



Purposes for Assessment in Child Care Programs

YoungStar technical consulting and formal rating processes provide opportunities for child care programs to earn optional points for conducting "ongoing assessment" that is completed to "monitor ongoing progress and the information is used for intentional planning to improve child outcomes." These assessment practices provide information to support and inform individualized instruction within child care programming, and inform the curriculum choices within a program.

For assessment practices to be effective, the teacher/director must first define the purpose for which the assessment is being used.

"Clarifying the main purpose for which young children are assessed can help determine what kinds of assessments would be most appropriate (Lillian G. Katz (1997), *Developmental Approach to Assessment of Young Children*)."

Through the work of the **Healthy Children Committee of the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners**, the following definitions and principles have been agreed upon for screening and assessment processes.

Screening is an intentional *process* that provides information about how a child is developing and the family is functioning. A concerning screening result suggests that more in depth information be gathered to determine whether an intervention is warranted to address it. Best practices include using multiple sources of information and a reliable, valid, and standardized tool or procedure. Screening is distinguished from informal monitoring or observation which is often done by caregivers.

Assessment often follows a screening, although it may occur in instances in which screening does not. It is a *process* in which more detailed or specific information is collected to answer the question "what should come next?" Assessment can serve multiple purposes depending on the context. It can determine service eligibility. It can serve as a way to plan interventions and instruction and provide ongoing support in these processes once an intervention or program is underway. It can serve as a way to monitor ongoing progress during and following interventions, treatments or instruction.

Guiding Principles for Screening and Assessment processes identify that assessments are used only for acceptable purposes, where research has demonstrated they yield valid and reliable information among children of similar ages, cultures, home languages, and other individual variability. Assessment processes that are used to label, track, or otherwise harm young children, are not developmentally appropriate. In March 2012, the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners, Healthy Children Committee developed Guiding Principles for Screening and Assessment. This document identifies a set of common principles essential to assessment practice. These principles and descriptions are included at the end of this document.

ASSESSMENT IN CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

Assessment is generally completed for four specific purposes in child care programming. This includes assessment to:

1. Plan and adapt curriculum to meet each child's developmental and learning needs,
2. Help teachers and families monitor children's progress,
3. Screen all children and recommend follow up for a child with potential disabilities or special needs, and/or
4. Evaluate and improve program effectiveness.

Conducting assessment for all of these purposes brings about benefits for children, programs and families. Below is additional information about each of these four purposes.

1. Assessment to Plan and Adapt Curriculum to Meet Each Child's Developmental and Learning Needs

Assessment is used to select what curriculum content is delivered in a child care setting. Assessment is linked to the curriculum framework and informs both the content, and methods of instruction used to deliver the content to meet group and individual needs of children. That is, it informs what a teacher will teach and how she will do it.

Teachers use assessment data to inform and refine how they plan and implement activities within their curriculum. Assessments address a child's learning and development in all developmental domains and help teachers identify developmental and learning goals to be expressed within the program curriculum. This includes short- and long-range plans for each child and the group based on children's knowledge, skills, interests, and other factors such as changes in family circumstances.

In the classroom, a teacher's first impulse may be to compare children with other children in a group, especially with those who respond positively to the planned curriculum. Assessment can help to answer questions such as, if only a few children are way behind the rest, does that mean everything is okay? Even if the entire group of children performs similarly, are they all behind or ahead of where they should be? Individualized assessment is used to better understand each child's performance within curriculum expectations. How each child acquired the knowledge or skill identified in the criterion (standard, benchmark, objective) is important. Information from assessments is directly useful in deciding what children have yet to learn.

It is recommended that assessments be **used at every 90 days** to ascertain individual strengths, plan potential learning goals, and make knowledgeable instructional decisions. This is best implemented as a routine part of the curriculum and lesson planning. In this way, activities are informed by child developmental assessments.

2. Assessment to Help Teachers and Families Monitor Children's Progress

In addition to guiding curriculum and planning, assessment helps teachers determine if a child is making the desired progress in meeting curriculum goals. This type of assessment:

- Serves as a guide in determining whether changes need to be made in instruction.
- Uses a tool to gather information to determine what a child can do and what the child is ready to learn (data collection/data analysis).
- Indicates if the desired objectives and outcomes are being met.
- Provides data/information to facilitate the interpretation of progress utilizing the teaching cycle of: ongoing assessment, planning and curriculum goals, and implementation and systemically moving again into assessment, planning and implementation over time.

Information collected about what children know and can do takes on additional meaning when looking at individual domains of early learning, such as those included in the *Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards* and the developmental continuum. A developmental continuum describes the typical sequence of child development and learning. A continuum provides a starting framework for thinking about what range of things to work on with a group of children at a particular age. Referring to the continuum informs our interpretation of the evidence that has been gathered.

