

Family and Child Outcomes for Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education April 2005

Background

The Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO) Center was funded by the Office of Special Education Program to develop an approach for collecting data on child and family outcomes for the Part C early intervention and Part B preschool programs of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). The resulting data are to be used for federal and state accountability purposes and to improve programs. The family and child outcomes in this document are the product of the initial step in developing this approach. The outcomes were developed through a year-long consensus-building process that involved input from and review by numerous stakeholders including federal, state, and local policy-makers and administrators, local providers, family members of children with disabilities, and researchers. The ECO Center tried to incorporate the feedback received into the current version of the outcomes but, not surprisingly, it was not always possible to reflect the diversity of positions on the outcomes.

This version of the outcomes represents the ECO Center's current thinking based on the input received. The next step in the process will be to work with OSEP and states on the development of the measurement approach. It is possible that developing the measurement approach may reveal a need for additional refinements in the outcomes.



Family and Child Outcomes

Preface

Early intervention and early childhood special education support young children with disabilities and their families. For children, the ultimate goal of this support is 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 child care, preschool or school programs, and in the community. For families, the ultimate goal is 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.

An “outcome” is defined as a benefit experienced as a result of services and supports received. Thus, 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. The child and family outcomes are interdependent in that positive outcomes experienced by the family serve to promote the child outcomes and outcomes achieved by the child benefit the family.

As outcomes in an accountability framework, these statements should be taken as desirable accomplishments of the system. It is understood that a service system cannot guarantee the achievement of any outcome involving families or children. The achievement of an outcome is the result of a variety of factors, only one of which is early intervention or preschool special education. Even in the best system, it is likely that not all families or children will achieve all of the desired outcomes. Nevertheless, early intervention and early childhood special education should strive to achieve the outcomes for all the families and children they serve.

Family Outcomes

1. Families understand their children’s strengths, abilities and special needs.
2. Families know their rights and advocate effectively for their children.
3. Families help their children develop and learn.
4. Families have support systems.
5. Families are able to gain access to desired services, programs, and activities in their community.

Based on input from the consensus-building process, it was concluded that all five family outcomes apply to early intervention and outcomes 1 and 2 and possibly 3 apply to early childhood special education as it is currently being delivered.

Child Outcomes

1. Children have positive social relationships.
2. Children acquire and use knowledge and skills.
3. Children take appropriate action to meet their needs.

Additional Information about the Family and Child Outcomes

The family and child outcomes were written to be simple and straightforward statements but the few words of each outcome encompass important concepts that might not be readily apparent. Additional information is presented to further clarify the intended meaning of the each outcome.

Family Outcomes

A brief explanation is presented for each family outcome. Examples of the kinds of knowledge or behaviors referred to in the outcome are included to illustrate what is meant by the outcome. The examples are not meant to represent all possible knowledge and behaviors that could be considered part of the outcome.

1. Families understand their children's strengths, abilities and special needs.

To promote development and speak effectively on behalf of their children, all parents must recognize their children's unique features that will influence developmental progress. Parents of children with special needs face unique challenges in learning about their child's strengths, abilities, learning style, and temperament, since children with special needs often display atypical patterns of growth and development. They often have special risk factors, health problems, conditions, or diagnoses that are unique and require parents to learn new information about such diverse topics as genetics, medications, surgeries, seizures, need for adaptive equipment, or special learning needs (e.g., use of augmentative communication devices, signing or behavior management techniques). Early intervention and early childhood special education professionals can provide information for families and can help families learn new ways to access this information themselves. This information allows parents to better support their children's growth and development and to represent their children's needs more effectively in planning interventions. Families who understand their children's strengths, abilities and special needs, for example:

- Know expectations for typical development at different ages and stages
- Are aware of how their child with or at-risk for a disability is developing, and what might be the next developmental abilities that could be encouraged
- Understand their child's learning style and preferences
- Are able to observe their child's behavior and notice whether changes occur as a result of services, medication, changes in parenting, or alterations in the home environment
- Know about the special risk factors, conditions, or disability their child might have
- Know about recommended interventions and practices related to their child's special risk factors, conditions, or disability
- Know how to access information about child development or their child's special needs through resources such as other parents, reading materials, professionals, or the Internet

