

What are 'outcomes' and why do they matter?

If you have a child with SEND, you probably hear people talking about their '**outcomes**'. You might also hear different professionals using the same word in different ways. This can be very confusing! This resource is to help you understand what we mean when we talk about outcomes, and what good ones look like.

This resource is based on outcomes for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), but outcomes also feature in SEN Support, looked after children's plans, mental health support and other contexts. The principles are very similar.

What do we mean by the word 'outcomes'?

Put simply, an outcome is the **benefit** or **difference** that we want to see in someone's life when they are being supported.



The child or young person's situation before the support (their needs)

The support (provision)

The improvement in the child or young person's life (outcomes)



Why are outcomes important?

We know that life can be more challenging for children and young people with SEND, and that they need support to live healthy, happy and fulfilling lives.

If all supporting adults (professionals and parents) understand what children or young people want their lives to look like (their outcomes), then they can all work together to help those individuals achieve those changes. This is sometimes called a person-centred approach.

How do we know what a child or young person wants in their life?

All children and young people should have a say in their hopes, dreams and outcomes. This includes children and young people who are non-verbal, and young children. There are lots of ways we can understand their views:

Watching play

Creative methods
e.g. art, photos,
poetry

Body language and
facial expressions

Alternative
communication e.g.
talking mats



Remember: Just because a child or young person cannot speak doesn't mean they can't communicate!

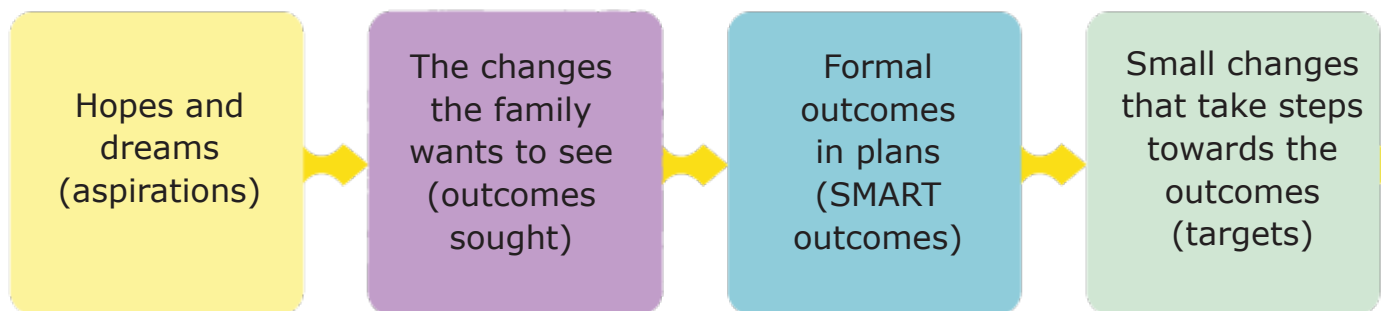
Parent carers' views should also always be sought and included, but the balance between the child or young person's views and their family's will change over time. In most cases, a child or young person will develop the skills and confidence for expressing their views as they get older, something which should be supported, encouraged and valued. However, some young people will need ongoing support to make decisions about their life, and your knowledge of them has an important role in identifying the right outcomes.

For more information on this see CDC's [Decision Making Toolkit](#) and [Supported Decision Making e-learning](#). (The e-learning is part of the Expert Parent Programme course)



Where do outcomes come from?

This is what the process for agreeing outcomes looks like. We will look at each section separately.



Starting with hopes and dreams

Because outcomes are about the child or young person's life, they should start with the child or young person's **aspirations**, which means their **hopes and dreams for the future**. Aspirations can be anything and everything, they don't have to be realistic or achievable.

