alternative

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected

If more were known about Tabitha's functioning, then the team could determine if it is AE or not. For example, if after being read a new book, she could name the story's characters but could not tell what happened in the story, then this would not be AE.

Theme: Culture

Scenario 21:

Alona

Alona is 24 months old.

During Alona's assessment, the evaluator played games with her and encouraged her to point to different body parts. When the evaluator said "*Where are your feet? Point to your feet where your shoes go,*" Alona did not point. However, she did nod her head in the direction of her outstretched foot.

The evaluator wasn't sure and tried several times in different situations. Each time she nodded in the appropriate direction but did not specifically point.

One time when asked, she also smiled and wiggled her feet and then looked up at the evaluator for a response. Alona's father said that members of their family's tribal culture do not point with their hands or fingers.

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

Although Alona didn't point, the nod was clearly directed toward her feet in an appropriate way. On repeated occasions, she wiggled her feet suggesting that she understood the meaning of feet and was demonstrating that understanding in a culturally appropriate way.

Facilitator's Notes:

While a standardized test might require administration looking for one very specific response, the purpose of observing functional use of skills for the COS allows more flexibility.

It is ok for the response to be interpreted as AE for the COS given the customs described.

Theme: Culture

Scenario 22:

Aki

Aki is 30 months old.

Aki lives with his grandparents while his mom is out of the country for 15 months for work. He does not attend daycare or receive care from other caregivers.

Family interviews reveal that it is the family's cultural practice to feed children until they are 36 months old. They explain that when kids are fed, they'll open their mouths for food and let adults know when they want more.

At mealtimes, Aki is not yet using utensils himself, as this is not necessary for him yet. Observation reveals that he sits at the table and passively waits for food.

Sometimes his grandma needs to prompt Aki by tapping his lips to get him to open his mouth for another bite.

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Action to Meet Needs

Tipping (choose one):

- No**, Clearly Not Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Yes**, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping**

Rationale:

Aki is not feeding himself nor using utensils, which is in line with his family's culture. However, it is expected that Aki opens his mouth during feeding without prompting. Yet, he often needs prompting as described by his grandparents.

Because he requires prompting to open his mouth and because he only passively participates, his eating skills are not at an AE level for his age and culture.

Facilitator's Notes:

Considering the family's culture and that Aki is only with his grandparents now, Aki's being fed is AE for the family culture. However, his passive behavior at mealtime and need for prompting to open his mouth makes his behavior not AE.

Note that the absence of a skill—such as not using utensils—is not enough information to determine if the skill is AE or not. We need to know more about what the child does.

In this scenario, we know that Aki does not feed himself and that is expected for the family culture, but we also know from the family that children open their mouths to indicate they want more food, which Aki is not doing consistently, making his behavior not AE.

When considering culture, it is important to know what the progression of skill development looks like for other children in that culture.

Theme: Culture

Scenario 23:

Sofia

Sofia is 34 months old.

Sofia is breast- and bottle-fed. Her family reports that breast feeding is common in their culture until children are around 36 months old.

Sofia stays at home with her mother all day every day. Sofia drinks water, milk, and juice from a bottle. She has not yet been given an open cup at home.

Last week, the family was at a restaurant, and Sofia was given an open cup for the first time. Her mom reported that Sofia accidentally knocked the cup over when she reached for it.

When her mom held the cup up to her, Sofia drank some. At first, she drank a little too fast and spilled all over her shirt. Eventually, she successfully drank a few gulps with her mom's help.

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Action to Meet Needs

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping (Correct Answer)

Rationale:

Sofia's family's culture does not prioritize drinking from a cup or straw, so she has not had experience doing so.

When cultural variations lead to a lack of opportunity for a skill that the team considers AE, it is appropriate for the team to consider this Not Tipping.

Facilitator's Notes:

Different cultures prioritize different skills. When this is the case, the team must be careful not to suggest that a child's lack of opportunity due to cultural priorities is a negative. If the team plans to evaluate the child on a skill not prioritized by a family's culture, the team should ask for the family's permission before engaging the child in a new skill or task to see the child's response.

Questions will arise about what counts as culture, and what counts as family preference. The difference between a clear cultural context with a historical tradition and a family being unaware that opportunity for practice is relevant to development of a skill. If the family just didn't know, and didn't have the opportunity, it would not be AE.

