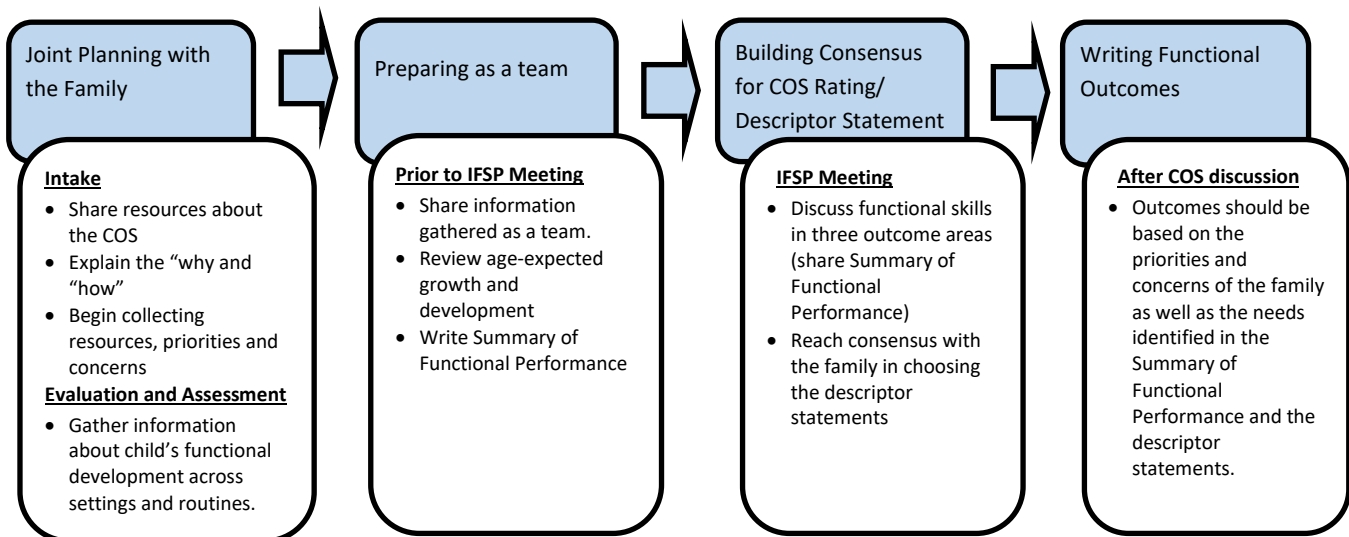


## Engaging Families in the Child Outcome Summary (COS) Process

The COS process is an essential part of services for children and families enrolled in early intervention and relies on the information families have to share. It is important for families to understand why we are completing the COS and how the ratings and descriptor statements will be used. The following information contains guidance on how to engage families in this process in order to determine the most accurate rating/descriptor statement. The Child Outcome Summary Team Collaboration Toolkit (COS-TC) is a set of helpful resources to support quality COS practices within your team. We recommend you use this tool and we will reference it throughout this practice guide. There is information at the end of the guide on how to access the training for the COS-TC.

### COS Process



### Joint Planning with the Family (section II of the COS-TC)

The family is the expert on their own child and the information that they share is critical to ensuring an accurate rating of the child’s abilities. In order to maximize the information they have to share throughout the intake, assessment and evaluation process, use active listening skills to meet the family where they are. Summarize, paraphrase, or ask for descriptive examples to check understanding. Ask follow-up questions to get additional information as needed.

To help family members fully participate in COS discussions, it is important to give them some background information before the meeting. The following key points are pulled from the COS-TC and can be used when discussing the COS with families: \*

- **Explain to the family why outcome data is collected and how they are used.**

Before beginning the COS decision-making discussion, providers need to give the family basic information about why outcome data is collected and how those data are used and make sure the family has no additional questions. Providers are encouraged to share written materials with families about why child outcome data are collected and the COS process before coming together for the COS rating meeting.

- **Describe the three child outcomes that are measured.**

Part of the preparation for families should include a brief description of the outcomes as each is discussed during the meeting. This may include a new description or reference to an earlier explanation about the outcomes. Providers should remind families that each of the outcome areas includes a variety of functional skills and abilities that teams consider when identifying ratings for each outcome.

- **Describe how the outcome data is collected.**

For each of the three outcomes, team members determine how the child is currently doing by discussing information that has been obtained about the child's functioning across settings and/or routines. Providers can reinforce the approaches that were used to gather information about the child's functioning (e.g., assessment, observation, interviews, etc.) and when the information was collected. In collaboration with families, all team members consider the mix of functional skills a child has for each of the outcome areas and then determine how close these skills are to age-expected development. The process is repeated later (i.e., annually and/or at exit) to compile information that helps identify changes observed in the child's functioning.

