

# **Functional Life Skills**

**Creating Appropriate Functional Goals  
Within a  
General Education Curriculum Framework**

**MARYLAND COALITION FOR INCLUSIVE  
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## **OLD Definition of Functional Skills**

**“Functional Skills** refer to the variety of skills that are frequently demanded in natural domestic, vocational, and community environments.”

“Functional/critical skills... include skills/activities that are required or expected of non-handicapped peers. These skills are essential to the student’s performance and participation in a variety of community environments.

## **NEW Definition of Functional Skills**

“...the definition of what is functional needs to be broadened to include science, art, music, history, English literature, and other subjects.”

“Learning history, geography, science, and math with classmates is functional and in the long-term best interests of all students, including those classified as having significant intellectual disabilities.”

“...skills such as communication, cooperation, problem solving, self-initiation, responsibility ...have been shown to be more related to job stability than the ability to perform specific vocational tasks.”

“... the academic and social benefits of inclusion rely on students’ being full-time members of general education classes and their school communities.”

***We need to consider skills that will allow  
students to participate in  
in-school and out-of-school activities with  
other students of the same age.***

## Criteria for Determining if Skills are Functional:

### Educational goals on IEPs should:

- \_\_\_\_\_ reflect the *general education curriculum* (e.g., math, language arts, science, social studies, art, music, PE, or other academic subject)
- \_\_\_\_\_ be a *communication skill or social behavior* that will enhance the student's ability to:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ communicate what he or she knows
  - \_\_\_\_\_ understand information
  - \_\_\_\_\_ communicate socially with peers
  - \_\_\_\_\_ participate with peers in and out of the classroom.
- \_\_\_\_\_ be a *specific job skill* identified as a real possibility for employment after school (if the student is age 14 or older)
- \_\_\_\_\_ be a skill that increases the student's self-advocacy or participation as an independent learner in school

### Criteria for selecting other skills as "functional" for the student should be:

**1. Age-Appropriate**

*Is the skill and the materials and methods used to teach the skill appropriate for the chronological age of the student?*

**2. Required now**

*If the student does not perform the skill, will an adult or another person have to do it for him/her? Or is there an alternative to performing the task?*

**3. Required as an adult**

*Will this be an important skill that will be required for community participation or for interactions with peers when the student is an adult?*

**4. Usefulness**

*Will the student have the opportunity to use the skill in other places and at other times?*

**5. Student and Family Preference**

*Does the student and the family want the student to learn and use this skill?*

**6. Enhancement of the Student's Status**

*Will this skill increase the student's likelihood for:*

- \_\_\_\_\_ increased social contacts/relationships
- \_\_\_\_\_ physical well-being
- \_\_\_\_\_ social status and appearance of competence?

**7. Expands Community Participation**

*Does the skill enable the student to access more places in the community and participate meaningfully?*

**8. Probability of Acquisition**

*Is it likely that the student will acquire this skill in the school year?*

# **FUNCTIONAL LIFE SKILLS**

## **Example For school age students**

### **GENERAL SCHOOL PARTICIPATION**

- 1 Communication/Social Interaction:
  - Have a communication system
  - Ask for help/assistance when needed
  - Respond to verbal directions
  - Initiate greetings
  - Respond to social greetings and verbal initiations of others
  - Answer questions
- 2 Follow routines
- 3 Follow directions
- 4 Adapting to change in routines
- 5 Safety/fire drill procedures
- 6 Appropriate appearance
  - Wears clothing appropriate to the weather (consistent with peers)
  - Adjusts and fastens clothing to cover self appropriately (consistent with peers and school rules)
  - Maintains an appearance that is groomed (consistent with peers and unlikely to subject student to criticism)
- 7 Movement around the school
  - Travel and/or wait in line
  - Carry belongings
  - Know and travel to various locations (cafeteria, office, library, auditorium, etc.)

### **GYM / PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

- 1 Change clothes
- 2 Use locker (manipulate lock, store and retrieve items)
- 3 Line-up and stay in line
- 4 Wait turn
- 5 Use math skills (counting, ordinal positions)
- 6 Use reading skills (sight words, directions, diagrams)
- 7 Stay in one place
- 8 Use eye-hand coordination
- 9 Know and follow safety rules

## **Media**

- 1 Know and find books in A, B, C order
- 2 Put books and other library materials away
- 3 Access and use computer
- 4 Know and follow Numerical order
- 5 Categorize
- 6 Hold a book and turn pages
- 7 Follow, find, respond to sight words
- 8 Know identification number
- 9 Follow rules for whispering or being quiet
- 10 Research skills
- 11 Choose an interest and know how to locate information in interest area
- 12 Use AV equipment (operate projector, start/stop buttons, etc.)
- 13 Attend quietly to speaker
- 14 Extended listening
- 15 Visual tracking (video)

