

# Essential Knowledge for Completing the COS Process

## Session 3 Presentation Transcript

This is the third in a series of presentations designed to provide early intervention and early childhood special education staff with the information needed to complete the Child Outcomes Summary process. This session outlines the knowledge and skills practitioners on Child Outcomes Summary teams must have to carry out a quality process.

## Team-Based Discussions & Decision-Making

Remember that the Child Outcomes Summary process is designed to be a team consensus process. As mentioned in Session 2, the teams that complete the process can be of any size and can be made up of individuals with different roles. Teams are composed of individuals who can contribute information about the child and participate collectively in a discussion to determine the child's ratings. This includes the child's family and other caregivers who know the child.

The goal is for these people to meet and discuss the child's functioning and determine a rating for each outcome. Sometimes meeting face-to-face is not possible. When the entire team can't meet together, it is essential that information from the missing team members be included in the conversation. Some team members may attend by phone, and others may send written information for the team's consideration.

## Essential Knowledge for Teams Completing the COS Process

All team members bring different information and perspectives to the Child Outcomes Summary process. As a group, the team members completing the process must have the following knowledge and expertise:

- Understanding of the content of the three child outcomes
- Understanding of age-expected child development
- Knowledge of the child's functioning across settings and situations
- Understanding of age expectations for child functioning within the child and family's culture
- Understanding of how to use the 7-point rating scale

## Important Points

Before we explore the areas of knowledge and expertise in more detail, here are a few important things to remember. First, each person on the team doesn't have to have knowledge and expertise in each of the

areas just listed. Rather, the team should be made up of individuals who have the needed knowledge and expertise so that collectively all the areas are covered. Families are important members of the team; they can provide the critical information about their child's functioning that the team needs to make an accurate rating decision. So while we don't expect the family to be experts in the Child Outcomes Summary process, their expertise on what their child is doing across settings and situations are invaluable.

## Understand the Content of the Three Child Outcomes

Session 1 provided an overview of the three child outcomes; each team must include members who are knowledgeable about the content of the three child outcomes. This includes an understanding of which skills and behaviors fall within each outcome area and which ones cross outcome areas (for example, communication skills). This also includes an understanding of the functional nature of the outcomes and how children bring together their skills and behaviors on a daily basis to accomplish things that are important to them.

The team must understand outcomes well enough to be able to translate information from domain-based assessments into functioning in each of the three outcomes.

## Understand Age-Expected Development

The next area of knowledge needed by the team is the age at which children typically acquire different kinds of skills. The rating process requires an understanding of the timing and sequences of development that enable children to have positive social relationships, acquire knowledge and skills, and take action to meet their needs. For example, children typically play next to their peers before they meaningfully interact with them. In addition to child development occurring in typical sequences, we also know that children typically acquire skills within a certain time frame. For example, most children learn to walk around 12 months of age. The rating process requires that team members understand both the sequence in which children acquire skills and the age range in which they are acquired. Team members will be asked to think about how the child's functioning compares with what would be expected for a child his age.

If the team members need additional information about child development, we encourage them to consult the many resources available. It is important to use these resources to ensure that the perception of what is typical development is accurate.

## Why Age Anchor?

Why does the Child Outcomes Summary process require a comparison with age-expected skills? Because moving toward or maintaining age-expected functioning will enable children to be full and active participants in their everyday world. One of the goals of early intervention and early childhood special education is to help children acquire the skills that are expected for their age. The ratings help programs see how successful they have been in helping children do this.

## Know About the Child’s Functioning Across Settings and Situations

To assign an accurate rating at entry and exit, the team needs to obtain a complete picture of the child’s skills and behaviors across multiple settings and situations. This means that in addition to gathering information through standardized assessment tools, teams should have other mechanisms for getting information about the child in other places and with other people. It is especially important to get a picture of the child in places where the child spends time, including at home, in child care, and in other community settings. The team needs to know how the child interacts with adult family members, siblings, extended family, and other significant people in the child’s life. This information can come from talking with those familiar with the child, such as family members, grandparents, and/or care providers, or from observations in places where the child spends time.

## Describing Children’s Functioning

For the purposes of the Child Outcomes Summary process, we use three terms to describe where a child’s skills are with regard to age expectations: *age expected*, *immediate foundational*, and *foundational*. Let’s explore each one.

