

Scaffolding with Caregivers to Elevate Quality Series Functional Priorities

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University of Louisville School of Medicine
Department of Pediatrics
571 S. Floyd Street, Suite 233
Louisville, KY 40202
(502) 852-9196
ceitmp@louisville.edu



From Concern to Functional Priority

Concerns are the big things that worry families, like when their young child is not yet talking or walking. These concerns often lead them to access early intervention services and become a primary focus of IFSP outcomes. Functional priorities are the more focused individualized goals that are meaningful to caregivers that are addressed during ongoing visits, such as what they want to happen now and what would make things better during everyday interactions and routines with their child. This edition of the maintenance newsletter focuses on scaffolding approaches that support caregivers to reflect on what's immediately important to their daily lives, to determine the purpose of their priorities, and to achieve their goals.



Functional priorities frame the visit as the foundational structure, ensuring that intervention is relevant and meaningful for the child's participation in family life.

Targeting Functional Priorities

Scaffolding approaches used during ongoing EI sessions support caregivers to reflect on what's currently important to their daily lives, to determine the purpose of their priorities, and to achieve their goals. Here we outline commonly used scaffolding strategies, their rationale, and sample questions.

Strategy: Frame discussion

When joint planning with caregivers, proactively framing the discussion is an effective strategy to engage caregivers to select priorities most supportive of their daily lives. We set the stage to help caregivers think about what's most important to them in the moment, what's impacting their everyday life and interactions, and where they'd like to see change. To frame the discussion, we use reflective questions such as "Thinking about what will support your day-to-day life, what would you like to work on today?", "What is one aspect of your day that you would really like to see improve or go smoother?", or "What are some areas where you'd like to see some changes in?"



Strategy: Inquire about purpose

Caregivers may share their priorities or select activities (i.e., play dough, books, ball play, etc.) to target in a session. It's essential that we give caregivers the opportunity to convey why their priority is meaningful to them. Inquiring about the purpose is a nice strategy to support caregivers to explore the reasons their priority is important to clarify the focus. We employ reflective questions such as "How might your child being able to ___, make a difference to your family?", "How would you fill in the blanks? I want my child to ___ so he can ___?", or "Why did you select this ___?"



Strategy: Connect priority to routines

Another supportive strategy for caregivers is helping them to connect their priorities to everyday routines and activities. We guide them to identify the existing activities and routines that their priorities impact. This supports them to discover authentic opportunities for more practice, engagement, and participation to move toward their goals. We utilize reflective questions such as "Which routine or activity would it be important for child to ___?", "When during your day does ___ come up?", or "Which routine is this occurring in?"



Strategy: Set goals

Discussing concerns and priorities can evoke many different thoughts and emotions. Supporting caregivers to set goals can lead to all being in agreement with a clear objective. This focuses the session and provides a basis for reflecting on the observation and strategies practiced. We use reflective questions such as “What do you hope to see, do, or learn today?”, “What is one wish you have for you and your child's interactions?”, or “What would you like to see happen today?” to establish goals for the session.


**Strategy: Break down big wishes into smaller steps**

Conversations about caregivers’ concerns often lead to discussion of their big wishes and long-term goals for their children, like walking, talking, etc. It’s important for us to support their dreams while also helping them focus on the here and now. Breaking down big wishes into smaller steps allows caregivers to experience short-term successes on their way to achieving larger goals. We use reflective questions such as “Seeing where we are right now, what would one baby step toward ____ be?” or “What might the first step to getting there be?”

**Strategy: Reflect on targeted functional priority**

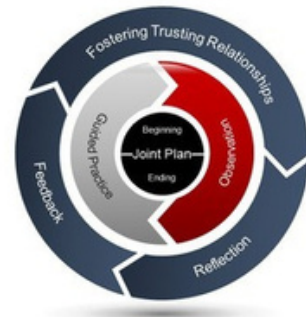
Reflection on the caregiver’s targeted functional priority is an effective strategy to conclude the discussion after practicing. We can support caregivers to identify any changes, what helped/didn’t help, and next steps by summarizing discussion. We ask caregivers reflective questions such as “What do you think about ____ now?” or “How are you feeling about working on ____ moving forward?”



Click the  links above to see three examples of effective conversations that scaffold with caregivers to share their functional priorities.

SCAFFOLDING FROM CONCERN TO FUNCTIONAL PRIORITY

Scaffolding approaches used during ongoing EI sessions support caregivers to reflect on what's immediately important to their daily lives, to determine the purpose of their priorities, and to achieve their goals. Here are commonly used scaffolding strategies, their rationale, and sample questions.



Frame discussion to ensure caregivers select priorities that are most supportive to their daily life

- What is most important to you for us to work on today
- What part of the day are you most concerned about?



Inquire about purpose to support caregivers to think about the current impact/reasons for their priorities

- How might this make a difference?
- How would you fill in the blanks? I want him to _____ so that _____.



Connect priority to routines to help caregivers discover authentic opportunities to engage and practice

- Which routine would it be important for her to _____?
- When during your day does _____ come up?



Set goal to have a clear objective for the session

- What do you hope to see, do, or learn today?
- What would you like to see happen today?



Break down big wishes into smaller steps to concentrate on a realistic goal for the session

- What would one baby step toward _____ be?
- What might the first step to getting there be?



Reflect on targeted functional priorities to determine the changes made today and next steps

- What do you think about _____ now?
- How are you feeling about working on _____ moving forward?

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