2. Families know their rights and advocate effectively for their children.

Federal legislation makes it clear that parents of children with disabilities have a set of rights with regard to assent and access to services. All families must be given the

opportunity to participate in decisions regarding their child's eligibility for services, the goals to be addressed, and the services provided. Families are to be partners in the design and delivery of intervention and need knowledge and skills to fully participate in the process. Families who know their rights and effectively communicate their children's needs, for example:

- Know their rights and responsibilities related to service provision
- Know where to go for services and other supports in their community
- Know about different service options, and are familiar with the types of services offered by different providers
- Feel comfortable talking with professionals or asking questions
- Know how to use a variety of sources of information (e.g., local parent organizations, the Internet) to find out about rights and services
- Are able to participate as full partners in team meetings to plan goals and services
- Communicate the need for services they feel are important
- Know what to do if they feel that needed services are not being provided.

3. Families help their children develop and learn.

A caring, warm relationship between a parent and the child is the foundation for all subsequent development. Families who help their children learn and develop provide for and interact with their children in a variety of positive ways that will promote the development of the child. The family environment is the most influential factor in shaping children's development and learning in the early years. Family environment encompasses the ways parents talk with, teach and discipline their children; the physical environment of the home, the overall tone of family interactions, and the types of out-of-home experiences that parents provide for their children. Families create family environments in many different ways, depending on the culture, traditions, and values held by the family. Professionals can support families in acquiring the knowledge to parent effectively and in putting that knowledge to everyday use. Families who help their children learn and develop, for example:

- Provide a safe, nurturing, and stimulating environment for their child
- Know and use styles of effective parenting
- Help the child participate in family routines and activities
- Feel confident in their parenting skills
- Use special techniques that might be effective in enhancing learning or managing special behavior problems
- Modify the home environment or routines to reflect their child's learning style or needs for adaptive environments
- Know about and help their child use special adaptive equipment
- Know how to access and evaluate the validity of recommendations for dealing with particular learning or behavior challenges

4. Families have support systems.

Families of children with special needs sometimes feel alone in dealing with the fact that they have a child with a delay or disability. Research has documented the important role of social support in helping individuals cope with stressful or challenging circumstances. Support can come from both formal (e.g., professionals, agencies) and informal (e.g., relatives and neighbors) sources. One clear finding from research is the subjective nature of support. The positive benefits of social support seem to result from the quality

of the support as perceived by the person receiving it and not necessarily from the amount of support. What constitutes appropriate support is also influenced by the family's culture and community in which a family lives. By using family-centered helping practices, professionals can help families build and use informal support systems. Families who feel they have adequate social support, for example:

- Feel supported in raising their children
- Maintain friendships and make new friends
- Have professionals providing the type and level of support that the family in partnership with the professionals have deemed appropriate for the family.
- Are able to talk to friends and neighbors about disability-related issues
- Are able to participate in desired neighborhood and recreational activities, family functions, and other activities with spouse or friends
- Meet and get to know other families of children with disabilities
- Have neighbors, friends, or family who can provide help (e.g., babysitting)

5. Families are able to gain access to desired services, programs, and activities in their community.

Most families need and have access to a wide range of community resources, services, programs, and activities. These resources could include the medical services (e.g., doctors, dentists), child care, religious institutions, libraries, recreational centers, and, for older children, programs such as sports or scouting. Families of children with disabilities often experience challenges in accessing community resources, especially those that seem responsive to their needs and those of their children. The community resources actually used depend on the age of the child, the child's needs, the family's desire to participate in those activities, and what is available in the community in which they live. Families vary considerably in the extent to which they want or need community resources. Professionals can assist families in understanding and accessing the services and activities available in their communities. In communities where these services exist, families who know how to access desired services and activities, for example:

- Have quality childcare that is responsive to the unique needs, strengths, and abilities of the children so that parents can work
- Have opportunities for their children to have inclusive experiences with children who do not have disabilities
- Have a physician and dentist who can provide care that is sensitive and responsive to their child's special needs
- Have acceptable and trustworthy respite care services when informal care is not available
- Are able to participate in religious, recreational or educational activities and programs with families with typically developing children
- Participate in parent organizations or support groups relevant to their child's disability and their family's style and priorities

Child Outcomes

The child outcomes are based on the assumption that children of different ages demonstrate these outcomes in different ways. A second assumption is that there are many pathways to competence and that some children will need special supports or accommodations. The following presents a brief explanation of the outcome and a few selected examples of the behavior or skills that are part of achieving the outcome. The examples are not meant to show all the ways the outcome would be demonstrated across the entire early childhood age span or across the range of abilities and disabilities of children served in early intervention and early childhood special education.

