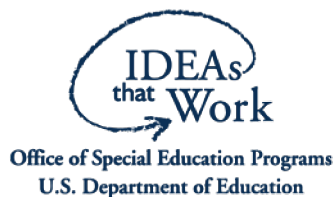# Age Anchoring Guidance for Determining Child Outcomes Summary (COS) Ratings

Guidance for EI/ECSE Practitioners and Trainers

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IDEAs that Work
Office of Special Education Programs
U.S. Department of Education

Contents

Introduction

Rationale

Early intervention (EI) and early childhood special education (ECSE) practitioners participating in the Child Outcomes Summary (COS) process must understand age-expected development, the ages at which children typically acquire different skills. The COS process requires an understanding of the timing and sequences of development that enable children to have positive social relationships (Outcome 1), acquire and use knowledge and skills (Outcome 2), and take action to meet their needs (Outcome 3). When determining COS ratings, COS team members need to consider the child's functioning relative to what is expected for his or her chronological age. This is referred to as *age anchoring*.

Purpose and Audience

This resource provides answers to commonly asked questions about age anchoring as it applies to the COS process. It is designed as a reference for practitioners, as well as supervisors, coaches, and professional development staffs. It offers guidance on how to accurately age anchor a child's functional skills and explanations of how that guidance applies to COS teams. Using the guidance will help practitioners age anchor for the COS in a time-efficient manner while also gathering the rich information needed to complete a high-quality process.

Use

Practitioners can use this resource to seek answers to questions about age anchoring for the COS process. Supervisors, coaches, and professional development staff members can use it in discussions about specific aspects of age anchoring to promote consistent, time-efficient implementation of a quality COS process across team members.

Although this resource provides examples of developmental progressions, COS team members will need to obtain more detailed information on child development from age anchoring resources, keeping in mind that some states and programs require or recommend specific tools whereas others do not (see http://ectacenter.org/eco/pages/childdevelopment.asp).

Practitioners who use this resource should have first completed the DaSy/ECTA Child Outcomes Summary (COS) Process Online Module and/or other state or local COS training, as applicable.
- A national online module is available at http://ectacenter.org/eco/pages/cos.asp#COSProcessModule
- More training activities are available at http://ectacenter.org/eco/pages/cospd.asp
- Additionally, a collection of targeted PD activities on age anchoring is available at http://ectacenter.org/eco/pages/training_activities.asp

Age Anchoring Basics

1 - What is age anchoring?

Age anchoring is the process of examining a child's functional abilities skills and behaviors and determining how close that functioning is to the functioning expected for the child's chronological age. It is important to focus on functional abilities rather than isolated (or discrete) skills that a child may have demonstrated only during assessment. Functional skills refer to

> ➢ abilities that are meaningful to the child in the context of everyday living; and
> ➢ integrated series of behaviors or skills that allow the child to achieve everyday goals.

Typical development in all three outcome areas follows a predictable trajectory, most children acquiring skills gradually and sequentially. These are known as developmental progressions, and we know about them from years of research involving extensive observations of children (e.g., the work of Piaget and Vygotsky). Age anchoring requires COS teams to consider developmental progressions when making determinations about how close or how far a child is functioning relative to age expectations for each of the three outcomes. Age anchoring is an important part of a high-quality COS process and is necessary for determining COS ratings.

APPLIED IN PRACTICE
Liza (6 months)

Liza's COS team discusses the following observation:
Liza participates in playtime on the family's living room floor by sitting up independently and reaching out with her hands to explore toys within reach, such as grabbing the bell-filled rings from the stacker and banging them several times on the floor to activate the sound.

We know that some of the functional skills and behaviors shown by children at 6 months of age who are developing typically include
- ✓ Sitting independently
- ✓ Reaching with one arm to get items
- ✓ Picking up objects within arm's reach and in their visual field
- ✓ Exploring by banging

Knowing the details about how Liza plays, we can determine where her skills fall on the developmental progression and if those skills are expected of her age, come in just before age-expected, or are skills that come in much earlier. When considering Liza's functioning relative to age expectations for a 6-month-old child, we find that she is demonstrating functional skills like those of her same-age peers. The team will need to know more about Liza's functioning to determine COS ratings, but this is an important start and is a brief example of aligning a child's functioning with age expectations.

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2 - Why is age anchoring important?

Age anchoring provides the COS team with concrete examples of the child's functioning relative to age expectations to use in the discussion and documentation of COS ratings. The team's discussion is best guided by the Decision Tree for Summary Rating Discussions, which includes such questions as: *Does the child ever function in ways that would be considered age-expected with regard to this outcome?*

The team uses answers to the decision tree questions and related examples of the child's functioning to determine COS ratings. Examples from the discussion on age anchoring are documented in writing to substantiate the accuracy of the COS ratings. Documentation stands as a record of the team members' decision-making and shows whether they accurately applied the COS rating scale criteria.

