



# Guidance for Writing IFSP Outcomes for Social-Emotional Learning

Writing functional and contextual outcomes when social-emotional learning is the parent priority can be challenging. IFSP outcomes are most commonly written as **child learning outcomes**, focusing on activities the parent would like the child to participate in and behaviors the parent would like the child to use in those activities. Outcomes can also be written as **parent support outcomes**, focusing on items the parent wants to learn more about or wishes to become more confident in. Both types of outcomes play an important role in supporting a child's development within the family's everyday routines.

**Child-learning outcomes** are written to focus on child participation in daily routines and support functional behaviors across developmental domains.

**When writing child-learning outcomes, consider the following guidelines.**

Outcomes should be:

- Necessary and functional for the child and family's life (Lucas et al., 2014; Shelden & Rush, 2009).
- Situated in a real-life contextualized setting for the child (Lucas et al., 2014).
- Discipline free and allow for the integration of developmental domains (Lucas et al., 2014; Shelden & Rush, 2009).
- Clear, simple, and free from professional jargon (Lucas et al., 2014; Shelden & Rush, 2009).
- Emphasizing what the child will do rather than what the child won't do (Lucas et al., 2014).
- Active, rather than passive, and include the behavior or role the child will have (Lucas et al., 2014).
- Measured in a way that is meaningful to the family using criteria the family considers appropriate (Shelden & Rush, 2009).
- Timebound by real-life benchmarks or events meaningful to the family (Shelden & Rush, 2009).

The following are examples of child learning outcomes that focus on social-emotional learning within a meaningful family activity and are integrated across domains of learning:

- *Jackson will take turns and share when he plays cars with his brother.*
- *Kai will gesture "help" or point when playing with his siblings.*
- *Noah will approach other children and play with them at the playground.*
- *During playtime on the floor, Mila will look toward her caregiver and respond with coos or smiles when engaged.*
- *During naptime, Zane will begin to calm when he is held, rocked, or sung to, by a familiar caregiver.*
- *Aria will happily play with her toys in the bathtub.*
- *Jaxon will join in a game with his siblings by sitting down and requesting a turn.*
- *Olivia will transition from outside to inside when she hears the clean-up song.*
- *Luna will tell her caregiver which foods she wants on her tray during lunch and dinner time.*
- *Leona will hand her cup and her plate to her dad when she is done eating.*
- *Ezra will help clean up his own toys when his mom tells him to.*
- *James will wait his turn when coming down the slide.*
- *Isla will calm herself at naptime using her stuffed animal and blanket.*

**Parent-support outcomes** focus on helping caregivers gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence to support their child's learning and development. These outcomes might include things like learning how to respond to a child's cues, using strategies to support communication during routines, or feeling more confident managing tense interactions. The goal for this type of outcome is to empower parents with confidence and skills to be their child's most effective teacher and advocate. In addition to supporting everyday interactions, parent outcomes can also focus on increasing understanding of the child's diagnosis, navigating school services, or accessing community resources.

**Parent-support outcomes:**

- Describe what the parent or caregiver will learn or do to feel more confident about supporting their child's development within everyday routines.
- Are grounded in the family's priorities.
- Enhance the caregiver's ability to promote the child's learning and engagement.
- Usually include the routine or context (e.g., mealtime, dressing, grocery store), the parent's action or learning (what they will practice, learn, or gain confidence in), and the purpose (how it helps the child participate, self-regulate, or communicate).
- Are expressed in clear, jargon-free language.

The following are examples of parent-support outcomes:

- *Emma's parents will notice and label her emotions during mealtime to help her understand and express how she feels.*
- *During transitions, Jackson's caregiver will model calming strategies (like deep breaths or gentle touch) to support his ability to manage frustration and transitions.*
- *Ava's parents will practice using consistent language and tone while at the playgrounds to help her feel safe, connected, and emotionally secure.*
- *Noah's mom will use positive attention and encouragement when he waits, shares, or follows directions.*
- *Maya's parents will read her cues and put words to them.*
- *During the morning routine, Harper's parent will slow down and take deep breaths to stay calm and patient.*

Together, parent support and child learning outcomes ensure that both the child and the family are supported in ways that fit naturally into everyday life and routines. By listening to a parent's priorities, a practitioner can support caregivers with writing parent support and child learning outcomes to meet their family's needs.