For example:

I want to be a computer game designer

I want to be a butterfly

We want Bea to enjoy her childhood and have the same opportunities as her brother

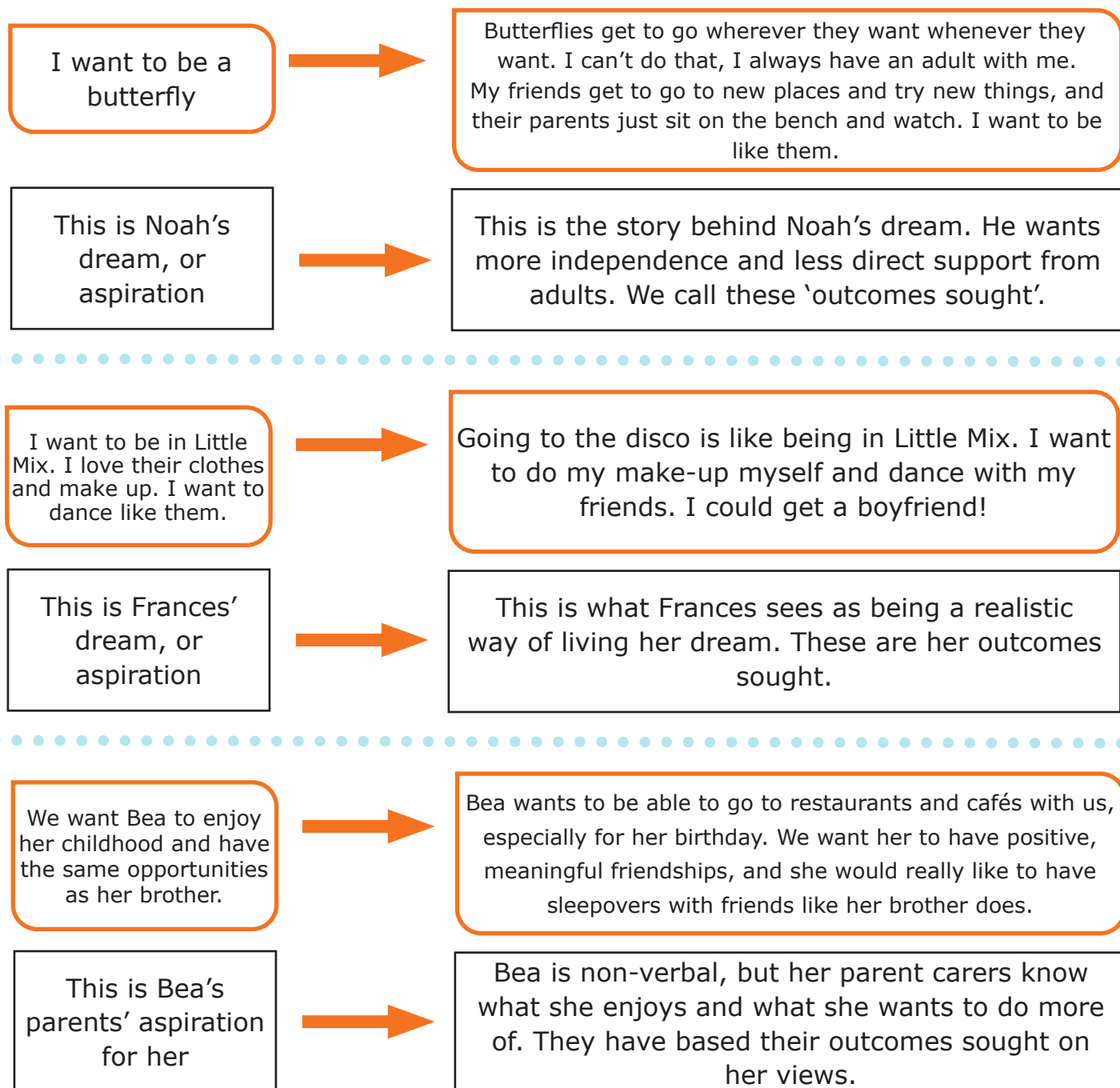
I want to get married and live in my own house

Remember, you and your child might have different opinions! Be clear about which are your child's own hopes and dreams, and which are yours on their behalf.



Moving from aspirations to outcomes

Unlike **aspirations**, **outcomes** do have to be realistic. It might help to think of outcomes as 'stepping stones' towards aspirations, so we have to understand the story behind those hopes and dreams. This conversation might be led by a professional, such as a SENCO, but it should include people who know your child well, as well as the child themselves. Remember that there are lots of ways to include your child's views.