APPLIED IN PRACTICE
Michaela (25 months)

Michaela's team starts discussing her functioning in the area of acquiring and using knowledge and skills (Outcome 2) by answering the first question on the decision tree: Does Michaela ever function in ways that would be considered age-expected with regard to this outcome?

The team members were quickly able to answer that, yes, Michaela does function in a variety of ways that are considered age-expected. They went on to describe and document specific examples, such as:
- ✓ Michaela recognizes several different objects by pointing to them when asked (e.g., Where's your cup, blanket, shoes, car, teddy…?)
- ✓ She listens to short stories for approximately 3 minutes, jabbering along with an adult reading the book.
- ✓ She points to pictures of named objects in books (e.g., dog, baby, cat, flower, car…).

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3 - What do the categories age-expected (AE), immediate foundational (IF), and foundational (F) mean?

The categories *age-expected*, *immediate foundational*, and *foundational* are helpful descriptors for summarizing a child's abilities relative to age-expected developmental progressions for each of the three child outcomes as part of the COS process.

Early childhood development progresses through several levels, with skills and behaviors becoming more complex and proficiency increasing as children get older. All skills that lead to higher levels of functioning are important. The set of skills and behaviors expected for the child's chronological age are called age-expected (AE) skills. The skills that occur developmentally just before age-expected functioning are described as immediate foundational (IF), and the skills that are developmentally much earlier or farther from age-expected on the developmental progression are foundational (F). Think of it like a staircase.

Consider the categories in this way: Some of the abilities and behaviors that develop early are the foundation for later skills and behaviors. In most cases, later skills build on earlier skills in predictable ways. For example, children typically roll over, sit, crawl, stand independently, and cruise before they walk.

APPLIED IN PRACTICE
Randall (36 months)

Using the developmental progression for pretend play abilities, consider 3-year-old Randall. If Randall were demonstrating pretend play abilities like those of a typically developing 36-month-old child, the skills would be considered AE (age-expected). For example, acting out long play sequences and giving stuffed toys/animals a voice while playing doctor. However, if Randall were demonstrating skills that come in just before 36 months, those skills would be considered IF (immediate foundational) on the developmental progression of pretend play because they are skills demonstrated just before what is expected for his age. For example, if Randall were sequencing only a couple play actions when playing with the doctor kit.

If Randall were demonstrating pretend play abilities like those of a much younger child, those skills would be F (foundational) because they are like those of a very much younger child and are earlier on the developmental progression of pretend play skills. For example, if Randall were performing only one pretend action and was only performing the action on himself or extending it to an adult. Foundational abilities are important steps in the developmental progression, but have to be built on to reach IF or AE functioning.

4 - How much of the child's skills and behaviors need to be age anchored?

The COS team does not need to age anchor every observed skill and behavior of a child. Rather, the team should age anchor the functional skills that are most pertinent to the child's participation in meaningful activities. The team should have enough examples of the child's functioning to support answers at each point on the Decision Tree for Summary Ratings for each of the three outcomes.

Functional information about a child's abilities can come from many sources - from observation of the child doing things he or she typically does; from parents, caregivers, or others who know and spend time with the child; and from viewing videos or pictures of the child in everyday activities. These forms of authentic assessment provide indications of the child's functional abilities.

APPLIED IN PRACTICE
Ingrid (30 months)

Ingrid's team notes that she engages in pretend play by
- ✓ bringing a toy baby bottle to her mouth,
- ✓ putting a phone to her ear, and
- ✓ putting a toy spoon in her mouth.

The team members discuss how her pretend play mostly involves her and props (toys), but it does not include actions on dolls or other figures. They also observe that Ingrid's actions are single one-step actions (e.g., pretend to drink, pretend to stir, and pretend to eat from spoon) and that this is consistent both at home and at day care. They anchor these as foundational (F) abilities; knowing that this is how she typically plays across settings, they do not need to age anchor every play observation made.

This discussion provides the team with several concrete examples of how Ingrid engages in pretend play, but she could also play in other ways (e.g., pretending to wash her tummy with rag). If the team had simply mentioned that Ingrid "engages in pretend play," they would not have had enough detail to effectively age anchor her functioning related to pretend play.

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5 - Who age anchors the child's skills and behaviors?

The process of age anchoring skills and behaviors should be done by the EI or ECSE practitioners on the COS team and any other individuals who bring knowledge of typical child development to the discussion. The discussion about the child's functioning relative to what is expected for his or her chronological age should optimally involve all team members to ensure proper consideration of the child's full range of functioning across settings and situations. Involving all team members, especially family members, promotes a shared understanding of the child's functioning relative to same-age peers.