1. Children have positive social relationships.

As noted in the discussion of the first family outcome, a caring, warm relationship between a parent and the child is the foundation for all subsequent development. From this foundation, the young child begins to develop a positive sense of self and can begin to build more relationships with other family members and those outside of the family such as peers. Making new friends and learning to get along with others is an important accomplishment of the early childhood years. Children develop a sense of who they are by having rich and rewarding experiences interacting with adults and peers. They also learn that different rules and norms apply to different everyday settings and that they need to behave accordingly. All children need support from adults in learning how to be successful participants in their social world but some children who face challenges in this area need additional or specialized support. Children who achieve this outcome show a variety of behaviors related to making and maintaining positive social relationships in age-appropriate ways. For example, they:

- Demonstrate attachment with the significant caregivers in their lives.
- Initiate and maintain social interactions.
- Behave in a way that allows them to participate in a variety of settings and situations, for example, on the playground, at dinner, at the grocery store, in child care, etc.
- Demonstrate trust in others.
- Build and maintain relationships with children and adults.
- Regulate their emotions.
- Understand and follow rules.
- Solve social problems.

2. Children acquire and use knowledge and skills.

Over the early childhood period, children display tremendous changes in what they know and what they can do. Everyday life can present children with a wide variety of natural learning opportunities that serve to help children acquire progressively more advanced skills. Parents and other adults support children's acquisition of knowledge and skills by providing children with safe, nurturing and stimulating environments in which learning can flourish. Children with special needs can face a variety of challenges related to acquiring knowledge and skills and may need additional supports to realize their potential. The knowledge and skills acquired in the early childhood years, especially those related to communication, pre-literacy and pre-numeracy, provide the foundation for success in kindergarten and the early school years. Children who achieve this

outcome show a variety of behaviors related to acquiring and using knowledge and skills across a variety of everyday routines and activities. For example, they:

- Display curiosity and an eagerness for learning.
- Explore their environment.
- Explore and play with people and objects including toys, books and other materials
- Engage in daily learning opportunities through manipulating toys and other objects in an appropriate manner.
- Use vocabulary either through spoken means, sign language, or through augmentative communication devices to communicate in an increasingly complex form.
- Learn new skills and use these skills in play, for example, by completing a puzzle or building a fort.
- Acquire and use the precursor skills that will allow them to begin to learn reading and mathematics in kindergarten.
- Show imagination and creativity in play.

3. Children take appropriate action to meet their needs.

As children develop, they become increasingly more capable of acting on their world. Babies cry to communicate hunger whereas an older child can ask for something to eat. Children have a variety of needs – to eat, sleep, play, move, explore, and communicate to name but a few. With the help of supportive adults, young children become able to address their needs in more sophisticated ways and with increasing independence over the course of the early childhood years. They integrate their developing skills, such as fine motor skills and increasingly complex communication skills, to achieve a goal that is of value to them, such as showing their artwork to an adult and describing what it is or pointing to a toy and asking for it. Children with disabilities may use specialized technology or may need assistance from adults to allow them to meet their needs. Children who take appropriate action to meet their needs show a variety of behaviors related to this outcome. For example, they:

- Use gestures, sounds, words, signs or other means to communicate wants and needs.
- Meet their self care needs (feeding, dressing, toileting, etc.). Their ability to meet self care needs allows them to participate in everyday routines and activities.
- Use objects (for example, forks, sticks, pencils, crayons, clay, scissors, switches, other devices, etc.) as tools in appropriate ways.
- Move from place to place to participate in everyday activities, play, and routines.
- Seek help when necessary to move from place to place.
- Seek help when necessary to assist with basic care or other needs.
- Follow rules related to health and safety.