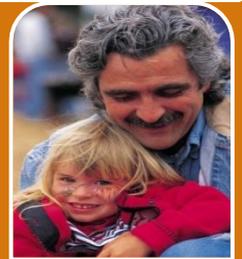




KIT

"Keeping In Touch"

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Resource Article



Evidence shows that families are generally satisfied with early intervention services. However, little research has been done to explore the *results* of early intervention services. In 2003, the Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO) Center was funded by the Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs to use a stakeholder consensus process to identify what is important in terms of family and child outcomes, which outcomes should be measured, and how to measure such outcomes. Family outcomes were defined as "benefits experienced by families as a result of services received" (p. 195) and analysis of the National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study (NEILS) data helped initially guide identification of the five outcomes that became recognized through the stakeholder process.

The KIT article this month "Measuring Family Outcomes Considerations for Large Scale Data Collection in Early Intervention" by Bailey and colleagues describes the extensive discussion, planning, and decision-making process involved in the development of the Family Outcomes Survey (FOS). Included below are some of the critical questions raised, researched, and resolved in design process.

1. What data collection mechanism will be used?

Options for consideration included direct observation, interview, and survey methods. The pros and cons of these options are explored. For example, the first two options are quite labor-intensive and yield data that can be challenging to analyze on a large scale. Survey design was ultimately determined to be the best option for large-scale collection of family outcomes.

2. Who will provide the data?

Possibilities included professional ratings of family outcomes and family ratings of family outcomes. While professionals might be able to use their experience to rate families, families' perceptions are best coming from families. Other supporting reasons for family self-ratings are discussed on page 197.

3. Whose outcomes are being reported?

The question raised here is whether the respondent is one family member, a consensus of the whole family, each family member with separate ratings, or possibly at least one family member. After examining the associated complications, the consensus process determined that the fourth option (at least one family member) gives families the most flexibility.

4. Should the items be open- or closed-ended?

Open-ended questions offer respondents more flexibility, but aggregating the data on a large scale is complicated and labor intensive. Closed-ended items can be trying for respondents as the response options might not exactly fit their thoughts. However, closed-ended questions on a survey are a less complicated option for large-scale data collection and analysis.

5. What should be the content of the items?

Item content should consider theory, practice and empirical information and should yield solid content validity. Another consideration for item content, was whether or not items should be attributed to early intervention (e.g., *as a result of early intervention our family... versus, our family...*). These considerations are addressed on page 198.

6. What will be the format of the closed-ended responses?

Scaled options like a Likert scale are quite common. However, the types of scales and anchor descriptors are quite variable. The number of items on the scale is another factor. Initially a seven-point scale with distinct

descriptive response anchors at 1, 3, 5, and 7 was developed.

7. How long will the measure be?

Like the other questions, this one too has many layers of consideration, such as the number of questions, the length of the survey, and the time respondents might be expected to spend on the survey.

These complex questions and many more were carefully considered throughout the design, feedback, and pilot phases of FOS development. As the FOS has been implemented it has undergone revisions with the goal of most effectively capturing the information needed to measure and understand the benefits experienced by families as a result of early intervention services received. More information on the FOS survey editions is available online at the Early Childhood Outcomes Center. <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/>

Bailey, D. B., Hebbeler, K., Olmsted, M. G., Raspa, M., & Bruder, M. B. (2008). Measuring family outcomes considerations for large-scale data collection in early intervention. *Infants and Young Children* 23 194-206.

On the WWW



The website this month is a link on the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC) site.

<http://www.nectac.org/topics/quality/childfam.asp>

The "Child and Family Outcomes" link on the NECTAC site provides information about state reporting requirements, planning resources, national organizations and resources, state activities related to child and family outcomes, measurement tools, as well as meeting and conference calls held around child and family outcomes. Each of these headings includes other related resources and information that helps the reader understand the intent and requirements of measuring child and family outcomes. You are encouraged to visit this site to explore what is happening with this important initiative that includes EDIS and all state early intervention programs.

What Do the Data Say?