APPLIED IN PRACTICE
Pascal (42 months)

During each meeting with the family, the practitioners collected information about Pascal's functioning through observation and talking with his parents. Using that information, the practitioners documented examples of Pascal's functioning for each of the three child outcomes.

The team examined what was expected for a 42-month-old child and used developmental checklists and other resources on typical development to work through the age anchoring process. They identified and discussed which of Pascal's abilities were age-expected, which were skills that typically come in just before age-expected (immediate foundational), and which were much earlier than age-expected (foundational). As they worked through the COS rating process, they used this information and discussed it with the family as they reviewed the Decision Tree for Summary Ratings to generate COS ratings.

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6 - When should age anchoring occur?

Ideally, the COS team has multiple contacts with a child and family to collect reliable and authentic information about the child's functioning before working through the COS process. Practitioners can begin age anchoring a child's functioning upon their earliest contacts with a family. Age anchoring will most likely occur over time in conjunction with routine encounters with the child and family as the team gathers information about the child's functioning in his or her everyday routines and activities and then considers those abilities relative to age expectations.

In some cases, the number of contacts with the child and family before the COS rating process is minimal. When this happens, teams must be even more diligent about considering all authentic assessment opportunities, including child observations and gathering information from parents and caregivers who know the child well.

It is important for a team to gather adequate detailed information about the child's functioning to effectively age anchor skills and behaviors that inform high-quality COS ratings. When this is not possible, it is important that the time with the child and family incorporate authentic assessment, including gathering information from the family about the child's functioning in day- to-day routines.

APPLIED IN PRACTICE
Kian (22 months)

Kian was referred to the early intervention program because his parents raised concerns about his gross motor development. During the initial intake visit, the service coordinator took time to observe Kian and talked with his parents to learn more about what Kian typically does. The service coordinator shared the notes she took with the assessment team members, and they identified skills that were like those of a much younger child. For example, Kian had just begun crawling on his hands and knees, and at 22 months walking independently would be age-expected. During the transdisciplinary assessment at the family's home, the physical therapist took the opportunity to share with Kian's parents her observations using age anchoring, saying:

> *It is nice to see him crawling on his hands and knees to you when you encourage him. This will be important to build upon to eventually help him walk. At this time, crawling is a foundational skill for his age, a skill typical of a younger child.*

Kian's team of early interventionists continued to document examples of his functional skills through authentic assessment. After determining that Kian was eligible to receive early intervention services, they revisited these examples as they worked through the COS process, drawing attention to the things that Kian is doing relative to what is expected for his age.

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7 - When is a skill or behavior categorized as immediate foundational rather than foundational?

The distinction between immediate foundational (IF) and foundational (F) is grounded in the review of the developmental progression of abilities. *There is no mathematical formula*. Developmental skills just before the child's chronological age are considered IF abilities, and developmental steps before that are F abilities.

When age anchoring, it is important to start with good descriptions of what the child is doing and a good understanding of what is expected for the child's chronological age. From there, consider the developmental progression of that skill to determine how close or far the child's functioning is to age-expected.

APPLIED IN PRACTICE
Aiden (12 months)

When playing with his parents, Aiden imitates sounds that are in his repertoire, such as a vowel sounds /ah/ and /oo/. He also squeals with varied pitch and volume. He's not yet imitating novel sounds or making consonant sounds like /d/, /b/, or /m/.

At 12 months of age, children make many consonant-vowel sounds and are starting to use single words with meaning, such as mama and dada. Knowing this, we look at how Aiden is making and imitating sounds and identify that he is not using age-expected skills. IF abilities would be making a variety of consonant sounds (such as /d/, /b/, /m/), babbling, and imitating more novel sounds. Aiden is not yet demonstrating these IF skills; rather, what he is doing represents abilities at a younger, more foundational level in the developmental progression of imitation and making sounds as part of language acquisition. Using the illustration below we see Aiden's abilities in this area as foundational.