## Vignette Illustrating the Determination of Social-Emotional Outcomes

Below is a vignette illustrating how a practitioner might help a family develop social-emotional learning outcomes that focus on the important routines in which the family wants the child to demonstrate desired behaviors.

**Practitioner:** You mentioned you wanted help with Susan's behavior. Tell me about the behavior and what concerns you have?

**Parent:** Susan throws lots of tantrums; I can't get her to listen to me when I tell her to do something. She cries and screams over everything and it's annoying because I can't do anything with her.

**Practitioner:** When was the last time she did that?

**Parent:** Last night at bath time. She loves to take a bath every night, but it is frustrating because when it is time to get out she pitches a huge fit. She screams and cries and refuses to get out of the tub for me. I end up having to pick her up and wrangle her to the bed and getting pajamas on is a fight. I don't know what I can do to make this transition easier for her.

**Practitioner:** That sounds like a struggle. If we were writing an outcome about what you want bathtime to look like, what would you describe?

**Parent:** I would like her to get out of the bathtub when I ask and let me get her pajamas on.

**Practitioner:** We can make that one of her outcomes, if you like. It's perfect just as you said it. We'll be successful when Susan gets out of the bathtub when asked and lets her mom put her pajamas on. How else would you like early intervention to help Susan and you?

**Parent:** I would like her to walk. She's getting too heavy for me to carry around.

**Practitioner:** Let's think about an activity she likes to do or that you would like her to do that would give her chances to practice walking. When would it be most helpful for her to walk?

**Parent:** Lots of time. Anytime we want to go somewhere or do anything, I break my back trying to bend over and lift her.

**Practitioner:** I think I get what you mean. It will be easier to get to that if we choose one place to start. Then, when she starts to get it, we can help her do it during all those important times. Walking takes a little time to encourage, so maybe we can think about an activity that happens several times a day that requires her to walk, and where you are not rushed and can help her practice.

**Parent:** Well, she can't get to me in the kitchen very well when I go in there to get her drink, make her snacks or lunch, and she always pitches a fit while I am in there.

**Practitioner:** So, it sounds like you might want her to walk with you to the kitchen to get her drinks and snacks.

**Parent:** Yes.

**Practitioner:** Let's think about what's achievable within the next six months. Right now, she can get into sitting and crawling position and gets on her knees at the edge of the table but not into standing position. She's not yet going anywhere in any of those positions but could start going somewhere in any of them within the next six months. She may crawl before she walks, or with her muscle tone, she may go right to walking and skip crawling. What do you think about the outcome focusing on her getting herself

to the kitchen when you prepare her drinks and snacks, and being open to it happening by crawling or walking?

**Parent:** I would be open to that. I think if she could get herself there by any means, we would see less tantrums when I leave the room.

**Practitioner:** I think you're right. When children have more independence and can do more things for themselves, they have fewer reasons to protest. What else do you think you would like support with?

**Parent:** I would like to learn more about her condition. Her doctor called it a microdeletion, and I don't really know what that is or how I am going to need to help her because of it. I know that it is responsible for some of her behaviors and communication delays, but I don't know if there are certain things I should be doing to help her learn better.

**Practitioner:** Early intervention can help with that too. Let me see if I am wording this right. It sounds like you are saying, "Susan's parents will learn about her microdeletion and what strategies are effective in helping her learn." Did I get that right?

**Parent:** Yes.

**Practitioner:** Both of those goals seem like they are very doable within the next six months. We will keep talking about them along the way to make sure we are on the right track, and you are seeing the progress you are expecting. What else do you want the program to help with?

## References

Lucas, A., Gillaspay, K., Peters, M. L., & Hurth, J. (2014). Enhancing recognition of high quality, functional IFSP outcomes. Retrieved from <https://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/pubs/rating-ifsp.pdf>

Shelden, M. L., & Rush, D. D. (2009). Tips and techniques for developing participation-based IFSP outcome statements. *BriefCASE*, 2(1) [https://fipp.ncdhhs.gov/wp-content/uploads/briefcase\\_vol2\\_no1.pdf](https://fipp.ncdhhs.gov/wp-content/uploads/briefcase_vol2_no1.pdf).