What do good quality outcomes look like?

Every child or young person's outcomes will be different and about the things that matter most to them. They should be holistic, which means that they are about living a full and enjoyable life in general, not about one particular part of their care. They are not something that one individual professional can 'solve' on their own, everyone has to work together to achieve them.

They might include themes such as:

Taking part in fun activities

Having good relationships

Becoming more independent

Getting ready for work

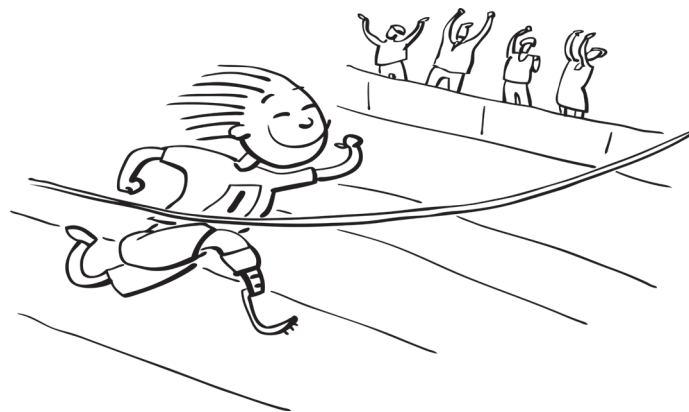
Being as healthy as possible

SMART outcomes

When they are written up formally (for example in an EHCP), outcomes are SMART. This means they are **s**pecific, **m**easurable, **a**chievable, **r**elevant and **t**imebound. We have an example later in this document, and you can see lots more in our [EHCP exemplars](#).

We don't expect children and young people to write these themselves! Professionals should use their expertise to turn the outcomes sought by children, young people and/or their parent carers into SMART outcomes.

You can learn more about this process in our [Holistic Outcomes in EHCPs e-learning](#).





How do professionals help to achieve outcomes?

Because the outcomes are **holistic**, lots of different professionals support them in small ways. Imagine they all have a few different jigsaw pieces, and when the jigsaw is complete the outcome can be achieved.

Meet Bea. One of her outcomes identified by her parents is 'Bea wants to be able to go to restaurants and cafés with us, especially for her birthday.' Mealtimes at home are very difficult at the moment.

Using their knowledge of Bea's needs and how they affect her, here is how different professionals might use their piece of the jigsaw puzzle to support Bea to achieve her outcome:

Improving
Bea's chewing and
swallowing

Developing toileting
skills to so the family
doesn't rely on changing
facilities

Medication to keep
Bea's epilepsy under
control

Teaching Bea to
use PECS and Makaton
to so she can communicate
more clearly and is less
frustrated



Helping Bea develop
coping strategies for new
environments

This is the basis of Bea's support, which is often called **provision**. Once professionals have decided what support will help Bea achieve her outcomes, they will decide **how much** and **how often** it will be needed. They must be **specific**.