an ability that emerges well before the child's chronological age **F**

This is what Aiden is doing

an ability that comes in before the ability prior to age expected **F**

an important ability that comes in just before child's age **IF**

the functional ability expected at the child's chronological age **AE**

an ability beyond what is age expected
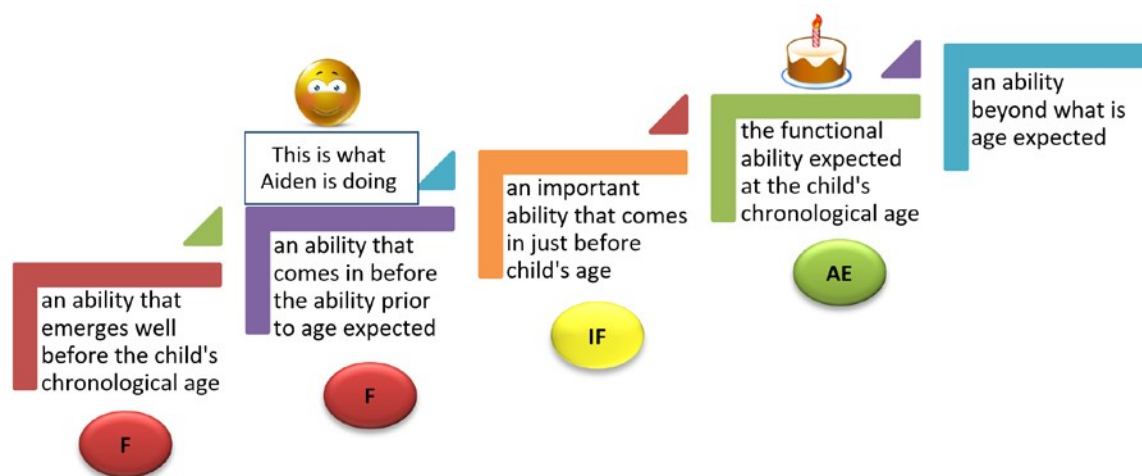
8 - How are developmental progressions used in age anchoring?

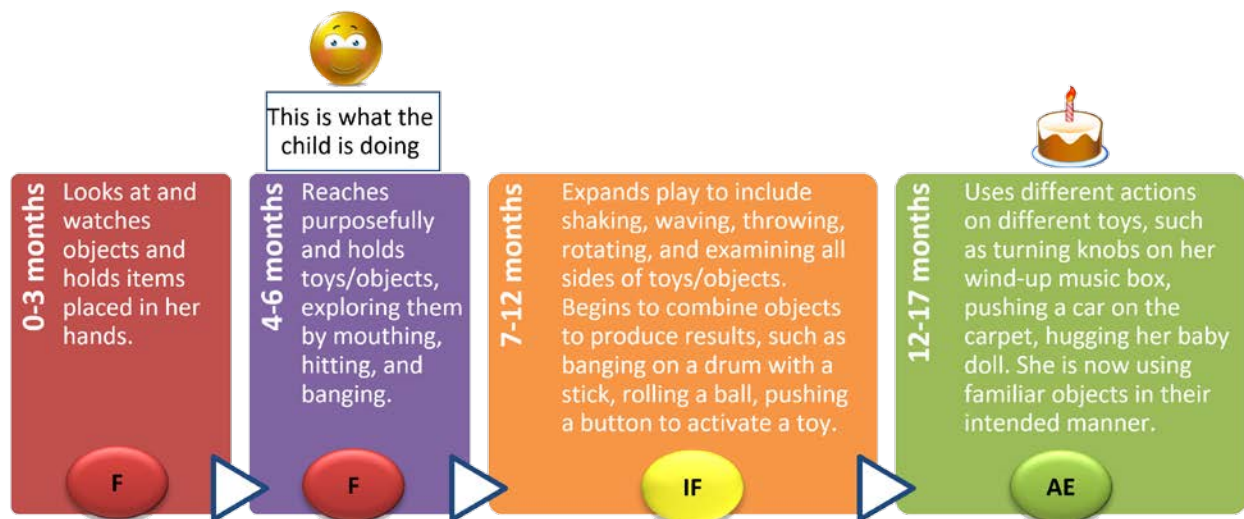Understanding and using developmental progressions is essential to age anchoring. Included in each of the three outcomes are a myriad of functional skills that can be thought of as developmental progressions. Considering developmental progressions helps teams understand how close or how far a child is to age expectations. By establishing what the child is doing on a continuum of development, the team has a better understanding of the developmental abilities that come before what the child is doing and what typically develops after what the child is currently doing.

APPLIED IN PRACTICE
Dorthea (15 months)

Dorthea explores objects and toys at home, and at her day care she mostly bangs and mouths them. Considering the developmental progression of play and exploring objects, we have a better understanding of what is expected for her age and how close or far Dorthea is on this developmental progression.

This is what the child is doing

0-3 months	4-6 months	7-12 months	12-17 months
Looks at and watches objects and holds items placed in her hands.	Reaches purposefully and holds toys/objects, exploring them by mouthing, hitting, and banging.	Expands play to include shaking, waving, throwing, rotating, and examining all sides of toys/objects. Begins to combine objects to produce results, such as banging on a drum with a stick, rolling a ball, pushing a button to activate a toy.	Uses different actions on different toys, such as turning knobs on her wind-up music box, pushing a car on the carpet, hugging her baby doll. She is now using familiar objects in their intended manner.
F	F	IF	AE

9 - What is the thinking process for age anchoring?

