

Handout 7.1 Assessment – Ask the Expert

Dr. Jane Squires Answers Questions About Assessment



What Does the Research Say?

Assessment includes the gathering of information to make informed decisions related to providing individualized services and supports to young children and their families. Assessment practices are central to identifying children who are eligible for Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE), designing services and supports for these children and families, and for monitoring and evaluating their progress over time. Research on early childhood assessment supports several key principles:

- 1) Using a collaborative process involving parents, family members, and practitioners (Bricker, Macy, Squires, & Marks, 2013; Squires, Bricker, & Twombly, 2015);
- 2) Selecting assessments that target universal, functional skills that are critical for young children to be successful in their environment, and can measure small changes in behavior (Bricker, Pretti-Frontczak, Johnson, & Strake, 2002; Johnson, Rahn, & Bricker, 2015; Bagnato, McLean, Macy, & Neisworth, 2011).
- 3) Gathering assessment information across authentic activities, play, and everyday routines (Johnson et al., 2015; Bagnato, 2007; Bagnato, Neisworth, & Pretti-Frontczak, 2010);
- 4) Selecting assessments with evidence to support them, including validity, reliability, and utility (McLean, Hemmeter, Snyder, 2014; Odom et al., 2005; Macy, Bagnato, Macy, & Salaway (2015); and
- 5) Assuring linguistically appropriate and culturally sensitive assessment practices are used with children and families (Duran, Cheatham, & Santos, 2011; McLean et al., 2014; Losardo & Notari-Syverson, 2011).

Why is this Important?

Family centered, evidence-based assessment practices undergird effective intervention. Each of the assessment processes--screening, eligibility determination, individualized planning, monitoring child progress, and measuring child and program outcomes-- yields important information for decision-making. Using valid and reliable assessments will enhance intervention efforts and lead to improved short and long-term outcomes for young children and families. Assessment practices, carefully aligned and intertwined with formal and informal supports and services, will increase the success of our collective efforts to promote young children's development (McConnell & Rahn, 2016).

Bottom Line

By following several key assessment principles, practitioners will be guided in making optimal decisions related to intervention practices. Use of technically adequate screening and eligibility assessments will assure children are identified and served in appropriate programs in a timely manner. Implementing effective curriculum based assessments for intervention, and collecting and evaluating on-going data on child progress will assure children receive targeted, functional intervention and make consistent on-going progress. Using accurate, linguistically and culturally sensitive family-guided assessments will yield data that inform and optimize child progress--ultimately improving our ability to support all children and families in meeting their short and long-term goals.

About the Expert

Jane Squires is a professor of Early Intervention/Special Education at the University of Oregon. She is Co-Director of the Center on Human Development and oversees research and outreach projects in the areas of developmental screening, implementation of screening systems, early identification of developmental delays, and the involvement of parents in monitoring of their young children's development. She and her Early Intervention team are currently conducting research on a curriculum-based assessment focused on early childhood social emotional competence.

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