Module 2
Functional Assessment in the IFSP Process
Trainers’ Guide
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The purpose of these modules is to support local lead agencies in providing professional development to their teams on developing effective, functional, routines-based IFSPs for young children with disabilities and their families. The modules were adapted from materials developed by the Early Childhood Technical Assistance (ECTA) Center and customized to reflect Maryland’s strengths, needs, and practices. Please feel encouraged to further adapt them to meet the needs of your program and staff. You may wish to add additional information on some topics or skip some slides and activities, based on previous trainings you have conducted and the professional development needs of your staff.

Module 2: Functional Assessment in the IFSP Process

This module discusses the importance of authentic, functional assessment based in the context of the child and family’s daily life and activities. This assessment lays the foundation for appropriate IFSP outcomes. Strategies for effective authentic assessment are explored through discussion, activities, and a video example. Participants will use a tool developed by MSDE/DSE/EIS to reflect on their own/their program’s assessment practices. This activity will be most beneficial if the participants bring one or more IFSPs with them. This module will take approximately 1 to 1 1/2 hours to deliver.

Materials

- Handouts:
  - Process for Developing Effective, Functional, Routines-Based IFSP Outcomes (Handout 2-1)
  - Family Strengths and Needs Worksheet (Handout 2-2)
  - Authentic Assessment of Family Routines, Activities, Concerns and Priorities (Handout 2-3)
  - Scale for Assessment of Family Enjoyment Within Routines (SAFER) (Handout 2-4)
  - Scale for the Assessment of Teachers’ Impressions of Routines and Engagement (SATIRE) (Handout 2-5)
  - Agreed Upon Practices: Functional Assessment of the Child (Handout 2-6)
  - Evidence of Key Principles in Family Assessment Process (Handout 2-7)
  - Functional Assessment Table Talk (Handout 2-8)
  - IFSP Reflection Tool ASSESSMENT Sections (Handout 2-9)
  - PowerPoint handouts for participants, if desired
  - Sample IFSP for reflection activity, if participants do not bring their own.
  - Post-it notes (if desired)
  - Computer and LCD projector
  - Internet access for playing on-line videos and exploring web-based resources
  - Evaluation forms for your own planning purposes (if desired)
Welcome to Developing Effective, Functional, Routines-Based IFSP Outcomes. My name is (name) and I am the (title) at (organization).

**Note to Trainers:**
Please tailor this introduction to meet the needs of your audience. You may want to add your names to the title slide. You may want to include the following in your introduction:

- **Housekeeping items, such as the schedule, breaks, food and drink locations, location of the bathrooms**
- **Who’s in the room (i.e. disciplines represented, agencies represented, etc.)**
- **Orientation to the packet/handouts**
The purpose of Developing Effective, Functional, Routines-Based IFSPs is to support professionals (such as teachers, caregivers, providers, practitioners) and families to understand the practical connection among:
- the functional, authentic assessment of young children,
- the development of meaningful and functional IFSP outcomes, and
- the measurement of the child’s functioning in relation to the three broad early childhood outcomes and the family’s capacity in relation to the three family outcomes.
This training on Developing Effective, Functional, Routines-Based IFSPs was created to share information and strategies for best practices for developing and implementing IFSPs that support children and families and lead to improved outcomes and school readiness. The training is organized in three modules:

Module 1 sets the context with regard to the purposes of early intervention and reviews how research and professional knowledge about how children learn impact the delivery of effective services. We explore the importance of engagement and routines-based intervention to support children’s growth and development and progression towards the three broad early childhood outcomes.

Module 2 explores functional assessment, which includes the what, why, when, how and who of the functional assessment of young children. The module illustrates the connections between the broad early childhood outcomes and individual IFSP outcomes, and shows how the same information can be used for both the development of functional IFSP outcomes and the federally required child outcomes measurement.

Module 3 explores the process of developing functional IFSP outcomes, including the requirements of the law, the characteristics of high quality IFSP outcomes, and the process of developing strategies and services to support outcomes.
The objectives for this module are to:

- Understand the importance of authentic assessment in developing functional routines-based IFSPs
- Review strategies for conducting functional assessment
- Reflect on current assessment and IFSP development practices within the framework of the Early Intervention Mission and Key Principles

It is critical to understand a child’s abilities in meaningful contexts and to understand what the child and family do during daily activities and routines. Functional assessment uses methods and activities to gain information about what the child can do, likes to do, is interested in and how well he or she is engaged in meaningful activities throughout the day.