Age anchoring is a thinking and discussion process. It starts with clear examples of the child's functioning and a good understanding of the functioning expected for the child's chronological age.

By first reviewing age-expected functioning, teams have a clear benchmark for measuring how close or how far a child is to age-expected development. From there, teams review details about the child's functioning and determine how close to or how far from age expectations the child's skills are. Is the child demonstrating abilities expected for his or her age (age-expected), is the child showing functions that come in just before age expectations (immediate foundational), and/or is the child demonstrating functional abilities of a much younger child (foundational)? Age anchoring involves practitioners working through this illustrated thinking process while considering the child's functioning.
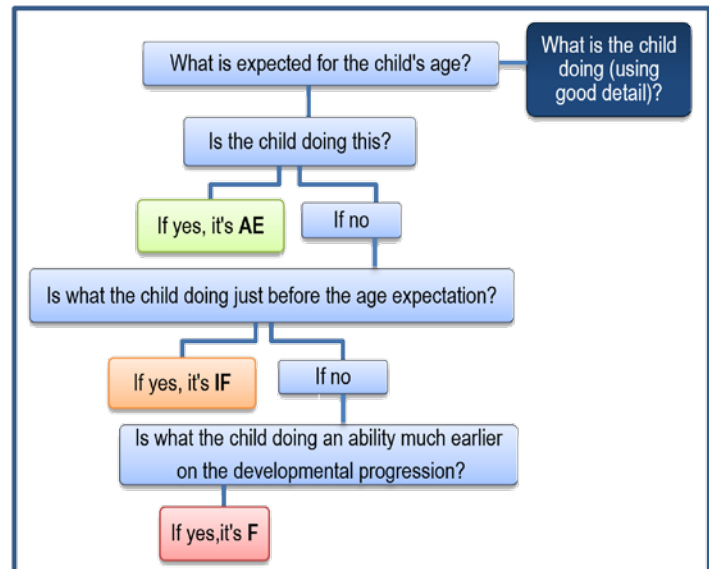
APPLIED IN PRACTICE
Zola (18 months)

Age Anchoring Tools

10 - What tools can a team use to age anchor functioning?

EI and ECSE practitioners know a great deal about child development, but it is difficult for any practitioner to remember the detailed developmental progression or age range for every set of functional abilities. Practitioners can, however, use resources such as developmental checklists, criterion-referenced instruments, and any state- or program-required or -recommended tools and resources, in addition to their expertise and the expertise of their colleagues.

APPLIED IN PRACTICE

Below is a list of questions that can help teams evaluate possible age anchoring tools. Good age anchoring tools would have a *yes* response to each of the following five questions.

Does the tool include sufficient density of items to illustrate developmental progressions or are there large leaps between different developmental skills?	Yes	No
Does the tool include the age-anchored items for skills at the child's chronological age as well as several items below to sufficiently capture AE, IF, and F skills?	Yes	No
Are actual ages included for the included items? *NOTE: "Basal" (starting points) in norm-referenced tools do not represent the age expectation for that skill or set of skills.*	Yes	No
Does the tool include age-anchored items of typically developing children of a culture similar to that of the child being age anchored? *NOTE: Some tools are for specific populations (e.g., children with Down syndrome, children with visual or hearing impairments).*	Yes	No
Are the items and ages included in the tool based on functional application, or are they based on specifically structured performance? *NOTE: We cannot accurately infer that a skill elicited in a highly standardized manner is also used spontaneously in a functional manner.*	Yes	No

Almost no age anchoring instruments were created with the COS process in mind. To address this, ECTA crosswalked numerous tools to show the alignment of different skills with the three outcome areas. Your understanding of the breadth and depth of the three outcome areas will be vital for appropriately using these tools for age anchoring in the COS process.

Resources: See ECTA's crosswalks at http://ectacenter.org/eco/pages/crosswalks.asp and age anchoring resources at http://ectacenter.org/eco/pages/childdevelopment.asp

11 - What if tools give different age expectations for similar skills?

On occasion, you may find that different tools provide different age expectations for the same or similar skills. Although this can be frustrating, the authors of these assessments may have used different bodies of research to specify the age ranges for different skills or may group the skills into smaller or larger age bands. Sometimes the differences in ages may be related to the quality, frequency, or specified use of the skill. Although consulting the manual for a tool is often helpful, sometimes manuals do not include this information. When this happens, look at the skills before and after to help determine if the developmental steps are too broad or too narrow for what you are trying to age anchor. If questions continue, carefully review what the child is doing, integrate your professional knowledge with the family's input, consider another resource, and come to consensus on the best age anchor.

