



## CHILD OUTCOMES SUMMARY (COS) IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE

### CHILD OUTCOMES

The purpose of the Florida Early Steps Outcomes Measurement System is to evaluate the developmental progress of an infant or toddler between the entry and the exit of the Program.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requires all state early intervention programs to report data on the following three child outcomes to determine if children enrolled in the Early Steps Program are making progress:

1. Children have positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships)
2. Children acquire and use knowledge and skills (including early language/communication and early literacy)
3. Children use appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.

Data on these outcomes serve important purposes beyond federal reporting. Outcome data can identify opportunities for program improvement. Teams can use the information for effective intervention planning and service delivery.

#### **Helpful Resources for understanding child outcomes:**

[A Child Outcomes Step by Step](#) video (Edelman, 2011) describes these three outcomes in depth. The video explains the functioning necessary for each child to be an active and successful participant at home, in the community, and other places like a child-care program or preschool.

[Breadth of the Three Child Outcomes](#) (Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center [ECTA] The Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems [DaSy], 2021) provides an infographic to describe the three outcomes.

### CHILD OUTCOMES SUMMARY (COS) PROCESS

The COS process is a systematic method to summarize **multiple sources** of information about a child's functioning in each of the three outcome areas. Information should include parent reports, observations, and results from formal and informal assessments. The COS form is **not** an assessment instrument. It is a way to summarize information and is needed because no one assessment instrument directly measures the three child outcomes.

There are four key features of a quality COS process:

1. There is active involvement from both professionals and family members.
2. Team members use the information gathered to rate a child's skills and behaviors in each of the three outcome areas on a 7-point scale. The 7-point rating scale is used to compare the child's skills and behaviors with those expected for his or her chronological age.
3. The process produces a description of the child's functioning at a point in time by blending multiple sources of information.
4. The process is completed at a minimum of two points in time: when the child **enters** the program and when the child **exits** the program.



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All team members bring different information and perspectives to the COS process. As a group, the team completing the process must include members with the following knowledge and expertise:

- An understanding of the three child outcomes
- Knowledge of child development
- Knowledge of the child's current development, skills, behavior, and functioning across various settings and situations
- Awareness of the expectations for the child functioning within the child and family's culture
- Understanding how to apply the 7-point rating scale

Early Steps personnel and providers must receive training, guidance, and instruction on the COS process before determining ratings, completing the COS Form, or to the state office. The Local Early Steps (LES) Program must ensure that staff and providers receive all COS-related training modules and other professional development supports required by the state.

All Early Steps staff and providers who will be involved in the COS process must complete the COS training within 60 days of their initial hire or contract date.

### TEAM-BASED PROCESS

An important part of the COS process is effective teaming, which includes engaging all members of the team when discussing a child's current level of functioning compared to same-age peers. The COS team needs a complete picture of the child's functioning to determine outcomes ratings. Each team member contributes different information drawn from their interactions with and observations of the child.

The team should include:

- Families
- Family Resource Specialist
- Service Coordinator
- Early Intervention Providers
- Others involved in a child's daily routines and activities

Family members have extensive knowledge about the child and can provide information about the child's functioning in different settings. Professional team members are skilled at helping to anchor a child's skills to age expectations and developmental sequences. By sharing what is known about the child, each member of the team helps establish a complete picture of the child's functioning, which helps to ensure that the COS process and the outcomes ratings accurately reflect everything the child can do.



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Identifying a COS rating is a consensus process. Determining the indicator ratings requires teams to summarize multiple sources of information about a child's functioning across different settings to identify an overall sense of the child's functioning. Family members are a critical part of the team. The team should consider the way the child interacts with each of the team members, including the family, at home, in the community, and during assessments with professionals. Each team member should discuss the interpretation of the evidence and why it led to a recommendation of a particular rating to the team.

### **Helpful Resources for understanding team collaboration for the COS process:**

The [Child Outcomes Summary Process Team Collaboration \(COS-TC\) Quality Practices Checklist and Descriptions](#) and [Guidance on Using the COS-TC Checklist](#) document provides a monitoring mechanism for those who implement, supervise or train on the COS process. The document addresses identifying, observing, and assessing team collaboration. Additionally, it includes a description of each of the quality practices, the fundamentals of these practices, and two examples of the use of each COS quality practice with team members.