**Note to Trainers:**

If participants need additional information about the overall evaluation and assessment process, the Birth – Five Evaluation and Assessment Module on Maryland Learning Links addresses evaluation and assessment with regard to their definitions, purposes, legal requirements, best practices and family partnerships through the lens of Maryland’s birth through age five seamless, comprehensive continuum of services for children with disabilities and their families. The module can be accessed at the following link: [http://olms.cte.jhu.edu/olms2/142555](http://olms.cte.jhu.edu/olms2/142555)
This slide depicts the process for developing IFSPs that reflect best practice in routines-based functionally-oriented early intervention. This graphic, vetted by Maryland’s Quality IFSP Workgroup, depicts the process for creating Effective Functional, Routines-Based IFSPs that align with Maryland’s Online IFSP. It is important to note that each of these steps is interrelated and not just a linear process. This means what is gathered and utilized in each step is built upon and referred back to in subsequent steps. This is critical for putting together the various types of information needed to truly understand the child and family.

Following formal evaluation methods to determine eligibility, functional assessment provides meaningful information about the child’s abilities during daily activities and routines and focuses on priorities and concerns a family has for intervention.

The process begins by gathering detailed information through family assessment including a family concerns, priorities and resources and then functional assessment across environments. This involves assessing the child’s skills and interests in the real life contexts and routines of family, culture and community, across the three early childhood outcome areas, with consideration of the developmental guidelines/early learning standards and natural learning opportunities for the child’s age. The functional assessment process (the three boxes along the top row) is the focus of this module.

Once comprehensive information has been gathered, it can be translated into outcomes that improve the quality of the child’s engagement and participation in daily routines and activities, and strategies and services that support parents and caregivers to help children meet those outcomes.

The process of developing functional, routines-based outcomes and the strategies and services to support them is covered in more detail in Module 3.

**Note to Trainers:** A version of this graphic with more detailed information is included in the materials as a handout.
Functional or authentic assessment of a young child’s skills happens in the real life contexts of family, culture and community rather than in isolation.

Functional assessment results in a complete picture of the “whole child.” Urie Bronfenbrenner (Ecological Systems Theorist) quipped that traditional assessment is “the science of the strange behavior of children, with strange adults, in strange settings for the briefest possible period of time.”

Functional assessment takes place in the context of everyday behaviors with familiar adults in comfortable, known settings and over time. It relies on information reported by those who know the child well and have observed the child’s ongoing development and learning. There are many methods for conducting functional assessment including observation, gathering information from families and interviewing families and caregivers. A comprehensive functional assessment involves multiple sources of information. When we truly value authentic information gathered from a functional assessment, we can approach more traditional evaluation in ways that are child and family friendly.
“Everything that can be measured counts, but not everything that counts can be measured.”

Conventional evaluation has its place in early intervention and early childhood special education. “Evaluation” means the procedures used by qualified personnel to determine a child's initial and continuing eligibility for early intervention services as an infant or toddler with a disability. Standardized testing helps us to distinguish typical from atypical performance and provides scores reported in “percent delay,” as required for determining a child’s eligibility. However, traditional standardized evaluations alone do not:

- provide the information needed to develop functional IFSPs that can be implemented within the day to day routines of the family/community/child care/school.
- determine what the child is able to do, likes to do, or needs to do in regard to the family’s/caregiver’s priorities.
- provide a clear understanding of the child’s abilities across environments and care providers – this is accomplished through observation and information sharing.