APPLIED IN PRACTICE
Kaitlyn (42 months)

Kaitlin is often found in the block center building towers alongside other children, but her interaction with them is limited to rarely accepting an offered toy or taking one from another child. She plays in a group but typically does her own thing.

Let's say we want to age anchor how Kaitlyn interacts with her peers during play as part of our COS rating for Outcome 1. When reviewing age anchoring tools, we see that one tool separates the social aspect of play into three categories:

isolated (birth - 2½ years)	parallel (2½ - 3½ years)	group play (3½ years & up)

Based on the tool definitions, Kaitlyn's play fits between parallel and group play. Since she is not yet meeting all the expectations of group play, we'd say she has the skills just before what is age-expected (IF).

Yet another tool includes the following more incremental steps in the progression:

Unoccupied (0 - 2 yrs.)	Solitary (2 - 3 yrs.)	Onlooker (2½ - 3 yrs.)	Parallel (2½ - 3½ yrs.)	Associative (3 - 4 yrs.)	Cooperative (4 - 6 and up)

Using these age expectations, we'd expect Kaitlin to participate in parallel and associative play with peers. Yet Kaitlin's limited attention to peers during play puts her at the solitary level, which is further down the developmental progression at a foundational (F) level.

This example illustrates the challenge with age anchoring tools and highlights the need for good detail about the child's functioning and careful attention to developmental progressions to identify the appropriate age anchor. The proximity of Kaitlin to her peers is one component of the social aspect of play, how she responds to them is another. Kaitlin doesn't initiate social interaction with the other children by looking at or speaking to them during playtime. Additionally, if another child messes up her blocks, she makes a high-pitched scream and pushes the other child away. This additional detail adds to the full picture of Kaitlin's social interactions during play and supports a foundational anchor for her social play with peers.

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12 - What if an age anchoring tool does not address the skills the team is trying to anchor?

Not all developmental checklists and resources include the precise functional skills you see when observing a child in his or her natural setting doing typical activities. Perhaps the child does not typically engage in a routine that elicits the specific skills on the age anchoring tool, or perhaps the age anchoring tool does not include a skill you have observed. This can create a challenge in trying to age anchor skills during the COS process.

When you are age anchoring behaviors using resources and tools, look for skills and behaviors that are *similar* to what you observed and remember that most of the time they will not be exact. By focusing on the underlying skills that are necessary to complete different tasks, you can often find an overlap between what you have observed and what is available in your age anchoring tool.

APPLIED IN PRACTICE
Benji (37 months)

The team members observed Benji during circle time at the day care center as the group was doing the "Itsy Bitsy Spider." During the observation, they noted that Benji followed along and did some but not all of the actions.

Partial completion of the "Itsy Bitsy Spider" is unlikely to be on an age anchoring tool, so how do you age anchor this skill?

By focusing on the underlying abilities that are necessary for the child to engage in the activity, you can find resources that will help you determine how close or far the child is to age-expected functioning. In the Itsy Bitsy example, you will likely find age-anchored items for when children are expected to join and participate in circle time, follow adult instructions, imitate actions, anticipate next steps in familiar songs/actions/finger plays, and other skills that are necessary for participating in this activity. You can use this information to age anchor Benji's engagement in circle time activities.

Special Circumstances

13 - How are a family's cultural expectations taken into consideration when age anchoring?

As cultural diversity increases in the United States, it becomes ever more important to recognize how a family's culture impacts child-rearing practices and developmental expectations. It is also important to consider the different settings and circumstances the child participates in when determining whether expectations are being met.

While age anchoring involves considering the child's age and abilities, cultural expectations for the child may not align with typical or mainstream developmental trajectories and age expectations. For example, potty training or independence with dressing or eating may be expected considerably earlier or later for some families depending on their cultural norms. Thus, it is important to consider the child's abilities relative to the family's culture. It is essential to gain a thorough understanding of a family's cultural expectations before determining if the child's functioning is within or outside the family's cultural norms. Equally important is considering other settings where the child spends time, what the expectations are in those settings, and how the child functions relative to those expectations.

APPLIED IN PRACTICE
Tania (16 months)

Tania's family does not provide her with opportunities to self-feed because this is not expected in their culture until a child is closer to 2 years of age. Knowing this, being fed at 16 months would **not** be considered a foundational skill for Tania. Rather, it is what the family expects of Tania and is considered age-expected within the family culture. However, Tania also attends the local child care center, and in that setting it is expected that children 16 months of age feed themselves. Because Tania is not yet self-feeding, but rather waits to be fed, this would be considered an earlier (not age-expected) ability for her in the child care setting.