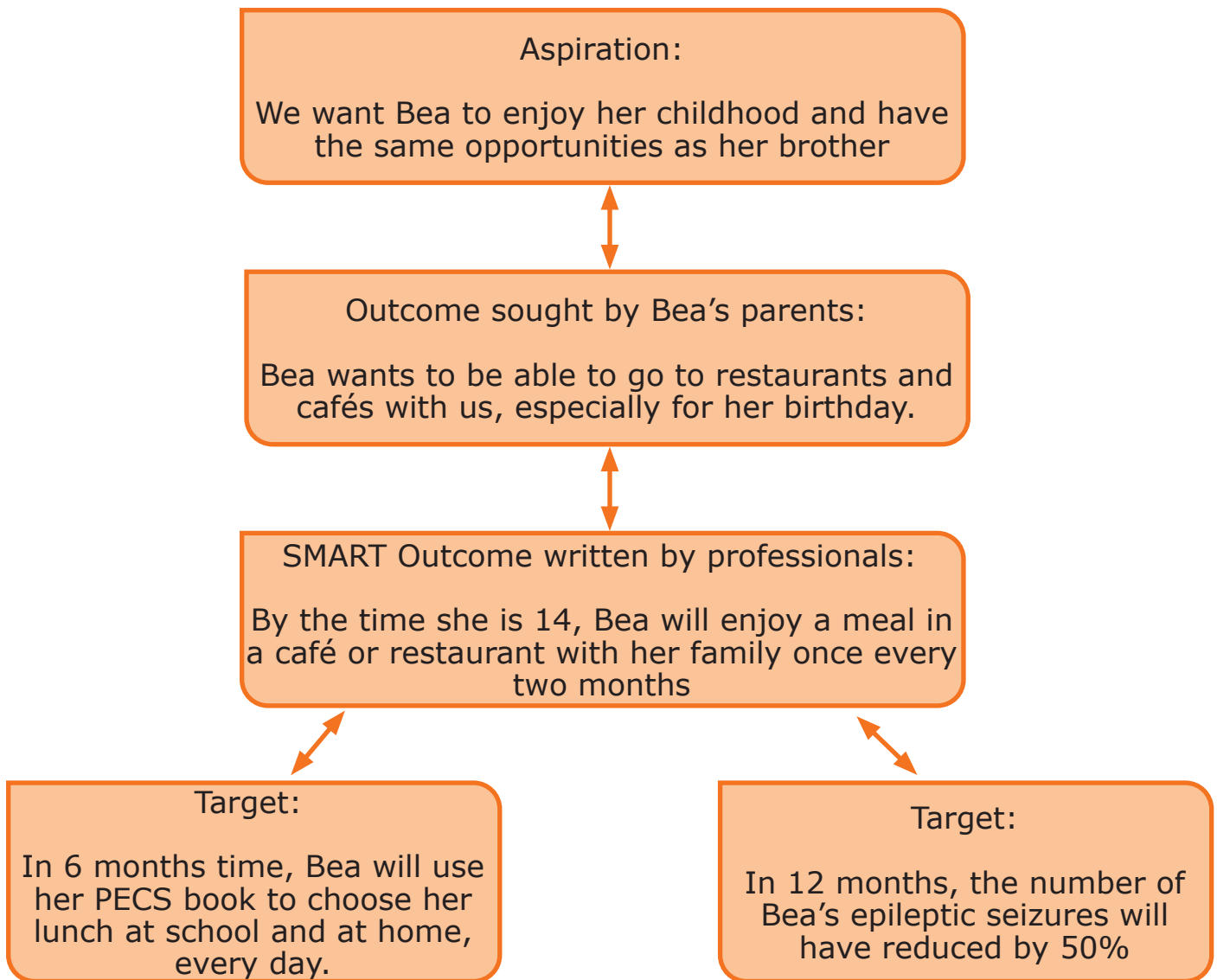
Professional targets

Each professional working with a child or young person will plan small steps towards achieving outcomes, which we call **targets** to separate them from **outcomes**. There might be several targets under one outcome.



How does this all fit together?

If we put all of this together for Bea, it looks like this. We can see how the different stages fit together. We have included just one outcome here, but in reality, Bea would have between 3 and 6.





I've heard about 'strategic outcomes', what are they?

So far we've looked at individual outcomes. This is what one particular child or young person (or their parent carer/s) wants to achieve in their life.

Strategic outcomes are similar, but much bigger. They are the changes that everyone working in a local area wants to see for all the children and young people they support, and should be developed by children, young people, families and professionals all working together. They look different in each area, but the themes are similar, usually including:

Taking part in fun activities

Having good relationships

Becoming more independent

Getting ready for work

Being as healthy as possible

Decision-makers in local areas should use these **strategic outcomes** to check how well the services they provide or pay for are helping to improve children and young people's lives. They should report on this to the public in a simple way, so you can see the bigger picture about life for children and young people with SEND in your area.

The different services in your area should also be clear on how they are contributing to achieving the strategic outcomes.

You should be able to find information about your area's strategic outcomes on your local offer website.

You can learn more about strategic outcomes and how they can be used [here](#).