- **Check for family understanding before moving on.**

When sharing information about the outcomes and the COS, it is important to confirm the family's understanding. Asking open-ended questions may be helpful, for example "What else would you like to know about measuring the child outcomes?" In addition to initially checking the family's understanding of the why and how of the COS process, the providers should check the family's understanding as needed throughout the meeting. Ensuring families understand the COS process is critical to meaningfully engaging them in it.



## Preparing as a Team (Section I of the COS-TC)

It is important for the team of professionals to discuss all of the information gathered so far that will contribute to the selection of the descriptor statements. The team should have a rich discussion about the child's functioning in each outcome area, including discussing what is age-expected. The team will not be selecting a descriptor statement during this meeting, as this must happen with the family present. The Family Resources Coordinator should facilitate this preparation and include the following:

- 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?

- Review COS background information, including the meaning of the three outcomes, the rating criteria, and the descriptor statements.
- If there are any questions or concerns, the team discusses these further and refers to resources with more information about age-expected development and the rating criteria.

The entire IFSP team, including the family, determines what the child’s strengths and areas of need are in the outcome areas at entry and at exit. Below are some practices to remember when collaborating as a diverse team.

- All members participate. It is not necessary that all team members be knowledgeable in all five areas of development.
- There is no expectation that families understand typical child development.
- Diverse perspectives and different opinions are encouraged.
- Minimize acronyms and jargon.
- Explain professional terms.
- Summarize, paraphrase, or ask for descriptive examples to check understanding.
- Ask follow-up questions to get additional information, as needed.



### Summary of Functional Performance

The Summary of Functional Performance, with input from the parent, synthesizes all the information known about the child from a variety of sources and across settings to create a snapshot of the child’s functioning relative to same-aged peers in each of three global outcome areas. As a team, a descriptor statement that most closely describes how the child is functioning compared to same age peers is selected for each outcome from a predetermined list of choices that are:

- Tied to a 7-point rating scale
- Based on the child’s functioning:
  - What the child does across settings and with different people
  - Compared with what is expected given the child’s chronological age
- Age appropriate within the context of the family’s culture

3 out of 7

VS

Child shows functioning expected for his or her age some of the time and/or in some settings and situations. Child’s functioning is a mix of age-appropriate and not age-appropriate behaviors and skills.

There is not a need to mention the numbers on the rating scale to families, nor do we need to ask the families to come up with a number on the rating scale. Discuss information so that all team members, including the family, have a picture of the different ways the child uses his or her functional skills in each of the three outcome areas. This picture should reflect the perspectives of all who interact with the child. Information from multiple sources helps the team accurately gauge the child’s functioning relative to what is expected at the child’s chronological age.

## Cultural Considerations

Expectations for development may vary between cultures, especially with regard to independence and self-care skills. It is important for the team to learn from the family about their culture's expectations for their child's development and learning. Interpreters must be available if needed and professionals conducting the assessment should be skilled and knowledgeable about the cultural implications of the assessment process.

- If a child's skills are not at the same level as same age peers of the mainstream culture, it may be that there is a different expectation within that child's and family's culture. For example, a child may not be using self-help skills in an age appropriate way according to an evaluation tool but the family may not have any expectation that the child complete those tasks independently.
- The rating on the Summary of Functional Performance should reflect age expected functioning within the child's culture. For example, if a child is not yet eating with utensils because the family eats with their hands, they should not be given a lower COS rating.

## Building Consensus for a High Quality Rating/Descriptor Statement (Section IV of the COS-TC)

The following are different strategies to incorporate into the discussion with families when choosing a descriptor statement.\*

**Give options:** Based on the discussion the professional team had prior to the IFSP meeting, offer the family a starting point to work from. Share these options with the family in order to narrow down the seven descriptor statements. Be careful not to present these as the only options the family can choose from; you want to be sure they are able to give input beyond your suggestions, if needed. Examples of how you might do this include:

*We talked about Norton mostly using skills we would typically see of a much younger child in this outcome area. However, we do see some age-expected functioning in how he displays and communicates his emotions with others. Let's consider if this other statement is a more accurate way to describe his functioning. [Read alternate statement.] -or-*

*We have to consider if he demonstrates age-expected functioning in all or almost all settings and situations. Earlier, we heard that when we think of his play with others, Norton continues to do more onlooker play with familiar peers at childcare and he continues to have difficulty separating from you. These are behaviors that typically appear before his age. Do you agree?*

**Give Examples:** In order to help give context for the family about their child's development in comparison with same age peers, provide concrete examples of the functional skills their child has as well as what is considered to be age appropriate. For example:

*Being able to separate from you easily in familiar surroundings is an ability expected for his age. Norton, however, displays notable shyness and can take up to 30 minutes to separate. This is more typical of a younger child and is often seen before being able to separate more easily. When we think of how Norton separates from you we'd call it an immediate foundational ability. -or-*

*Norton is making sounds and starting to say things that sound like they could be words. Children Norton's age are typically saying more words. They also use words functionally to name things that they see. Norton's skills are more typical of a much younger child; we'd call these foundational skills. They are important skills, and ones we'll want to build upon to help him get closer to age-expected development.*

**Use the Decision Tree:** It is recommended that the team of professionals use the decision tree to come to an accurate descriptor statement before meeting with the family. The team may also decide to use the tool with the family during the IFSP meeting, being careful not to use the numbers on the rating scale. Depending on the family, this may help to narrow down the choices and come to consensus. For example:

*I believe we have a good picture of Norton's functioning in this first outcome area. Let's now use this decision tree to help us make a decision about Norton's use of skills in this outcome area. The first question is about age-expected functioning. We've discussed that Norton interacts with Jenna in a way that is expected for his age; he also follows the routine at childcare and transitions easily between activities. These are abilities typical of children his age. So in regards to this first question would you all agree that he does show some age-expected functioning in this outcome? -or-*

*We have to consider if he demonstrates age-expected functioning in all or almost all settings and situations. Earlier, we heard that when we think of his play with others, Norton continues to do more onlooker play with familiar peers at childcare and he continues to have difficulty separating from you. These are behaviors that typically appear before his age. So in response to this question, I think we'd say no. Do you agree?*

### **Difficulty Reaching Consensus**

You may encounter challenges reaching consensus with the family and/or team when deciding on a rating. Here are some tips for helping you to reach consensus. Be sure to complete the steps listed above in *Preparing as a Team*.

- If disagreements arise with the family when choosing a descriptor statement, it is essential to determine the source of the disagreement and work to resolve it. For example, are there differences in what skills people consider age-expected? If so, refer to an age anchoring tool to develop a shared understanding of expectations. Use concrete examples of the child's functional skills.
- Refer back to Summary of Functional Performance or any other information the family may have shared about their child's skills and their concerns.
- Empathize and use active listening to ensure the family's perspective is being heard.
- Use a descriptor statement the family feels comfortable with if disagreement remains.

Be sure this conversation is respectful of the family's perspective and doesn't feel like an argument. If the family feels very strongly about selecting a descriptor statement that the provider team disagrees with, and an attempt has been made to come to consensus using the methods listed above, move forward with the descriptor statement of the family's choice.

### **Writing Functional Outcomes**

Functional outcomes should be based on the priorities and concerns of the family as well as the needs identified in the Summary of Functional Performance and the descriptor statements, and should address desired outcomes for the child and family as they relate to the three global child outcome areas. Engaging families in the COS process ensures a more accurate understanding of the child's abilities and skills, and contributes to quality outcomes for the child and family.

## Resources for the Family

The following resources can be helpful in explaining the COS process and assisting the family to understand their role, particularly if shared prior to the IFSP meeting:

- Washington State COS Brochure: [https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/ChildOutcomes\\_MeasuresBrochure.pdf](https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/ChildOutcomes_MeasuresBrochure.pdf)
- PACER Family Guide: <https://www.pacer.org/ec/early-intervention/guide-child-outcomes.asp>

## Resources for the Team

These resources can be used by the team to assist with the COS process:

- Decision Tree Entry: <https://dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/esit/COS-DecTree-Entry.pdf>
- Decision Tree Exit: <https://dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/esit/COS-DecTree-Exit.pdf>
- Descriptor Statements: <https://dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/esit/DescriptorStatements.pdf>
- Consensus Worksheet: <https://dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/esit/Consensus.pdf>
- Outcomes Measurement Instrument Crosswalks: <https://ectacenter.org/eco/pages/crosswalks.asp>
- Summary of Functional Performance Practice Guide: <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/esit/SummaryofFunctionalPerformanceApril2014.pdf>
- Child Outcome Summary Team Collaboration Checklist: This set of materials provides training on the COS-TC checklist and accompanying materials. It is recommended that you complete the ESIT COS modules and the ESIT in-person training on Engaging Families in the COS Process before completing this training.
  - COS-TC Training: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGePyKbgwsw>
  - COS-TC Checklist and Descriptions: [https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/esit/COS-TC\\_Checklist\\_and\\_Descriptions.pdf](https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/esit/COS-TC_Checklist_and_Descriptions.pdf)
  - Guidance on Using the COS-TC Checklist: [https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/esit/Guidance\\_on\\_Using\\_the\\_COS-TC\\_Checklist.pdf](https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/esit/Guidance_on_Using_the_COS-TC_Checklist.pdf)
  - Additional information about the COS-TC can be found on the DCYF website: <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/child-dev-support-providers/esit/ssip>

### **\*Child Outcome Summary Team Collaboration Toolkit (COS-TC)**

Younggren, N., Barton, L., Jackson, B., Swett, J. & Smyth, C. (2017). *Child Outcomes Summary-Team Collaboration (COS-TC) Quality Practices: Checklist and Descriptions*. Retrieved from <http://ectacenter.org/eco/pages/costeam.asp>