It is important for the team to use the Decision Tree for Summary Ratings to identify the appropriate rating.
1. Does the child ever function in ways that would be considered age-expected with regard to this outcome? Yes, her feeding skills at home are within the context of the family's culture.
2. Does the child function in ways that would be considered age-expected **across all or almost all** settings and situations? No, because Tania is not demonstrating age-expected feeding skills in her child care setting.
3. To what extent does the child function in ways that are age-expected across settings and situations? The team would discuss an answer to this question and consider other skills included with the outcome before arriving at a COS rating.

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14 - How are splinter (or scattered) skills and atypical functioning addressed when age anchoring?

When considering splinter skills (also referred to as scattered), it is important to determine if they are functional. A splinter skill is the ability to do something that does not generalize to other tasks or activities. An example is the ability to recite number words in order but not understand that they are used for counting objects. Similarly, if a skill is atypical for the child's chronological age or if it is performed in an atypical or repetitive manner, then it is not functional and is not age anchored using the AE, IF, or F categorization. Rather, it is regarded as atypical and considered in light of the child's overall functioning relative to each of the three outcomes.

Teams should consider if or how splinter and atypical skills impact the child's participation in day-to-day routines and activities.

APPLIED IN PRACTICE
JoJo (26 months)

JoJo is able to name all the letters in the alphabet. To assess the functionality of this skill, teams consider the following questions:

1. Is it a skill expected for the child's age?
2. Is the skill necessary for children of this age to function successfully in day-to-day routines and activities?
3. Does the child use the skill functionally to participate in day-to-day routines and activities?
4. Does the child demonstrate the important and functional abilities leading up to the skill?

Let's answer these questions to understand if letter naming is a functional skill for JoJo:

1. **No**. At 26 months, children are typically naming some pictures. They may know a familiar sign, such as Stop, but only because they associate stop with the color and shape of the sign not because they are reading the word or naming the letters.
2. **No**. Naming letters is not necessary for a 26-month-old child to participate in typical day-to-day routines and activities.
3. **No**. JoJo names letters in a repetitive manner that interferes with his ability to participate in other activities, such as watching TV or looking at books with his family. When watching TV or looking at books, JoJo fixates on the letters, naming them over and over, rather than looking at or commenting on the pictures or actions.
4. **No**. JoJo is not yet identifying pictures or naming objects.
    Considering the no responses to these four questions and the additional detail about how JoJo names letters, clearly this is not a functional ability for him.

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15 - How are significant negative (or interfering) behaviors addressed when age anchoring?

Some undesirable behaviors are a natural part of development, such as an increase in tantrums as toddlers test their autonomy. Teams need to consider the developmental appropriateness of such behaviors during the COS process, but they should not dwell on trying to age anchor them. Instead, the focus should be less on age anchoring and more on determining if or how these behaviors impact the child's ability to function in a positive manner. If the behavior is impacting the child's ability to perform particular skills, then those skills may not be used as expected for the child's age across settings and situations.

APPLIED IN PRACTICE
Aris (20 months)

Aris's favored toys are cars. He plays with them most days and pretends to drive them up his toy garage and push buttons on the garage to move the ramps around. Yet when the buttons do not work or the cars do not go down as he planned, he becomes upset and throws the cars and kicks the garage. His parents report that he does this with other things as well when he cannot make them work as quickly as he would like. This behavior generally happens a few times a week when he plays with his garage.

As the team members considered Aris's play and functional use of toys, they shared excitement about how he can figure out the many detailed parts of his toy garage and other toys. However, they could not confidently say that Aris demonstrates age-expected play with his cars because of the extreme behaviors (throwing and kicking) that he consistently demonstrates when frustrated. Although some aspects of his play are age-expected, he is not demonstrating that ability across opportunities because the extreme behavior interferes with his play. The team acknowledged Aris's periodic age-expected ability but also used it as an example when working through the Decision Tree for Summary Ratings, noting that it does not occur regularly or across varied opportunities.

This example illustrates that while extreme behaviors are not age anchored, they are considered when reviewing a child's abilities across outcomes.

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16 - What about skills that come in earlier and do not change much as children get older?

Many developmental skills and functional abilities are replaced by newer, higher level functioning; for example, crawling is replaced with walking, drinking from a bottle is replaced with drinking from a cup, and using single words to request something is replaced with two- and three-word requests. On the other hand, some functional skills emerge early and may become more polished over time but are not replaced by a new skill. Examples are making eye contact, walking, and eating with a spoon. For these types of skills, the team should focus on how the child is using them in a functional way and incorporating them into the more complex routines and activities expected for his or her age.

