
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 learning, as well as to 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 planning for instruction, and making 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 caregivers. 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 styles in a variety of settings (e.g., 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 wellbeing. 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 to the extent possible:** 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

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