A Plausible Alternative

- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected

If Sofia successfully held and drank from an open cup consistently when given the opportunity, rather than only once, then the team could consider answering the "ever" question with a Yes.

However, Sofia only drank from an open cup—which was held by her mom—with moderate success once, so this cannot be considered AE.

Theme: Culture

Scenario 24:

Mateo

Mateo is 4 years old.

He moved to the US about four months ago. Eight weeks after Mateo's enrollment, preschool staff interviewed his parents with a translator. They reported he is curious and talkative in Spanish.

Mateo loves to talk about building things, construction sites, and equipment. He asks many questions and gives long answers when others ask him why or how to build things. He lists many types of construction equipment and explains differences between them; he goes on and on with six- or seven-word sentences. Mateo's neighbors easily understand him, and they talk back and forth at length about building.

Mateo's preschool only speaks English. His teachers report that he is quiet, but that he can name some objects (for example, "truck," "blocks," and "book") and uses some phrases (for example, "more please," "thank you," "yes," and "no"). He also has a few two-word phrases, like "play ball" and "build blocks," that he uses with other kids. In English, Mateo does not use long sentences, past tense, or words that describe where one thing is in relation to another. Conversation is brief without many conversational turns.

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

Mateo's language skills in Spanish are at an AE level. He is progressing according to age expectations for children whose first language is Spanish.

His English language skills are like those of a younger child, but he started learning this language later. Learning a second language does not take away from his AE language competence.

Facilitator's Notes:

Sometimes when children are dual language learners, it is hard to understand the level of language skills used in the other language. This is especially true if it is a language not commonly spoken in the child's community, which might lead to a Not Tipping decision.

It is important to gather as much information as possible about whether language skills in the native language are progressing according to age expectations for that culture.

The preschool may need to do things to support Mateo's English skills, capitalize on his Spanish skills, and help him maintain connections and acquire skills so that communication challenges with others in English don't lead to delays in other skills. However, Mateo's skills within his cultural context are currently at an AE level.

Theme: Culture

Scenario 25:

Shilah

Shilah is 4 years and 2 months old.

During a two-hour home visit, Shilah did not speak even when encouraged and prompted to do so by several people. He sat attentively, observed others talking for long periods, and played independently. When queried about his language, Shilah's parents were proud of Shilah's silence indicating that his behavior is exemplary because in their culture children should not display themselves verbally in front of adults or ask direct questions of strangers.

When asked about Shilah's behavior within the family unit, his parents reported they almost never talk directly to Shilah and that he rarely uses words to talk to his brother. The brothers build elaborate structures together and hardly need to talk, maybe just using one word every now and then to know what the other is thinking.

The only words the family has heard Shilah say are "thank you," "yes," "no," "more," "please," "up," and family members' names. Shilah does demonstrate that he understands language when others talk to him.

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

Tipping (choose one):

- No, Clearly Not Age-Expected (**Correct Answer**)
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

Shilah's expressive language is clearly not at an AE level. Although there are varied cultural values about when to speak, who to speak to, and valuing silence, reports about Shilah's functional use of expressive language even in familiar, informal family surroundings, is not AE. Expressive language is not a peripheral skill that could easily emerge later with opportunity and cannot readily be dismissed from skills that should be examined for the outcome. There are settings in which it would be appropriate for Shilah to talk within his culture (for example, with his brother) and in these circumstances as well his functioning is not AE.

Facilitator's Notes:

When considering culture, it is important to understand expectations across settings, situations, and interactions. Discuss to what extent the child displays aspects of this skill in other contexts where different cultural rules apply, (for example, at childcare, or with peers, with siblings, informal family situations) or where specific actions are more socially acceptable. What might teams do to assess language in settings where it is culturally appropriate?

It can be helpful to understand what the progression of skill development looks like for other children in that culture. Is this child's functioning consistent with that?

Also, if the only AE skill is the absence of something, it is not recommended to consider that AE. For example, if the only AE skill Shilah had was to be silent at the appropriate times during adult conversation, that alone would not be sufficient to tip the Decision Tree for Summary Rating Discussions to the AE side.