Teams need to consider many different skills and behaviors when age anchoring, and they should not get too caught up in insubstantial detail or discrete aspects of a skill, such as the exact measurement of a child's range of motion. Teams are cautioned when doing this because the functionality of the skill can be forgotten.

> **APPLIED IN PRACTICE**
> *Amber (48 months)*
>
> Amber's team members found themselves engaging in a lengthy conversation about eye contact and debating whether Amber was making eye contact as expected for her age. Their conversation included a discussion about how far Amber could see and the difference in the visual acuity of infants and preschoolers. After some further deliberation, the team realized it had lost the focus on functionality and how Amber socially engages with others and makes eye contact when called by her name. When considering skills that come in early and remain, be certain to consider how the child uses them functionally.

17 - What if the team cannot agree?

On occasion, teams cannot reach an agreement. Before debating further, the team should first be certain that it has enough rich descriptive examples of the child's functioning. Without them, teams can have difficulty developing a shared understanding of the child's functioning essential for age anchoring. If the team does have the necessary descriptive detail of the child's functioning and still is at odds, it is important to review the age anchoring tools or resources being used. The practitioners may need to refer to an additional tool or seek further input from other team members.

Teams should also consider the significance of the skill or behavior they are discussing. Perhaps it is not a functionally significant skill, or perhaps they have enough other detail about the child's functioning that it is not necessary to consider the skill in question. There is no easy or always- right answer, beyond engaging in further discussion, referencing additional resources, and considering all the information at hand.

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APPLIED IN PRACTICE
Abdul (52 months)

The team got stuck on determining Abdul's initial COS ratings for Outcome 3 (taking actions to meet needs). One member felt strongly that Abdul's ability to move around was not age-expected because he was not yet able to jump over the test object, balance on one foot, or swing on the swing. One of Abdul's legs is shorter than the other, so balance activities are difficult for him. During the evaluation, he did not get full credit for these items. Another team member felt Abdul was moving about in an age-expected way. She shared her observation of Abdul on the playground, noting that he ran well and quickly and changed his direction, stopping and starting several times, as he chased another child. He did so with a limp, but he was able to do it. She also said that he navigated the obstacle course by climbing through the long tube, stepping up and jumping off the step, and walking five steps on the balance beam, keeping up with the rest of the children in his class.

While these team members had great input, a third member reminded the team to keep focused on Abdul's functionality and not to get distracted by his disability. They paused and considered Abdul's functional abilities, noting that although he missed some test items, he is able to move around functionally like other children his age. Team members had also reviewed his preschool's curriculum and noted that Abdul is demonstrating age-expected abilities for moving about from place to place at school, using this information to move forward and document a variety of age-expected skills for him for Outcome 3.

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Checklist on Age Anchoring for the COS Process

Use this checklist to guide the team's discussion about the child's skills and functioning.

AGE ANCHORING PROCESS			
	Yes	*Partly*	*No*
Do we have a good detailed example of the child's skill we are age anchoring?			
Do we have a clear understanding of the child's functional use of the skill?			
Do we have a clear understanding of the context in which the skill is used?			
Do we know the outcome area to which we are aligning this skill?			
If no *or* partly*, gather more information before you attempt age anchoring this skill or behavior.*			
Do we have a good understanding of what is age-expected regarding this skill?			
Do we have clear detail about the nuances of this age-expected skill?			
Have we looked at resources and/or consulted with colleagues as needed?			
If no *or* partly*, consult necessary resources to understand the age-expected skill or behavior.*			
Do we understand the developmental progression of important related skills and behaviors leading up to the age-expected skill?			
Do we have an understanding of the necessary incremental steps and detail of the progression?			
Can we specify the immediate foundational (IF) skills that come in just before the age-expected skill?			
Can we specify the foundational skills that come in before the IF skills and even earlier on the developmental progression?			
If no *or* partly*, consult resources to understand developmental progression of this skill or behavior.*			

AGE ANCHORING TOOL SELECTION			
	Yes	*Partly*	*No*
Does the tool include sufficient density of items to illustrate developmental progressions, or are there large leaps between different developmental skills?			
Does the tool include the age-anchored items for skills at the child's chronological age as well as several items below to sufficiently capture AE, IF, and F skills?			
Are actual ages included for the included items? *NOTE: "Basal" (starting points) in norm-referenced tools do not represent the age expectation for that skill or set of skills.*			
Does the tool include age-anchored items of typically developing children of a culture similar to that of the child being age anchored? *NOTE: Some tools are for specific populations (e.g., children with Down syndrome, children with visual or hearing impairments).*			
Are the items and ages included in the tool based on functional application, or are they based on specifically structured performance? *NOTE: We cannot accurately infer that a skill elicited in a highly standardized manner is also used spontaneously in a functional manner.*			