Intentional planning is a means of acting purposefully (based on an individual child assessment), with a goal in mind, and a plan for accomplishing it. Programs can demonstrate this through assessing individual children and using what is learned from the assessment to establish lesson plans and program areas where they aim to improve child outcomes.

When used to monitor a child's progress, child development assessment is **on-going, continuous, and it is not done on a fixed timeline**. Authentic child assessment is an approach to assessment that fits well within the naturally occurring routines and activities within a child care program. Authentic assessment is an approach that includes focused observations which are based on the use of reliable and valid evidence-based tools to capture strength-based functional tasks that occur during everyday activities and routines with a child care program. It uses everyday relationships, observations of growth and development; consideration of individual learning styles and differences; and utilization of all environments in which the child lives and learns.

3. Assessment to Screen All Children and Recommend Follow Up for a Child with Potential Disabilities or Special Needs

Universal developmental screening for all children in a program may be conducted to gain a "point in time snapshot" of a child's development. A universal approach helps to assure a family that their child's development is on track and provides information to help a provider start a conversation about potential developmental concerns and identify if additional assessment is needed. Developmental screening, conducted with a brief, valid and reliable tool provides information about how a child's development is similar to that of other children the same age. Developmental screening may be conducted by staff of a child care program, if they are trained in using a valid and reliable tool such as the *Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)* and interpreting the results.

Screening is brief, and may be completed once **a year** for all children upon entry into the program or at a specified time each year. Targeted screening may be repeated anytime that there is a concern about a child's progress and development. The practice of ongoing assessment is helpful in identifying the need for a targeted developmental screening. Screening is always linked to follow-up. This includes communication with parents and a potential referral for additional assessment. Assessments or evaluations focused on identifying, diagnosing, and planning for children with special needs or disabilities are conducted by qualified professionals using assessment tools and other methods (e.g., family interviews, observations) that are valid and reliable for such purposes.

If a program's providers are not prepared and trained to conduct development screening with a valid and reliable tool, then the program's role is to help the family with a referral to a resource provider in the community who is able to help. Resources include a referral to a family primary care physician, a referral to an early intervention (Birth to 3) program or school district for Child Find. Wisconsin First Step and the Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs Regional Centers are invaluable contacts for learning more about resources in your community.

Child Find, Screening and Assessment Resources:

- *Wisconsin Birth to 3 Program:* <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/birthto3/index.htm>
- *Early Childhood Child Find:* <http://dpi.wi.gov/sped/early-childhood/child-find>
- *Wisconsin First Step:* (800) 642-7837 or TTY (800) 282-1663
- *Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs Regional Centers:* <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/cyshcn/regionalcenters.htm>

4. Assessment to Evaluate and Improve Program Effectiveness

Regular program assessment is a way to demonstrate that a child care program has met its goals for program improvement. It is part of a **continuous assessment process** and is based on goals for improvement. Program assessment includes evidence (information/data) collected about the program to help identify to what degree the program has met its planned goals as well as to discover unexpected results. Showcasing program assessment data **on a yearly basis** is an excellent way to show parents your child care program's commitment to quality. It gives you a chance to show what you are doing to create a wonderful learning environment for the children in the child care setting and how it benefits the children you serve.

On the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners website resources are identified to help early care and education providers/programs assess program quality:

<http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/administration-management/program-evaluation/>

GUIDANCE FOR USING ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Developmentally appropriate assessment tools provide instructions for administering the tool, including guidance for data collection and organized ways to document the data and record baseline date. The tool's manual describes the theory on which the content of the tool was based and clearly identifies how the assessment findings are used to guide instructional planning. Providers must be trained on the assessment tool that they use to inform their practice and individualize instruction for children in their care. Assessments that are curriculum-based and aligned with standards, whether developed by commercial publishers or education systems, can be noted as criterion-referenced. Criterion-referenced assessments are reflective of skills and behaviors of a child and the philosophy is individualized. Curriculum-based assessments may be valid because they are reflective of skills and behaviors in a child's natural environment with a typical care giver (authentic assessment).

Examples of assessment tools that may be used for children birth to five years:

- Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming Systems (AEPS) for Infants and Children (Volumes 3 and 4)
- Creative Curriculum Child Assessment Tools –Teaching Strategies Gold
- High Scope – COR Assessment
- New Portage Guide
- Six Simple Ways to Assess Young Children—Developmental Milestone Checklist
- Work Sampling—Rebus, Inc.