What is the return rate of Family Outcome Surveys (FOS) given to families exiting Army EDIS programs after 6 or more months of service during the last reporting period (01 July 2009 through 30 June 2010)?



During this reporting period, 374 families, having received services for at least 6 months, exited the program. However, only 144 complete Family Outcome Surveys were returned. While more surveys were returned, they were not included in this analysis if they were not complete. The return rate for fully completed surveys was 39%. Interestingly, the return rate was the same (39%) for both CONUS and OCONUS programs.

It is difficult to know if the 144 returned surveys are truly representative of the population EDIS serves. Do these surveys represent all programs and communities and the mix of families EDIS supports through early intervention?

While a near 40% return rate is not poor, Babbie (2001) categorizes return rate as 50% being adequate, 60% is good, and 70% is very good (p. 256). As EDIS continues to collect family outcome data using the FOS increasing the return rate will be an important goal.

Consultation Corner



From September 2010 through December 2010 we are excited and honored to have Dr. Donald Bailey from the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International as the KIT consultation corner expert addressing the topic *Measuring Family Outcomes in Early intervention*.

Thinking about the Family Outcomes Survey, what is a family outcome; how is it different from satisfaction?

States routinely conduct surveys to find out what parents think about early intervention. Almost all of these surveys measure the extent which parents are satisfied with various aspects of the program. And the results have typically been very positive – often 90% or more of families express a high degree of satisfaction with early intervention programs and service providers.

Assessing satisfaction is an important component of program evaluation, but it only provides one piece of information. Equally important is the extent to which families have benefited directly from early intervention – what is different for them as a result of early intervention services? An outcome is not the receipt of services or satisfaction with services. Satisfaction does not always equal benefit. For example, a parent might say that early intervention has given them good information about their rights, but do they really know their rights and do they know what to do if they are not satisfied with services? A family outcome is the extent to which families have benefited from services.

What can we hope to learn from the Family Outcomes Survey?

Several years ago, we led a national effort to try to reach consensus on the most important outcomes of early intervention. We got input from lots of different stakeholders, ultimately recommending five outcomes. As a result of early intervention, families ought to be able to (a) understand their child’s strengths, abilities, and special needs; (b) know their rights and advocate effectively for their children; (c) help their child develop and learn; (d) have support systems; and (e) access desired services, programs, and activities in their community.

While this was an exciting effort, we had an immediate problem – no instrument existed that was intended to directly assess these five outcomes. So, to provide one option for early intervention programs to measure these outcomes, we developed the Family Outcomes Survey (FOS), a parent-report measure of the extent to which they feel they have attained specific outcomes. The instrument is now in its third version, as we have tried to modify it to make it easier for families to complete and more useful for programs. The FOS-Revised assesses 24 constructs across the five outcome areas, giving programs the ability to identify specific areas of needed improvement. To help states and other early intervention programs meet federal reporting requirements, we also created a “helpfulness” scale, with 17 items spread across the three federal helpfulness indicators: what percent of families report that early intervention has helped them (a) know their rights; (b) communicate their child’s needs; and (c) help their child develop and learn.

Together, the two sections of the FOS-Revised provide a psychometrically valid way to assess both families’ perceptions of the helpfulness of early intervention as well as the extent to which specific outcomes have been attained. We can use the survey to identify areas of needed program improvement. And researchers can use the survey to examine the extent to which various program variables, child characteristics, or family characteristics are associated with outcome attainment.

Continuing Education for KIT Readers



The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) is offering a continuing education opportunity for KIT readers.

In line with the focus on Measuring Family Outcomes in Early Intervention, readers are invited to receive continuing education contact hours for reading the monthly KIT publications (September 2010 through December 2010) and completing a multiple-choice exam about the content covered in these KITs.

If you are interested, take the exam online at www.edis.army.mil and upon successful completion, you will receive a certificate of non-discipline specific continuing education contact hours.

Please send your Consultation Corner questions and KIT ideas via email to ediscspd@amedd.army.mil

