

## What is a FUNCTIONAL outcome?

### First – what’s an outcome?

- Outcomes are the benefits that children and families experience as a result of early intervention/early childhood special education services.
- The three child outcomes, as measured for accountability purposes, are different than IFSP or IEP outcomes in that
  - The three child outcomes reflect global functioning in three broad areas of development (social-emotional, knowledge and skills, getting needs met)
  - IFSP or IEP outcomes are specific to an individual child, based on his or her individual needs.
- Each outcome is a snapshot of:
  - The whole child
  - Status of the child’s current functioning
  - Functioning across settings and situations

### But what makes it FUNCTIONAL?

Functional outcomes:

- Refer to things that are meaningful to the child in the context of everyday living
- Refer to an integrated series of behaviors or skills that allows the child to achieve the important everyday goals

### How do I assess functional outcomes?

Emphasize ‘meaning’ – ask:

- Can the child carry out meaningful behaviors in a meaningful context?  
*NOT*
- Can the child perform discrete behaviors such as knowing 10 words, smiling at mom, stacking 3 blocks, pincer grasp, walking backward?

Observe a child in natural settings to learn:

- What does the child usually do?
- What is his actual performance across settings and situations?
- How does the child use his/her skills to accomplish tasks?

The assessment of functioning is NOT about:

- the child’s capacity to function under unusual or ideal circumstances, skill by skill, domain by domain
- the child’s performance in a structured testing situation, in one standardized way

### Why isn’t assessing the child’s ability to perform discrete behaviors enough?

Discrete behaviors (e.g., those described by some items on assessment instruments) may or may not be important to the child's functioning on the outcome.

- Individually, they are not especially informative
- Summed, they may or may not be useful, depending on the functionality of the behaviors/items.

Think about isolated behaviors and what observing them tells you about the child. For example, suppose an assessment instrument asks you to observe whether or not a child can point:

- If you know that a child can point, do you know that the child can communicate her wants and needs?
- If you know that a child can't point, do you know that the she can't communicate his wants and needs?
- How does knowing about pointing help you understand how the child takes action to meet needs?

### **What about domains?**

- Functionality is not domains-based; children function across developmental domains
- Functionality can involve multiple domains and can cross domains
- Functional outcomes refer to behaviors that integrate skills across domains

### **What does functionality have to do with using the Child Outcomes Summary Form (COSF)?**

Ratings on the seven-point scale for each outcome are a snapshot of:

- The whole child
- Status of the child's current functioning
- Functioning across settings and situations

Ratings are based on the child's functioning:

- What the child does across settings and situations
- Compared with what is expected given the child's age

### **Discussion questions**

Look at the list of skills below. Which are examples of isolated skills? Which are examples of functional skills?<sup>1</sup>

- a. Knows how to imitate a gesture when prompted by others
- b. Uses finger in pointing motion
- c. Uses 2-word utterances
- d. Watches what a peer says or does and incorporates it into his/her own play
- e. Points to indicate needs or wants
- f. Engages in back and forth verbal exchanges with caregivers using 2-word utterances

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

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<sup>1</sup> a=isolated, b=isolated, c=isolated, d=functional, e=functional, f=functional