A list of assessment resource information can be found on the WECCP website at:

<http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/screening-assessment/>

Examples of assessment tools that may be used for school-age children:

- Creating Portfolios with Kids in Out-of-School Programs (Developmental Checklist for School-Age)
- National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST):
- <http://www.niost.org/Completed-Projects/afterschool-program-assessment-system-apas-project>
- <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youngstar/pdf/youth-outcome-measures.pdf>
- Parent, Provider, child surveys, questionnaires, or evaluations

For additional information:

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC): Position statements on Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation

<http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/StandCurrAss.pdf>

Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners – Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards Alignment with Curriculum

<http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/wmels/implementation/alignment-with-the-standards/>

Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners –Screening/Early Identification Resources

<http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/screening-assessment/>

Healthy Children Committee
Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners
GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

A set of common principles is essential to the implementation of cross-sector screening and assessment practices, regardless of where a young child spends his time or which programs and services she accesses. The following principles offer guidance in finding commonalities in screening and assessment processes across systems.

- **The purpose of screening and assessment is to provide information about a child’s development and inform decision-making:** As children grow, they are always learning. A universal approach to screening and assessing *all* children benefits children, families and practitioners. Parents and caregivers gain a comprehensive understanding of a young child’s development, informed by data from tools, surveillance and observations. Ongoing communication between families and practitioners provides opportunities to share information, provide assurance to parents about their child’s development, and address concerns about a child’s challenges and needs. Screening and assessment results inform follow up, including referrals for additional supports and services.
- **Parents and primary caregivers are partners in screening and assessment practices:** A young child’s growth and development is shaped within the context of relationships with parents and other primary care givers. It is essential for practitioners to partner with caregivers to support their participation throughout all aspects of screening and assessment including: engaging families in discussions about typical child development, creating opportunities to provide observations about their child’s development, contributing to decision-making, and guiding a child’s learning and development.
- **Information for screening and assessment processes is gathered from multiple sources, including standardized, valid and reliable tools, observations of a child’s development and communication with families and practitioners:** To gain a comprehensive understanding of a child’s health and development, it is important to gather information from multiple informants, tools and settings. This includes information about the child’s development as well as individual learning style in a variety of settings (i.e., home, school, community) in which the child lives and learns.
- **The timing of screening and assessment processes matter:** Screening and assessment information is gathered at critical points in time that are aligned with our understanding of developmental processes. Screening and assessment systems that are responsive to sensitive time periods contribute to the understanding of a child and family’s needs.
- **Practitioners use screening and assessment tools and processes that are culturally responsive to individual child and family circumstances:** Screening and assessment tools and processes include developmental expectations that are culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate as informed by cultural wisdom and research. Results and observations are understood and interpreted within the individualized cultural and linguistic context for each child and family.
- **Screening and assessment are components of a comprehensive system of services, resources and supports for children and families:** Each interaction with a child and family has the potential to influence the child’s development and the family’s education, health and well-being. Screening and assessment are holistic and dynamic processes that are integral to planning and monitoring the effectiveness of interventions, treatments and policies.

- **Screening and assessment activities occur naturally within the child and family’s typical routines and experiences:** This includes the full array of activities in home, school and community settings (e.g., physician office, child care center). In addition, tools, activities and materials are relevant to the cultural experiences of the child and family.
- **Collaborative screening and assessment initiatives within communities contribute to consistency in practices and promote greater accountability on behalf of all young children:** Within communities, cross-sector screening and assessment initiatives promote optimal family and community engagement and reduce duplication of services and resources. When collaboration occurs there are increased opportunities to reach more children and positively influence child and family outcomes.
- **Screening and assessment activities are implemented by trained and supported practitioners:** Screening and assessment requires that all practitioners have access to professional development opportunities to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to adequately carry out screening and assessment practices.
- **Screening and assessment information provides a pathway to ensure access to equitable, high quality resources to meet the needs of all young children and families:** Effective screening and assessment processes help to ensure that all young children and their families get what they need to develop and learn. Communication among parents/caregivers and practitioners is essential to ensure that action is taken to access appropriate services, resources and supports for each child.

References:

Wisconsin’s Comprehensive and Aligned System for Early Childhood Screening and Assessment

http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/CPlinkedDocs/Healthy_Children_Blueprint_9_28_16_FINAL-1.pdf

Developmental Screening, Assessment, and Evaluation: Key Elements for Individualizing Curricula in Early Head Start Programs (Early Head Start National Resource Center, Technical Assistance Paper No. 4) <http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/mental-health-screening-assessment/thepowerofplay-1.pdf>

Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards: Birth to First Grade, Fifth Edition (2017), Wisconsin Department of Children and Families & Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/CPlinkedDocs/wmels_5thedition.pdf

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