## **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**

It is crucial to provide families with information about the COS process before the assessment and services begin. Adequate preparation ensures families will be active and engaged team participants. Educating the family should include preparation for what to expect, discussing the family role to actively contribute to the discussion, and encouraging the family to ask questions during the process.

### **Helpful resources to support family engagement in the COS process:**

[Including Families in the Rating Discussion](#) (ECTA/DaSy)  
[Family Guide to Participating in the Child Outcomes Measurement Process](#) (National Parent Technical Assistance Center at PACER Center in collaboration with ECTA), also available in Spanish: [Una Guía Familiar para la Participación en el Proceso para la Medición de Resultados\\* de los Niños](#)  
[Examples of outreach documents](#) developed by state and federal programs to inform parents about child and family outcomes requirements and support active family participation.

## **CONTENT OF THE CHILD OUTCOMES SUMMARY**

**Children Have Positive Social Relationships:** The child's ability to communicate with others, express emotions and feelings appropriately, and control his or her behavior while interacting with others will look differently depending on the child's age.

**Children Acquire and Use Knowledge and Skills:** The child's ability to understand, communicate and problem-solve, provides the foundation for later success. These skills vary based on the child's age.

**Children Take Appropriate Action to Meet Their Needs:** The child's ability to use movement, sounds, gestures, and other skills to meet their needs and obtain assistance from others.



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### AGE EXPECTED FUNCTIONING

The COS process requires the team to understand the timing and sequence of development that enable infants and toddlers to have positive social relationships, acquire knowledge and skills, take action to meet their needs, and that children typically acquire skills within a certain time frame. 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 their age and how a family's culture may affect what is considered age expected.

### FUNCTIONAL OUTCOMES

Functional outcomes refer to skills and behaviors that are meaningful to infants and toddlers in the context of everyday living. They reflect how a child uses skills and behaviors to participate in everyday activities.

Functional outcomes are an essential part of the COS process and a key aspect of connecting the COS process evidence and ratings to [high-quality IFSP outcomes](#) and service goals.

### AGE ANCHORING

Age anchoring examines a child's functional abilities, skills, and behaviors in relationship to what is expected for children at the same chronological age. It is important to focus on functional abilities rather than isolated (or discrete) skills that a child may have demonstrated only during the assessment. Each of the seven points on the COS rating scale is defined by specific criteria:

- Age-expected skills - The skills and behaviors that are seen in children of a particular chronological age. For example, a child is walking at 14 months old. This is an age-expected skill for children between 12 and 18-month-old, so the child is showing age-expected skills.
- Immediate Foundational Skills - The skills and behaviors that come just before age-expected skills in development. Consider the example of walking. The skills needed just before walking include 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."
- Foundational skills – These occur much earlier in the developmental progression of skills. They are called foundational because they form the foundation for later skill development. When considering the example of walking above, consider the skills needed 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.

Part of every child outcome rating discussion should include an assessment of the child's functioning relative to age expectations. If a child's functioning is not age-expected, the team must determine which immediate foundational and foundational skills are present.



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### FUNCTIONING ACROSS SETTINGS AND SITUATIONS

Reviewing multiple sources of information assists teams with understanding a child’s functional abilities, determining functional IFSP outcomes based upon family priorities, and informing the identification and implementation of intervention strategies. When using the three global child outcomes as a framework for summarizing assessment results, providers assist families by considering how their child brings together skills across domains to function in specific situations, rather than talking about skills from a particular domain in isolation. For example, how does a child apply skills related to daily routines:

- Does she hold a cup and bring it to the table for a meal?
- Does she pick up small objects as a part of a cleanup routine?

Discussion regarding the three global child outcomes should focus on the child’s functioning in the context of the family’s everyday activities and routines. This promotes conversations about possible IFSP outcomes to support family participation. Linking the COS rating to IFSP outcomes is necessary to ensure the COS process is meaningful to the delivery of services.