While standardized testing may be needed to determine a child’s eligibility for services, it should never be the only source of information about the child.
All sources of information gathered during the evaluation and assessment process are critical to provide a comprehensive picture of the child and family. These sources of information may include:

- Medical reports
- Formal assessments
- Informed clinical opinion
- Informal assessments
- Quantitative and qualitative measures
- Observation in natural environments
- Family input
- Family Assessment/Routines Based Interview
- Information gathered through the IFSP process:
  - Child strengths and needs
  - Family concerns, resources, and priorities
- Ongoing progress monitoring

Functional assessment of the child and family engaged in real activities, in real settings, is the cornerstone. This multi-faceted process is what leads to the development of effective IFSPs.
**Note to Trainers:** Ask the participants “What practices provide the most valid information about the child’s capabilities?” Ask for responses from the participants (quick brainstorm fashion). Here are some examples of possible appropriate responses:

- Should include information from individuals who know the child (e.g. parents, child care providers, teachers, grandparents).
- Should pull from multiple sources (e.g. family report, observation, assessment instruments).
- Should occur across multiple settings.
- Should **not** be based on either the initial or a single interaction with the child and family.

As you move through the slides that follow describing assessment practices, incorporate the information that participants have provided. If the group size allows, ask participants to share their experiences as you go.

If time allows, wrap-up this activity with sharing the DEC Recommended Practices around Assessment.

Yields a real picture of the child
Guides identification of functional individualized outcomes

Functional assessment practices translate family concerns, such as:
- “She can’t let others know what she wants.”
- “He doesn’t sit at the table with us during meals.”

Into positive statements, such as:
- “I want her to be able to let others know what she wants.”
- “I want him to be able to sit with us during meals.”

Ultimately, this guides the identification of functional individualized outcomes. The assessment team gains valuable information when they inquire about the child’s preferences for activities, materials, play partners, schedules, and ask families to share detailed health and developmental information.
Assessment is conducted and interpreted within the framework of how the child functions within a number of social and cultural systems: ecological (considers the social context of the child in the family, neighborhood and community) and ethnographic (considers the cultural context). Research shows that functional assessment yields more valid and usable assessment results. How can functional assessment help change perspectives?

The Focus Shifts with Functional Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Focus Shifts</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knows how to make eye</td>
<td>Smiles and gives his mom a big hug when she picks him up from child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contact, smile, and give</td>
<td>care each day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a hug</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows how to imitate a</td>
<td>Watched his brother go down the slide on his tummy and then tried</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gesture when prompted by</td>
<td>to do it too.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses finger in pointing</td>
<td>Points to the kind of cereal he wants for breakfast most days.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shows a skill in a specific situation</td>
<td>Pulls his stool over to the sink to turn on the water to play in it.</td>
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With functional assessment the focus shifts from specific skills on an assessment checklist or in specific situations to a more complete functional picture of the child.

For example, the focus shifts from noticing that the child makes eye contact, smiles and gives hugs to noticing how the child initiates affection with the important people in his/her life. Through functional assessment, information is gathered about how the child actually uses his or her skills to perform important activities in the context of daily life.

**Note to Trainers:**
*Review the examples on the slide and invite participants to share their own examples.*
Authenticity is important because the more realistic the task, the more motivated the child will be, and the more applicable the results of the observation will be to everyday events and situations.

Authentic, context-based tasks reinforce the competency-based approach used in educating young children, in assessment across disciplines of complex skills and processes, and in generalization across learning settings.

Finally, authentic, context-based tasks require that the assessor make no inference about the child’s capabilities because the behaviors sampled are directly observable. This information helps providers and families understand what in the family’s day is challenging, what is going well, what learning environments and opportunities are available and what situations may require additional support.
Functional assessment is conducted by a team including the family and professionals from various disciplines. This includes team members who have the expertise necessary to assess the unique needs of the young child suspected of having a disability. The team can observe and analyze a wide range of tasks/skills and provide a greater sampling of behaviors in real and natural contexts.

Functional information enhances team observations and validates team findings. When working in teams, communication between and among team members is needed to provide a coordinated process, minimize the intrusiveness of the process for the child, family, and others in the setting and to ensure that a comprehensive process is completed.

Functional assessment occurs over time and across settings and involves:
- observation of the child in natural circumstances, and
- information shared about the observations of people familiar with the child.

When families share their observations, professionals develop a more complete and accurate picture of the child. It’s important to let families know that you value their observations and participation in ongoing authentic assessment. Giving families concrete examples of the kinds of information you would like them to share is helpful.

