Good Teaming, Good Decisions

Session 6 Presentation Transcript

Part of an effective Child Outcomes Summary process is effective teaming. In this presentation, we review the characteristics of a quality team process and apply those characteristics to the Child Outcomes Summary process. With good teaming comes good decision-making. Good decision-making leads to objective and accurate ratings.

Supporting Multiple Needs

Children and families in early intervention and early childhood special education have multiple needs. A team that includes professionals and family members is better able to understand and support the child's functioning than one person alone.

Why Team for the COS Process?

A Child Outcomes Summary team needs a complete picture of the child's functioning to decide on outcomes ratings. Different members of the team contribute different information to this picture. The speech therapist can describe how the child communicates with and understands others. The physical therapist notices how the child moves. Family members know what the child does in different settings and with different people. By sharing what they know about the child, each member of the team helps establish a complete picture of the child's functioning, which helps to ensure that the outcomes ratings accurately reflect what the child can and cannot do.

Preparing the Family

Family members are unlikely to know about the Child Outcomes Summary process. To help family members fully participate in discussions, it is important to give them some background information before the meeting. One of the professionals on the team should explain the three outcome areas, the purpose of the Child Outcomes Summary process, and the 7-point rating scale. The preparation should also include letting the family know what to expect during the meeting and provide an opportunity for questions. Stress how important it is for family members to contribute information about what they have seen the child do. It is helpful to provide families with written materials like "A Family Guide for Participating in the Child Outcomes Measurement Process." Be sure to check whether your state has additional materials for families.

Effective Teaming Practices

Hopefully, you are familiar with the principles of good teaming. These principles apply whenever teams convene in early intervention and early childhood special education, including when determining a child outcomes rating. We won't be able to thoroughly review how to hold an effective team meeting in this session, so we encourage you to consult other resources, such as those provided with this presentation. As a brief refresher, here are some key things to remember when you meet as a team to determine a child outcomes rating.

First, an effective team involves the active participation of *all* team members. It is important for the team leader to invite participation from all members.

Second, the team leader sets the tone that the input each individual member contributes to the team discussion is valued and respected. Everyone on the team knows the child, but their perspectives and what they have to share may differ and even appear contradictory at times. If there are conflicting observations, it is important for the leader to emphasize the value of those observations and encourage discussion about the circumstances under which different behaviors occur.

Also, remember to avoid using acronyms and jargon and to explain professional terms when they are used to ensure everyone understands what they mean.

A Few More Effective Teaming Practices

Let's review a few additional effective teaming practices. Looking at the speaker conveys that the ideas being shared are important. Responsive body language and appropriate facial expressions from listeners also support team members' contributions and quality interactions between team members. Members of an effective team provide time for speakers to reflect on and finish their thoughts before commenting or moving on. Throughout the discussion, team members should check their understanding about what was said. One way to do that is by summarizing or paraphrasing any parts of the discussion that might be misunderstood. Likewise, all team members should feel comfortable to ask for specific examples and ask follow-up questions.

Again, good teaming leads to good decision-making.

Quality COS Teaming Practices I

In addition to having teams that function effectively with active listening and rich dialogue, some specific practices promote quality child outcomes summary decisions and accurate ratings. Let's talk about three practices in more detail. First, plan ahead. Each team member should come to the meeting prepared to share what he or she knows about the child's functional skills in each of the three outcome areas. Team members also may need to review background information about age-anchoring and/or the 7-point rating scale criteria in advance of the meeting.

Quality COS Teaming Practices II

Second, have a rich discussion about the child's functioning in each outcome area, including discussing what is age expected. Let's take a deeper look at what this discussion should look like.

Rich Discussion: Example Questions to Ask

Being able to reach an accurate rating requires a rich dialogue about what the child is doing in each outcome and talking about what the child is doing relative to what would be expected for a child this age. Examples of questions that might draw out this type of information are:

- What skills and behaviors does the child use?
- In what settings and situations?
- How often is the child using those skills and behaviors? What supports are needed for the child to use them?
- Are these skills and behaviors what we expect of a child this age?
- Are there skills or behaviors that we would expect a child this age to use that this child is not yet using?

Make sure the team discusses the child's functioning in depth across settings and situations.

Rich Discussion: Addressing the Full Content of Each Outcome

The team leader should make sure that the full content of each outcome is discussed. For instance, with regard to Positive Social Relationships, this might include the child's social relationships with familiar and unfamiliar adults, how the child interacts with peers, how she follows rules and routines in settings like child care, and how the child expresses and regulates emotions and handles transitions between activities.

Rich Discussion: Considering Age Expectations

Another important part of a rich Child Outcomes Summary discussion is comparing the child's current skills and behaviors with age expectations. Using child development resources that explain the progression of skills will help the team age-anchor the child's skills accurately. Also, remember to consider the family's culture and the child's use of any assistive technology devices available in everyday situations when comparing the child's functioning with age expectations.

Quality COS Teaming Practices III

Once the team has a rich picture of the child's functioning in an outcome area and how the child's functioning compares with age expectations, the team is ready to apply the criteria to decide on a rating. The decision tree can be helpful in doing this.

When a decision has been reached, the team leader should restate the decision, possibly as a descriptor statement rather than a number, and summarize the rationale. For example, the team leader could say, "With regard to positive social relationships, Bella interacts in age-expected ways with adults but is not yet interacting with peers. We are seeing a mix of age-expected and not age-expected skills. Does everyone agree?"

Remote Participation

Getting all team members together to engage in the Child Outcomes Summary process can be difficult. Although face-to-face team interactions are preferable, team discussions can be held with one or more members present remotely. For instance, team members can effectively join meetings by phone or webcast. If one or more team members are attending remotely, the leader needs to be especially aware of engaging them in the conversation.

When Teams Struggle with Consensus

On rare occasions, teams have difficulty reaching consensus. If this is the case, it is important for the person leading the discussion to work with the group to figure out the source of the problem. Does someone have a different understanding of one of the outcomes? Is there disagreement over whether a skill is age expected? Does everyone understand the criteria described in the 7-point scale? If the leader identifies misconceptions, then they need to be addressed so the team can reach consensus.

Is the COS Rating Subjective?

Sometimes, people who don't understand the child outcomes summary rating scale or the process describe the rating as subjective. Subjectivity is defined as "relating to the way a person experiences things in his or her own mind based on feelings or opinions rather than facts." If a team did not apply the criteria and based the rating on team members' feelings, then the process would be subjective. However, research shows that when people use and apply rating criteria consistently, a team process produces useful and valid information.

There are many examples of rating scales that are reliably applied to reach an objective rating. One you are probably familiar with is the Apgar, a scale used with newborn infants. The Apgar produces useful information because there are criteria for the points on the scale and individuals trained in the use of the scale apply those criteria. Both the Apgar and the child outcomes summary rating scales can be used

incorrectly, but that is not a problem with the scales being subjective. That is a problem of users who need more training to know and apply the criteria consistently.

Final Thoughts

Teams are at the heart of delivering quality individualized early intervention and early childhood special education services under IDEA. Working to achieve desired outcomes for children and families requires bringing together the best thinking of a team. A quality Child Outcomes Summary team process that effectively engages team members in sharing their knowledge of the child and applying the rating criteria to that information will result in valid and meaningful ratings.