

GROWING IDEAS

Assessment Basics: From Observation to Instruction

What is developmentally appropriate assessment?

Developmentally appropriate assessment supports learning through the process of gathering information related to a child's development and learning style. It provides professionals with a picture of each individual child and helps to answer essential questions about a child's growth and development:



- Where is this child in the learning continuum?
- What is this child's learning style?
- What are this child's interests?
- Who does this child play with?
- Is this child's behavior the same or different during scheduled routines, times of the day, or with different groups of children or adults?
- What learning goals need to be set for this child?
- What are the developmental steps to reach these goals?
- What strategies will best support this child?

There are many different types of assessment strategies. One of the most powerful ways to learn about young children with and without disabilities is through observation. The planned and consistent use of observation is considered one form of assessment.

Why is it important to have an assessment system?

An assessment system helps educators move from observation to instruction. A well thought out assessment plan is a cornerstone of quality inclusive care and education. Observations assist educators to do the following:

- Get to know and appreciate each child.
- Gather information about each child and the group to guide planning, including how best to individualize the curriculum and teaching.
- Plan challenging, but achievable activities.
- Identify children who may need additional evaluation and support to succeed.
- Strengthen relationships with families and the community.

How is assessment information used to improve the learning experience for each child?

- Milestone charts, curriculum, program and early learning standards and other resources regarding child development are used to determine appropriate developmental expectations and goals to support each child's learning.

- Documentation of each child's developmental level, abilities, culture, temperament, interests, and communication style is referred to when planning activities.
- Review of each child's learning plan is conducted with revisions made, as needed.
- Information about each child's learning is shared and exchanged with the family or others involved with the child and family with proper permission.
- Documentation panels, newsletters, slideshows, and videos showcase and celebrate each child's learning.

Planned, objective observation is an essential component of assessment.

How to begin? Develop an assessment plan. Ask: *What is the focus of my observation?* This can be based on goals and objectives for each child, the group, or the program.

For example:

- Transitions between activities: How can the child be supported during transitions?
- Interactions with friends: Does the child understand how to join others in play?
- Use of classroom materials: Is the child interested, engaged, and motivated?
- Participation in all routines and activities: Can the child play and interact during circle time, outdoor play, small group activities and mealtime?

How do I find the time to observe and document?

Plan ahead!

- Set up learning centers so children know what is expected and can play independently.
- Organize the classroom with activities that encourage exploration and involvement.
- Arrange for other staff or adults to be available during scheduled observation times.
- Schedule regular observations of each child.

Effective child focused observations include the following:

- are ongoing
- document children in varied situations
- are scheduled regularly during daily activities
- record what each child knows and can do
- provide an organized collection of information to support each child's learning.

What information should I gather?

- Record observations and anecdotal records about what children are doing.
- With parental and/or guardian consent, collect work samples such as drawings, writings, and photos of constructions or play.
- Video or tape record children's play and interactions.
- Collect input from family members on each child's development.

How can I gather and store documentation?

- Use methods that will work well for you.
- Determine what to collect by considering what types of items best document what you want to know about each child.
- Create lists of things to observe and keep these lists handy, as reminders.
- Write anecdotal records on post-its, mailing labels, or prepared checklists.
- Make sure that children's work is named and dated.
- Ask children to tell about pictures they create and write down the stories.
- Take digital photos during busy play times to review later.
- Organize and store documentation materials in labeled folders or portfolios.
- Store information containing confidential information in a secure location (refer to your program confidentiality policy).

Where to learn more:

See "[Assessment Basics: From Observation to Instruction — Selected Resources](http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/assessres/)" at <http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/assessres/>

See "[Assessment Basics: From Observation to Instruction — Virtual Toolkit](http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/assessvtk/)" at <http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/assessvtk/>



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