The Family Guide to Understanding the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) has a Family Worksheet: A Look At My Child’s Development to assist families in providing concrete information about their child around the three broad early childhood outcomes.

**Note to Trainers:** The family worksheet is included in the handouts.
Functional assessment is done through gathering and compiling information about the child’s functioning from multiple sources, using multiple approaches to assessment, and observing across multiple settings in order to yield information that links assessment to services, programs and outcomes.

Selecting appropriate assessment tools is an important part of the functional assessment process, so being clear about the purpose of the assessment is critical. Tools may be norm referenced, criterion referenced or curriculum based; however, the most reliable information about young children is generated when these tools are used within an authentic/functional assessment model, which includes record review, developmental history, interviews, checklists/rating scales, anecdotal recordings, portfolios, technology and observation. Observation is a central feature. Team members should observe the child in multiple settings, being as objective as possible in noting how the child functions.

Here is a video of a provider discussing authentic assessment, including the importance of observation, talking with families and utilizing videotaping strategies. http://www2.cde.state.co.us/media/ResultsMatter/RMSeries/AuthenticAssessInEI_SA.asp

Note to Trainers:
Play the video and then generate discussion about the key strategies for functional, authentic assessment. This video is 7 minutes 36 seconds in length.
Involving families is key in conducting functional assessment, developing functional IFSP outcomes statements, and measuring the three broad early childhood outcomes required by the program.

Involving families in functional assessment is more than asking questions, going over questionnaires, or developmental profiles. To truly involve families, providers must:

- Listen to the family,
- Ask parents to show or describe what their perspective on child behavior is,
- Observe how the parent engages the child,
- Observe the child in play scenarios.

**Note to Trainers:**
If participants have additional professional learning needs around the utilization of observation, the following training module is designed to provide basic information about the uses of ongoing observation as a part of authentic assessment.
Observation: The Heart of Authentic Assessment:
[http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/observation](http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/observation)
Family routines and activities are the key to quality functional outcomes and appropriate early intervention services. Gathering information about the family’s daily activities is an essential part of the assessment process.

Another important part of the process is assessing the BARRIERS created by the child’s disability to the family’s ability to engage activities they would like to pursue. Team members should ask about the difficulty the family faces in daily activities and things they would like to do as a family but currently can’t.

**Note to Trainers:**
*Authentic Assessment of Family Routines, Activities, Concerns, and Priorities* and lead the group in discussing the questions below.

Ask the participants the following questions:

- “Which questions do you find the most useful?”
- “Are there any questions you would be uncomfortable asking?”
- “How might you re-word these questions so you would be more comfortable asking them?”
- “What other questions have you found helpful for gathering information from families?”

Ask a participant to read one of the questions out loud. Ask if he or she has ever asked a family that question and what follow-up he or she might ask.

It is important to guide the conversation to what is relevant to both the child and family, modifying the words you use to match their situation and probe for further information. Involving families through the questions we ask about everyday activities and routines is how we focus on what is functional for the family.
It is important to understand not just WHAT the family does from day to day, but the QUALITY of the child’s interactions, engagement, and independence in the routines and activities. HOW is the child involved? Is it developmentally and culturally appropriate? Is the child’s participation supporting his or her development and learning? What has already worked or not worked for the family? Does this activity or routine look like the family wants it to?

**Note to Trainers:**

Additional tools and resources to support family assessment are included as handouts:

*Scale for Assessment of Family Enjoyment within Routines (SAFER)*, Stacy Scott & R.A. McWilliam (2000, Revised 4/03) Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

*Scale for the Assessment of Teachers’ Impressions of Routines and Engagement (SATIRE)*, Beth T. Clingenppel & R. A. McWilliam (2003), Center for Child Development, Vanderbilt University Medical Center.
In the packet, there are two handouts to support functional and family assessment practices within the framework of the Key Principles in Early Intervention: “Agreed Upon Practices: Functional Assessment of the Child” and “Evidence of Key Principles in Family Assessment Process.” At your table, take a few minutes to review the above handouts. Then read the questions on the handout “Functional Assessment Table Talk” and discuss each question. A recorder should take notes as you talk with one another. Take about 10 minutes to talk with one another; then we will debrief as a large group.