### Describing Children’s Functioning

Age-expected skills are exactly what the phrase says: They are the skills and behaviors that are seen in children of a particular chronological age. For example, if a child is 24 months old, age-expected skills are what a 24-month-old would be expected to do. We would describe a 24-month-old with 24-month-old skills as showing age-expected skills.

### Describing Children’s Functioning

Immediate foundational skills and behaviors are those that come just before age-expected skills in development. To understand immediate foundational skills, let’s consider the example of walking. When we think about the skills that come just before children become proficient in walking, we see that they are cruising from one piece of furniture to another and taking a few unsteady steps on their own. These are examples of immediate foundational skills for walking. If a child is not showing age-expected skills but is showing the skills that come immediately before the skills expected for the age, we would describe the child as showing “immediate foundational skills.”

### Describing Children’s Functioning

Foundational skills occur much earlier in the developmental progression of skills. They are called *foundational* because they form the foundation for later skill development. When considering our example of walking, we would think about the skills needed for children to eventually learn to walk—

those that come even before cruising and initial wobbly steps. Examples include pulling to stand, crawling or scooting, going from a sitting position to all fours in preparation for crawling, or, in younger infant development, pushing up while in tummy time. Children who are not yet showing age-expected skills but are showing skills that come much earlier in development would be described as showing “foundational skills.”

## How Foundational Skills Lead to Age-Expected Functioning

In sum, development occurs in predictable sequences, and a child’s current skill level can be described with regard to where the child is in the sequence. This graphic shows the relationship between the three types of skills. Note that foundational skills provide the basis for later skills and that immediate foundational skills come just before age-expected skills in the sequence. Foundational skills are frequently the skills chosen for intervention for children showing delays to help them move closer to age-expected development.

For the Child Outcomes Summary process, individuals within the team need to understand child development and the sequence in which skills develop. To reach a rating, teams will need to think about whether the child’s skills and behaviors in each outcome area are age expected, immediate foundational, or foundational.

## Understand Age Expectations Within the Family’s Culture

The next area of knowledge and expertise needed by members of the team is understanding how a family’s culture affects what is considered age-expected. Certainly, within early intervention and within early childhood special education, we often work with families who come from cultures other than our own. Interventionists need to understand how cultural practices influence the age at which children develop certain skills. For example, some cultures don’t expect the same level of independence in feeding, and parents may continue to assist their children with feeding into the preschool years. In working with these families, culturally competent interventionists would not see this as a problem because it has no long-term impact on development.

For identifying appropriate targets for interventions as well as for the Child Outcomes Summary process, the team needs to understand age expectations within the context of the family’s culture. When teams see skills and behaviors that are below mainstream U.S. age expectations but are the result of cultural practices, like the example of independence, then they need to adjust age expectations for those skills for that child.

Working effectively with families from other cultures can be challenging for providers. These challenges are also challenges for the Child Outcomes Summary rating process. The team needs to understand what is considered age-appropriate in that child’s culture and base their sense of what should be considered age-expected functioning for that child on that understanding.

## Understand the 7-Point Scale

The last area of knowledge needed by individuals on the team is knowledge of the 7-point rating scale. The 7-point scale is used to document the child's status at a given point in time, which is usually entry into and exit from an early intervention or early childhood special education program. The 7 points on the scale describe a child's status compared with age-expected functioning. When we look at a child's ratings over time, we can understand the child's movement toward age-appropriate functioning between entering and exiting the program. A 7 on the scale represents age-expected functioning, and lower points represent the degree of distance from age expectations. Each point on the scale has specific criteria that are used to differentiate the child's functioning. Team members need to be familiar with the application of the criteria for each of the points on the scale. Much more information about the application of the 7-point scale will be provided in Session 4.

## The COS Process: Essential Knowledge

In summary, please remember that not every single person on the team has to have knowledge and expertise in each of these areas, but collectively, as a team, all these areas must be covered. Determining the appropriate ratings using a team consensus process takes practice and reflection; individuals who are members of Child Outcomes Summary teams are encouraged to consider these five areas of knowledge and expertise and work to develop or enhance their collective understanding of each area.