

The Exit COS Rating

Session 8 Presentation Transcript

Throughout this module, we have provided general information about the Child Outcomes Summary process, including how to determine a rating when a child enters an early intervention or early childhood special education program. As you learned in Session 2, to provide data for the federal reporting requirements, the process must be completed when the child enters the program and again at program exit. This session will outline what the team should do for the COS rating at program exit.

We know some states are doing interim ratings, such as every 6 or 12 months or in conjunction with IFSP or IEP reviews. However, we are not addressing interim ratings in this presentation. Please consult with your supervisor for more information about whether your program does interim ratings and what the procedures are for doing those ratings.

What Happens at the Exit COS?

So, what makes the Child Outcomes Summary process at exit different from the process at entry? At exit, the team will still determine a rating for each outcome **but** they ALSO will discuss the child's progress since the entry Child Outcomes Summary ratings were determined.

To help you understand what teams need to focus on during the progress discussion, let's talk about developmental trajectories and the different kinds of progress a child can make.

Thinking about Progress

Development follows a predictable course in many areas. This allows us to measure and plot growth in different areas of development. An example of this is the growth chart that pediatricians use to monitor height and weight.

Skill Acquisition Over Time

Just as we can track height and weight, we can track children's growth or progress over time in other areas of development and learning. In the following set of slides, a series of graphs will illustrate growth in development or learning over time. The horizontal axis across the bottom shows age in months. For these examples, the vertical axis along the left side shows "number of skills." It could have been labeled skills, knowledge or behaviors. For example, we could be graphing language skills, knowledge of early mathematics, or ways of interacting with peers.

Children at 12 months of age will be able to do more than children at 6 months of age. As shown in the graph, plotting this growth in skills creates a line.

Similarly, 24-month-olds have more skills and can do more than 12-month-olds.

We can show that by continuing to plot children's development on a chart. Since the line is higher at 24 months than at 12 or 6 months, it shows that 24-month-olds have more of the skill being plotted, such as knowing more vocabulary words.

Developmental Trajectory

The line that charts skill acquisition over time is called a "developmental trajectory." The green line is a hypothetical developmental trajectory in one area of development, such as vocabulary, for children who are typically developing. The line shows how many more vocabulary words children acquire as they get older.

Comparing Developmental Trajectories

We can use trajectories to compare the development of children to typical development. The green line is the trajectory for typical development. The blue line shows the trajectory for children who are developing more slowly. Note that both lines are going up, which indicates that the group of children with typical development and the group with slower development are both acquiring new skills. Both lines are higher at older ages than at birth meaning that both groups of children have more skills at older ages than at younger ages. However, the children represented by the blue line are learning new skills more slowly.

Acquiring new skills and changing rate of growth

Let's look at a different kind of trajectory.

The group of children represented by the yellow line started out with the same rate of growth as the group of children represented by the blue line. At 18 months, their development begins to accelerate so that over time the gap between their development and typical development is less than it would have been. Or to say it another way, the children represented by the yellow line are closer to the green line at 60 months than they would have been if they had continued to grow on the original blue line course of development. Had they continued on their original trajectory, they would have been considerably farther behind at 60 months. All three groups acquired new skills but they did so at different rates.

A flat trajectory indicates no new skills

The purple line shows a group of children who stopped acquiring skills in this area at 12 months. Very few children show this growth pattern but there are some conditions that severely impact skill acquisition. Some children even lose skills, but again, there are very few of them.

Two Questions Addressed at Exit

Now that we've looked at the developmental trajectories and the different types of progress that children can make, let's talk about how progress is captured in the Child Outcomes Summary process. When the team completes the Child Outcomes Summary process at exit, they will answer two questions about the child for each of the three outcome areas.

The first question, the rating question, is: To what extent does the child show age-appropriate functioning, across settings and situations, on this outcome? The team answers this question by providing a rating. This is the same question addressed at entry.

The second question, the progress question, is new to the Child Outcomes Summary process at exit. The progress question is: Has the child shown *any* new skills or behaviors related to this outcome since the last outcomes summary? This question is called "the progress question" because it tells us whether the child has made any progress compared to him or herself since the entry rating.