**Note to Trainers:**
At the end of ten minutes, ask for volunteers to share responses to the questions, beginning with the first question. Suggested debriefing time: 5 minutes.
This chart illustrates how family information can be helpful. Let’s start on the left hand side of the chart.

If, through conversation with the family, the family shares that bath time is a great time of day for the child and family, the team may think about identifying and enhancing learning opportunities during that time of day. Let’s say that having the child use words to express wants and needs is a priority for the family. The team may be able to employ some intervention strategies during bath time that will ultimately increase the child’s functional abilities to use words throughout the day. Routines and activities that are going well provide a great opportunity to identify and enhance learning opportunities to address family priorities.

On the flip side, if the family shares information about routines and activities that are not going well, these may become priorities that families want to work on with early intervention. For example, if bath time was very difficult because the child fusses and has difficulty sitting in the tub, the team may identify the hindering and helping factors and employ intervention strategies to ultimately improve bath time. This in turn promotes the child’s functional abilities in the areas of social relationships, engagement and independence.

By understanding what is going well and what is challenging, the team can work within those natural routines to increase the child’s functional abilities.

Consider how all of the rich information gathered through functional assessment can be effectively utilized within the IFSP process.

This matrix chart illustrates how information gathered through functional assessment can be used for multiple purposes throughout the IFSP process. For example, information about the child’s interests can be used in developing outcomes; selecting routines, activities and settings; developing strategies and objectives; and determining people, resources and services.
The results of functional assessment are critical to the development of multiple sections of the IFSP. They form the foundation on which the functional outcomes and appropriate services are based.

Each of these sections should reflect information gathered from multiple sources in an authentic manner and focused on meaningful routines and activities. The input of the family and other caregivers, and observations by professionals are included in each component.

- The Present Levels of Development contains the scores from standardized tests that were administered, as well as qualitative observations about the child’s development and performance.
- The Family Concerns, Priorities and Resources reflect in depth conversation with the family about their current needs and future goals, based on discussions about what the family does and would like to be able to do.
- The Routines in Natural Environments section describes the nature and quality of the child’s participation in caregiving, learning, and fun activities. It includes discussion of the barriers that the child and family face to full participation and possible solutions.
- The Strengths and Needs Summary includes clear descriptions and concrete examples of the child’s current, emerging, and foundational skills in each of the three early childhood outcome areas, reflecting the variety of types of behaviors included in each outcome area.

Together these four sections of the IFSP provide a comprehensive picture of the child and family to support the development of effective, functional, routines-based IFSP outcomes.
Now let’s connect functional assessment to the various IFSP components through a reflection activity. The Components of Effective, Functional, Routines-Based IFSPs Reflection Tool was developed by MSDE with stakeholders to assist lead agencies and service providers in refining their practice in developing IFSPs that use authentic and appropriate information to develop functional outcomes and routines-based supports and services for young children and their families. The tool is a self-assessment that may be used for professional learning and program improvement.

After receiving copies of the provided sections of the tool, take a few minutes to utilize this reflection tool with at least one IFSP.

Note to Trainers:
During this activity, participants reflect on IFSPs that they or members of their staff/team developed (Have extras available in case some participants are not prepared with their own IFSPs; the activity is still beneficial to them). This reflection may highlight both areas where their program is achieving effectiveness standards and areas for improvement.

The handouts contain the sections of the tool that relate to conducting and documenting assessment information. Allow ~ 20 minutes for the participants to assess their IFSP(s) and think about their responses to the questions. When everyone is finished, ask the questions listed on the slide out loud and ask for discussion. If you have a large group, you may want participants to answer the question in writing on different colored post-its (one color for each question). Have them discuss at tables, then collect the post-its and share out a few answers to each question.
Developing Effective, Functional, Routines-Based IFSPs

Questions?  
Next Steps?  

Thank You for Participating in Functional Assessment in the IFSP Process

Note to Trainers:  
Wrap-up final activity and ask participants if they have any questions or if they have next steps to consider based on the reflection tool activity.  
Thank participants for coming!
Note to Trainers:
Add the contact information for the presenters on this slide. Consider including name, email address and/or phone number.