

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

Participant Materials

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

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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](#).

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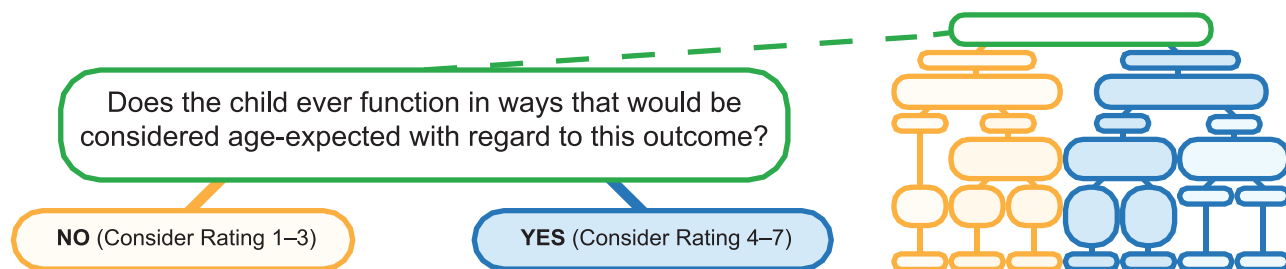
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Key Points

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

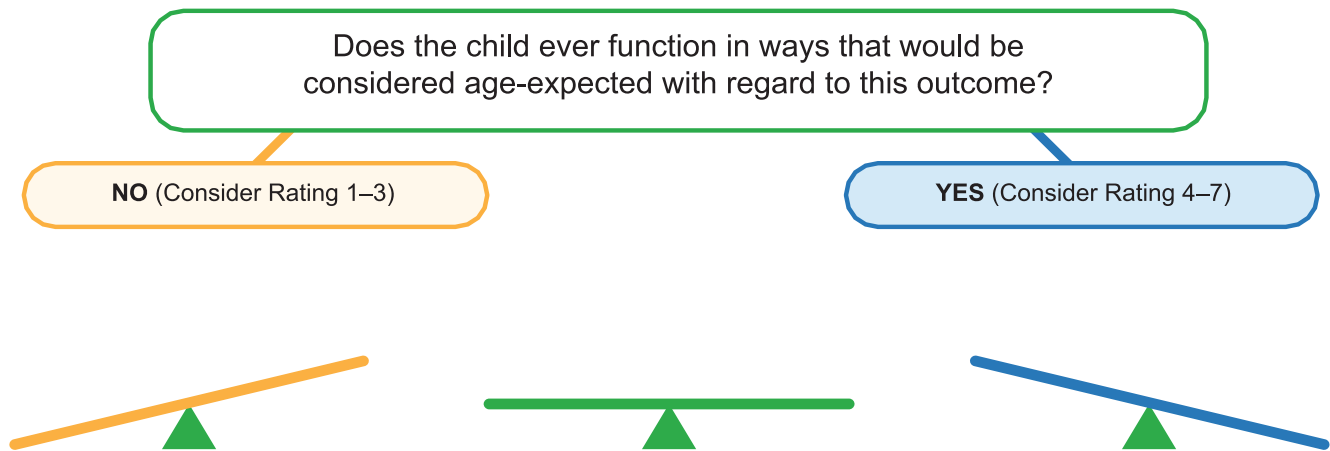
Practice quality age anchoring to reference how close or far a child’s functioning is to age expectations by:

- 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?

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
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

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

Rationale:

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

Rationale:

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
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

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
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

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

Rationale:

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
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

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

Rationale:

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
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

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

Rationale:

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
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

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
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

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

Rationale:

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
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

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
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

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
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

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
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

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
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

Theme: Health

Scenario 19:

Tyree

Tyree is 4 years old.

Tyree 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
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

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

Rationale:

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
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

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
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

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

Rationale:

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
- Not Tipping

Rationale:

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
- Yes, Clearly Age-Expected
- Not Tipping

Rationale: