

CHILD AND FAMILY IFSP OUTCOMES OVERVIEW AND GUIDANCE

Effective Child and Family IFSP outcomes are based on **real-life family situations**, emphasize **active participation**, and are influenced by **family priorities and observations**. They should be **meaningful, measurable, and support child development through everyday experiences**.

Research shows that children learn and develop best when they:

- Participate in natural learning opportunities that occur in everyday family and community routines and activities; and
- Are interested and engaged in activities and interactions with familiar caregivers, which in turn strengthens and promotes competency and mastery of skills.

(Dunst, Bruder, Trivette, Raab & McLean, 2001; Sheldon & Rush, 2001)

High-quality outcomes **guide all interactions** in Early Intervention and make it more likely that progress and successes will be achieved for the child and family. Outcomes help families to focus on their priorities and provide the framework for families to build the caregiver's capacity and confidence.

Participation-based outcome statements that are family-focused center on the desires and needs of the parents or other care providers and are based on their interest in building upon current knowledge and learning new skills that relate to enhancing the child's participation in everyday life. Child-focused, participation-based IFSP outcome statements have the child's enhanced active involvement in activities and routines that are important to the family as the focal point (Sheldon & Rush, 2009)

Family outcomes reflect statements of what the family would like to occur and identify the expected result (Dunst & Deal, 1994). IFSP outcomes are family-worded, positive statements that are action-oriented and indicate changes the family wants to see rather than a description of a need (Cripe, Hanline, & Daley, 1997; Rosin et al., 1996). They address the family's desire to acquire new knowledge or skills specifically related to their child's learning and development. When writing family-focused outcome statements, the parent or caregiver of the child is identified as the actor or learner. The focus of the outcome centers on the parents' or care providers' ability to promote the child's participation in activity settings (e.g., Mike and Pat will learn new ways of helping Joey join the family for meals at the dinner table); or targets learning regarding specified parenting topics (e.g., Mike and Pat will both be comfortable putting Joey to bed for naps and at bedtime).

Child outcomes are participation-based and reflect the family's priorities related to enhancing a child's participation within an existing or desired activity setting or daily routine, and promote child learning, growth, and development. Outcome statements that are child-focused and participation-

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based can target interest-based activity settings (e.g., Because Joey loves playing in water and gardening is a favorite activity of the family an outcome could be, Joey will help his parents water the garden and houseplants) or focus on new activity settings and situations that the parents and care providers are interested in the child experiencing (e.g., Joey will join the family for meals at the dinner table on the weekends).

GATHERING INFORMATION

The purpose of gathering information from families is to identify what is challenging in everyday routines and activities (concerns) and what routines are working well (identifying the child's and families' resources, strengths, and interests). This allows the IFSP team to focus on providing support to the child and family within the context of the daily activities that are most relevant to the family. In addition to information from the family, it is essential to gather routines-based information from childcare providers or others who spend a significant amount of time with the child. Because a child may have different routines and expectations in different environments, it is important to include those caregivers as members of the team and work together to create outcomes that meet the child and family's needs across settings.

In order to understand how priorities or desired changes impact daily activities, probing questions are needed. Examples might include:

- How would that make a difference in your day or make different times during your day easier?
- When would changes be most helpful and noticeable?
- Describe the ideal situation if all was going well. What would you, your child and others be doing during that time?
- How do you feel when ___?
- How do you think your child feels when ___?
- What do you enjoy about your child?
- What daily routines are going really well/challenging?
- What have you tried so-far?
- How can we arrange things so he will be successful?
- How can we help your family have a successful day?
- What would a successful day look like?

There are several other guidance documents with examples of questions.

Remember, if the parent has already shared information, take time to reflect back the information the parent already shared, such as: "At our intake visit you said you wished the boys could play together without having a meltdown" or "you mentioned that you aren't able to go to a restaurant as a family lately because Sarah screams through dinner."

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Once you can visualize the family’s activities and routines and have gathered information from all those who spend time with the child, it’s time to develop outcomes. Remember, outcomes come before services. There should be no discussion of services until the team decides what is needed to help the child and family attain their outcomes.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD OUTCOME

FUNCTIONAL

Outcomes should be functional, not developmental.

What the parents wants:	Write this:	Not this:
I want to be able to put Jaime on his stomach and not have him cry.	Jaime will be able to enjoy seeing himself in the mirror or play with his toy during tummy time for a few minutes, a few times each day.	Jamie will be able to tolerate tummy time by not crying.
We want Ruth to be able to sit at the table to eat with the family, but she struggles to sit up longer than a few minutes.	Ruth will sit at the table for family meals by sitting on her own for at least 15 minutes at a time.	Ruth will improve her core strength and tone so she can sit longer at the table.
I want Miles to tell me what he wants to eat instead of always crying.	Miles will point or use a single word to identify foods that he wants to eat every day at snack time.	Miles will use age-appropriate words instead of crying.

MEASURABLE

Outcomes should show progress made over time; they should avoid the use of percentages, dates that are not meaningful to the family, and measures that are hard to track.

What the parents wants:	Write this:	Not this:
I want Brian to greet his Dad when he comes home, by waving or saying “hi”.	Brian will greet Dad by waving or saying “hi” when Dad gets home 4 times in one week.	Brian will greet Dad by waving or saying “hi” 75% of the time.
I want Ava to sit with me while I read a story to her.	Ava will sit for a story with Mom 2-3 times a week.	Ava will sit for a story with Mom 2x a week by her 6-month review.

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What the parents wants:	Write this:	Not this:
I want Benjamin to look around at toys when he is playing on his tummy.	Benjamin will participate in playtime by tracking toys presented to him each day during tummy time.	Benjamin will be able to lift his head off the ground at a 45-degree angle for 20-30 seconds 5x/day across 2 weeks.

ROUTINES BASED

Child outcomes should be written with a routine to practice the outcome in mind.

What the parents wants:	Write this:	Not this:
We want Luna to start to walk on her own.	During playtime, Luna will walk independently between the couch and her toybox to get the toys she wants most of the time.	Luna will walk independently.
I want Max to be able to follow directions.	Max will get ready in the morning by following simple directions such as “get your....” most mornings.	Max will follow simple directions during all opportunities throughout the day.
I would like Maeve to start holding her own toys.	Maeve will pick up and hold a toy during most morning playtimes.	Maeve will cross midline to use a pincer grasp to pick up a toy.

FAMILY OUTCOMES

Family outcomes should be written as family-owned and measurable.

What the parents wants:	Write this:	Not this:
We want some ideas on how to get Alex to eat a wider variety of foods.	Family would like strategies to get Alex to eat a wider variety of foods.	Alex will eat 25% protein, vegetables and fruits at one meal each day.
I wish I had some ideas on how to get Madelyn to go to and stay asleep on her own.	Family would like support and strategies on how to get Madelyn to self soothe for bed and naptime, so they won't have to stay with her until she falls asleep.	Madelyn will fall asleep on her own 5 out of 7 opportunities.

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What the parents wants:	Write this:	Not this:
I would like for Owen not to squirm so much when I change his diaper.	Family would like strategies so that Owen is more relaxed during diaper changes.	Owen will tolerate diaper changes 75% of the time.

QUICK GUIDE

1. Types of IFSP Outcome Statements:

- **Family-Focused:** Centers on the parents' learning to support the child's participation (e.g., parents learning bedtime routines), the parent gaining information, or connecting to resources.
- **Child-Focused:** Focuses on increasing the child's active involvement in meaningful family routines (e.g., child joining family meals).

2. Three-Step Process for Writing IFSP Outcomes:

- **Step 1: Gather Information**
 - Identify family priorities, routines, interests, and desired participation.
 - Use interviews, discussions, observation and tools like:
 - Routines-Based Interview
 - Routines-Based Conversations
 - Guiding Questions or other family-friendly worksheets
- **Step 2: Observe Families and Children**
 - Observe real-life activities and parent-child interactions across various settings and times.
 - Involve caregivers in the observation process by pointing out skills, behaviors, routines, or activities for them to focus on.
- **Step 3: Document Outcome Statements**
 - Ensure outcomes come directly from the family's concerns and priorities.
 - Apply the "third word rule" to ensure functionality (e.g., "play" vs. "sit").
 - Include a measurement goal that is simple and observable to the family and IFSP team.
 - Use real-life timelines (e.g., most of the time, every day, a specific holiday, or a family event).
 - Include the routine or time of day in which the action or participation will occur.

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- Avoid passive words like “tolerate,” “receive,” “increase,” and “maintain.”
- Avoid percentages. Use measures that the family and IFSP team can observe and agree that the skills meet their expectation for accomplishment.
- Use language that is familiar to the family. Write discipline-free and jargon-free outcomes.

UPDATES and CLARIFICATION FOR WRITING CHILD AND FAMILY IFSP OUTCOMES

Number of Outcomes:

The number of outcomes depends on the family’s current concerns and priorities. Consider writing a handful of outcomes to address these initial concerns and then updating goals as the child and family make progress. Fewer outcomes in the beginning may feel less overwhelming and help families to recognize their progress and successes more readily.

Writing Child and Family Outcomes:

In the past, we used a “formula” described in the *Steps to Building a Child and Family Outcome* to assist in outcome writing. While this is still an appropriate and acceptable way of writing outcomes, we have expanded our guidance to also include a more simplified strategy highlighted in the examples above.