

# The Decision Tree

## Child Indicator Seeds for Success



### Functional Assessment is Not the Same Thing as Testing

Skills and behaviors that have functional applications should be the centerpiece of early intervention and coaching. Functional assessment is an essential element of evidenced based early intervention practice. Assessment should give a picture of the whole child, not just isolated skills and milestones. Functional assessment is ongoing and helps to expand both the parents' and providers' understanding of the child. In early childhood, assessment is not the same thing as testing. Assessment should engage us in a process of ongoing discovery. It should be viewed as a collaborative process of observation and analysis that involves formulating questions, gathering information, sharing observations, and making interpretations to form new questions.

### What Does Functional Assessment Look Like in Practice?

Functional assessment focuses on everyday, naturally occurring behaviors that are easily recognizable. In a functional approach, children do not have to score at a certain level or exhibit a certain type of behavior to achieve a certain acceptable score. Instead, we're trying to help parents and caregivers appreciate children's abilities in the first three years of life and think about how that relates to a whole range of other developmental behaviors.



Functional assessments focus on everyday, naturally occurring, practical behaviors and accomplishments that are:

- Easily recognized by parents and service providers,
- Central to the emergence of infant and toddler competence,
- Learned and assessed in context,
- Form the fabric of the relationships between infants and their primary caregivers, and
- Serve to elicit, support, and extend children's skills, abilities, and accomplishments.

Revisiting your joint plan each visit is one component of completing ongoing functional assessment. The provider who regularly seeks and shares information with families and listens appreciatively to each family's experiences, stories and comments is forging a relationship of equality with the family. This will empower families.

Functional assessment is ongoing and helps families and providers set goals. It enables families and providers to work together to recognize and document accomplishments and identify areas in need of further development. Functional assessment provides a vehicle for families and service providers to learn to observe the child and contribute to the evaluation of his or her growth.

Partnering with families to learn about children's development acknowledges that families have unique information to share and that their perspective is valued. When family members feel that they have something valuable to share with the provider, they are more likely to become involved in a meaningful way. If we can use assessment data to enhance the child's primary context- the family, then we will have engaged in something meaningful and something that will open the doors to lifelong learning.

*Formal tests or tools should not be the cornerstone of an assessment of an infant or young child.*  
(Greenspan & Meisels, 1996)