How to Answer the Progress Question

The progress question is a yes/no question that documents whether or not the child has acquired *any* new skill since the entry rating. The question focuses on whether the child has made progress compared to his or her own previous level of functioning. If the team is not already familiar with the kinds of gains the child has made, the team should look at earlier assessment results and progress notes to help answer this question. Any one new skill in the outcome area counts as a "yes." So, for example at exit, if in the two years since the entry rating, the team has seen the child begin using even one more new word or gesture to get his needs met, then the team should answer "yes" to the progress question for Outcome 3.

If the child has *not* acquired any new skill related to any aspect of the outcome since the entry rating, then the answer to the progress question should be "no."

Skill Acquisition Over Time

Going back to developmental trajectories, the rising blue line on the left graph shows a child who is acquiring new skills and for whom the progress question would be answered "yes." The purple line on the right shows a child who entered a program at 18 months and gained no skills between 18 and 36 months. The answer to the progress question for this child would be "no," because the child has not acquired any new skills in this outcome area.

Points to Consider

Let's talk about two common confusions related to the progress question. Some teams answer "no" because they think the child has to show progress across the breadth of skills represented in the outcome area. Teams should answer "yes" to the progress question even if the child has only acquired a new skill related to one aspect of the outcome. The child does not have to show progress across all aspects of the outcome for the answer to the question to be "yes."

Similarly, some teams may be confused about how to respond because the child's acquisition of new skills is slower than same-aged peers. The key point to remember is that the progress question is about progress compared to self not about progress relative to same-aged peers. A child may even lose ground compared to same-aged peers, but the team should still answer "yes" if the child demonstrated any new skill.

What Happens During the Exit COS Process?

So, what happens during the exit Child Outcomes Summary process?

The process used for the exit Child Outcomes Summary is nearly the same as what happens at entry. Again, current information will be gathered about the child's functioning across settings and situations. The child's team will meet to review the information and discuss how the child's functioning compares to that of age-expected functioning. The team will determine which of the ratings on the 7-point scale best describes the child's functioning, and the rationale for the rating will be documented.

In addition, the team will answer the progress question for each of the outcome areas.

Determining Exit Ratings

In determining the exit ratings, the team should NOT go back and look at the entry ratings. Each rating should reflect the child's current functioning. If the team members look at the entry ratings, they might unintentionally take that information into account in their decision-making. The entry ratings are not relevant pieces of information to the exit Child Outcomes Summary discussion and may bias the team's determination of the exit ratings.

When to Complete the Exit COS

Teams should complete the exit Child Outcomes Summary process as close as possible to when the child receives his or her last service. Remember, one of the purposes of child outcomes measurement is to show whether early intervention and early childhood special education are making a difference for young children with delays and disabilities. The most accurate picture of how a child has changed is obtained by documenting the child's functioning when he begins and when he or she leaves the program. Completing the exit rating several months before the child finishes will miss any growth the child makes over those months.

Each program has rules about when the exit Child Outcomes Summary rating is to be determined. Please be sure to become familiar with your program's policies and procedures.

Different Team Members

What if the team members who participated in the exit Child Outcomes Summary process are different from those who participated at entry? This is OK.

If the team includes individuals who know the child well and who are properly trained in the Child Outcomes Summary process, accurate ratings can be determined for the child regardless of whether or not the team members have changed.

Family who has left the program without notice

What if a family has left the program without notice? If a family has left without the exit Child Outcomes Summary process being completed, the exit ratings still need to be determined. First, attempts should be made to locate the family, according to your program's policies. If the family cannot be found, then the team should complete the process without the family based on the most recent information available about the child's functioning.

Relationship between the Ratings and the Progress Question

When reviewing COS data on children between entry and exit, program staff sometimes wonder how a child can have the same rating at two time points and also have received a "yes" for the progress question at the second time point. Remember that the rating is based on a comparison with age expectations. More skills are expected at older ages. A rating of 4 at entry is not the same as a rating of 4 at exit. The number of skills needed for a 4 has increased because the child is older. If the time points are more than six months apart, the child has to have acquired new skills to keep the same rating. Depending on the amount of time between the two ratings, it is even possible for the child to have a lower rating at exit and still have acquired new skills, so the correct answer to the progress question could be yes even if the rating has gone down.

Closing

In this presentation, you learned how to complete the Child Outcomes Summary process at exit. Remember that the answer to the progress question at exit is always based on the child's progress compared to himself or herself at entry. This is not like the Child Outcomes Summary rating, that is based on the child's functioning compared to age-expectations. Looking at the ratings and the answer to the progress question over time paints a picture of the child's developmental trajectory.