A child may behave or exhibit skills very differently because of the environment or setting. The team needs to have a complete picture of the child’s skills and behaviors across multiple settings to assign an accurate COS rating at entry. In addition to information gathered during the assessment, it is critical to get a picture of the child in places where the child spends time, including home, child-care, and other community settings. The team must understand how the child interacts with adult family members, siblings, extended family, and other people in the child’s life. This information can be gathered from parent reports, discussions with others who are regularly involved in the child’s life, observations by providers during home visits, and observations in places where the child spends time.

#### **Helpful resources for functional, age-appropriate outcomes in the COS process:**

ECTA provides additional detail on each of the child outcome areas with an infographic on what functional skills comprise each outcome area in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

Video [Child Outcomes Step by Step](#) published through ResultsMatter and other partners each of the child outcomes with approachable language (Edelman, 2011).

[Child Developmental Resources](#) page sharing several materials describing developmental milestones and detailing expected functioning across the early childhood period.

This [infographic from ECTA](#) provides a visualization of how evidence from multiple sources can be used to identify global functional outcomes.

[Discussion Prompts for Child Outcomes](#) can be used to expand the discussion of child outcomes, ensure that Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) team members are considering all aspects of development and to engage the family in the discussion of outcomes.

It is recommended local programs and providers review and become familiar with the [Age Anchoring Guidance for Determining Child Outcomes Summary \(COS\) Ratings](#) developed by ECTA. In addition, the Early Childhood Outcomes Center created a list of [age-anchoring resources](#).



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### EVIDENTIARY SOURCES

Sources of evidentiary information are used by the team during the process.

[Sources of Information for COS](#) (Please note this is not an exhaustive list.)

On the [COS Form](#), these sources of evidence are divided into check list categories:

- Family information on child functioning
  - Checklist options detail how the information was gathered and whether family members were involved in team discussion
- Evidence collected in a variety of settings and situations
  - Checklist options detail different social settings and routines
  - Options detail inclusion of activities by child preference, ease, and initiation
- Evidence collected using a variety of methods
  - Formal sources such as progress notes or assessment instruments
  - Informal sources such as observation and interviews

These categories are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the checklist is provided to provide a snapshot of the variety of evidentiary sources in a single space. This enables groups to summarize the sources and quickly assess whether enough evidence has been examined.

### RATINGS

#### 7-Point Rating Scale

The Child Outcomes Summary (COS) process is a team process for summarizing information on a child's functioning in each of the three child outcome areas using a 7-point scale. The [COS Ratings Definitions](#) define the criteria for each of the seven points on the rating scale.

#### Entry Ratings

An entry rating must be completed for every child who is eligible for Early Steps by 30 months of age. The rating must be identified within 30-days of the initial IFSP meeting or during the first provider visit. (See Appendix 1 regarding Possible Billing/Claims Submission Codes to be Used When Completing the Child Outcomes Summary Process.) The Child Progress question is not answered during the entry rating. An entry rating should not be changed for a child who is continuously enrolled. (See [Special Circumstances](#) section below regarding entry rating for any child that is re-referred to Early Steps.)

#### Exit Ratings

All children who receive an entry COS rating and have been enrolled in the program must receive an exit rating. At the exit, the *Progress Question* about new skills the child has learned since the last rating must also be answered. The exit rating must be determined and recorded no more than 45 days before the child's exit from Early Steps, or within 30 days following the child's exit from Early Steps. (See [Special Circumstances](#) section below regarding exit rating for any child that transfers Local Early Steps locations or exits the program unexpectedly.)



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The completion of a new formal assessment instrument is not required as a part of the discussion process, but the most recent information should be used to provide evidence. The team should identify a rating based on input from the family on the child's current functioning within everyday routines, progress notes, the most recent assessment(s) for the child, and any other sources of information that reflect the child's current functioning. The sources that are used should be indicated on the COS rating form. Teams are encouraged not to review the entry rating at the time of an exit rating to reduce any bias.