## **GENERAL CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION**

- 1 Know and travel to classroom(s), assigned seat in room(s)
- 2 Follow/keep on schedule/times of day
- 3 Participate in opening procedures
- 4 Have and be able to locate needed supplies (*organization*)
- 5 Class behavioral expectations for participation
  - o raising hand
  - o waiting
  - o appropriate voice volume
- 6 Use appropriate social skills for group interactions
- 7 Wait in line
- 8 Wait turn
- 9 Ask questions on topic of class activity
- 10 Speak/communicate to whole group
- 11 Use a computer (with adaptations as needed)
- 12 Complete tasks and know what to do when done
- 13 Reading, writing, math skills (for application in subject areas)

## **CAFETERIA**

- 1 Use acceptable eating manners
- 2 Demonstrate personal hygiene (wipe hands, face)
- 3 Eating skills
- 4 Carry trays of food
- 5 Use acceptable social skills (greetings, departures, respect personal space)
- 6 Social communication skills (don't interrupt, follow conversation topic, etc.)
- 7 Open/close containers
- 8 Use money skills (select amounts, make change)
- 9 Making food choices (balanced meal)
- 10 Read a menu
- 11 Clean up after eating
- 12 Time Management: eat within assigned time frame
- 13 Use vending machines (choice, insert money, manipulate selector, retrieve item)
- 14 Wait (in line, after eating)

## **AFTER SCHOOL ACTIVITY**

- 1 Greet peers
- 2 Occupy self with age-appropriate leisure activity
- 3 Know personal information (phone numbers, address, parents' name, etc.)
- 4 Cooperate with others in small group
- 5 Wait your turn
- 6 Follow directions
- 7 Use reading, writing, math skills related to activity
- 8 Follow schedule
- 9 Identify time for departure or change in routine
- 10 Social and hygiene skills related to eating
- 11 Complete play task/activity
- 12 Arrange transportation (to go home following after-school activity)
- 13 Follow rules for games
- 14 Locate appropriate areas for targeted activities
- 15 Follow safety procedures

## **HALLWAY – CHANGING CLASSES**

- 1 Respect others' interpersonal space
- 2 Greet others
- 3 Follow "unwritten" rules
- 4 Follow written directions
- 5 Following a schedule
- 6 Be on time to classes/activities
- 7 Know where to go to next location on schedule
- 8 Locate bathrooms
- 9 Use locker (recognize numbers, manipulate lock, store and retrieve items)
- 10 Use a map
- 11 Read and identify numbers (lockers/classrooms)
- 12 Read signs (office, restrooms, etc.)
- 13 Use appropriate language and voice level
- 14 Mobility
  - use stairs
  - deal with obstacles
  - deal with unpredictable situations
- 15 follow safety procedures during emergencies
- 16 Seek assistance if lost
- 17 Walk with someone (*pacing*)

## Criteria for Identifying “Functional” skills:

	YES	Some- what	NO
<p><b>1. Age-Appropriate</b></p> <p><i>Is the skill and the materials and methods used to teach the skill appropriate for the chronological age of the student?</i></p>			
<p><b>2. Required now</b></p> <p><i>If the student does not perform the skill, will an adult or another person <u>have</u> to do it for him/her? Or is there an alternative to performing the task?</i></p>			
<p><b>3. Required as an adult</b></p> <p><i>Will this be an important skill that will be <u>required</u> for community participation or for interactions with peers when the student is an adult?</i></p>			
<p><b>4. Usefulness</b></p> <p><i>Will the student have the opportunity to use the skill in other places and at other times?</i></p>			
<p><b>5. Student and Family Preference</b></p> <p><i>Does the student and the family want the student to learn and use this skill?</i></p>			
<p><b>6. Enhancement of the Student’s Status</b></p> <p><i>Will this skill increase the student’s likelihood for:</i></p> <p>    ___ increased social contacts &amp; relationships</p> <p>    ___ physical well-being</p> <p>    ___ social status and appearance of competence?</p>			
<p><b>7. Expands Community Participation</b></p> <p><i>Does the skill enable the student to <u>access more places</u> in the community and participate meaningfully?</i></p>			
<p><b>8. Probability of Acquisition</b></p> <p><i>Is it likely that the student will acquire this skill in the school year?</i></p>			
<b>TOTAL:</b>			