Progress Question: At the time of the exit rating, the team must also answer a question asking whether the child has shown any new skills or behaviors since the entry rating for each of the outcomes. The progress question does not ask if the child has caught up to age expectations.

The progress question is a yes/no question that documents whether the child has acquired **any new skill** since the entry rating. The question focuses on whether the child has made progress

compared to the previous set of skills. 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 (after completing the exit rating) to help answer this question.

Any new skill in the outcome area counts as a "yes." For example, if in the two years since the entry rating, the team has seen the child begin using even one 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."

### Impossible Response Error:

Because the progress question asks if **any new skill** has been learned rather than whether the child has increased their age-appropriate functioning, there may be some confusion if the data system returns an error message indicating that the response to the progress questions is impossible. Any child that has learned at least one new skill should receive a "yes," therefore, any combination of entry and exit ratings accompanied by a "yes" response to the progress questions is possible. Children who maintain a rating of 2 or higher over time are acquiring new skills to be able to keep the same rating because what is expected of older children developmentally is more than what is expected of younger children.

If a child has not learned **any new skills** at all as they have advanced in age, their age-expected level of functioning **must** be considered to have decreased. Therefore, if the exit rating does not describe fewer age-expected or immediate foundational skills than the entry (indicated by a numerical rating **less than** the entry rating), the data system will return an impossible response error. If the child received a 1 at entry and a 1 at exit indicating that the child has continued to show zero age-expected skills and zero immediate foundational skills, the progress question can also receive a "no" response.

DaSy has a [COS to Progress Categories calculator](#) that can be used to experiment with various responses to understand what the progress question represents and avoid an impossible response error.



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### **COS Decision Tree**

The decision tree was created as a tool for training in the use of the COS process. The tree is a series of questions about the extent to which a child exhibits age-appropriate skills and behaviors in each outcome area. The decision tree helps teams understand and apply the 7 points on the scale, as responses guide the user to a specific rating category on the 7-point scale.

English version [COS Decision Tree](#)

Spanish version [Árbol de Decisiones para Proceso de Resumen de Resultados de Niños](#). A more detailed explanation of each of the points on the rating scale is available in the ECTA/DaSy Module [The 7-Point Scale](#).

### **Annual/Periodic IFSP Meetings**

Currently, teams are not required to identify a COS rating at periodic and/or annual IFSP meetings; however, teams are encouraged to do so to monitor a child's progress periodically, support linkages from IFSP services, assess IFSP outcomes, monitor the effectiveness of the intervention, and enhance the fidelity of the COS process. (See Appendix 1 regarding Possible Billing/Claims Submission Codes to be Used When Completing the Child Outcomes Summary Process.) Annual or periodic completion of the COS process supports active family participation in team discussions, particularly at the exit, by increasing understanding and practice with the process.





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### SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

#### RE-REFERRALS

If a child was previously eligible for Early Steps, received an entry COS rating, was closed without an exit rating, and later re-referred, the entry COS should not be changed. The team should assess the child's current development; however, each child should have only one entry and one exit.

#### TRANSFERS

If a child transfers from one local program to another, the transferring program should explain to the parent(s) the importance of transferring the record, including the entry COS rating, to the new local program. Following receipt of consent, the transferring program should send the receiving program the entry rating, along with the rest of the Early Steps record. The receiving program should maintain the initial entry rating from the transferring program. The new local program should establish and record an exit rating if the child has been enrolled in Early Steps without regard to the length of time at any single local program site.

#### CHILD EXITS PROGRAM BEFORE EXIT RATING

If the team cannot meet in person, the team should consider alternate methods. Considerations for teams under this circumstance has been developed by ECTA and can be found at <https://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/eco/cos-distance.pdf>.

When a child exits unexpectedly (i.e., an unplanned move, lost to follow-up) the available team members must convene as soon as possible to review the most current information available and assign an exit rating. (See Appendix 1 regarding Possible Billing/Claims Submission Codes to be Used When Completing the Child Outcomes Summary Process.) If the child/family returns before the child record has been closed, the COS team should consider reconvening, as in a re-referral, to ensure that the COS rating established at entry is still consistent with the child's developmental status.