

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 answers to essential questions about a child's growth and development, such as:

- Where is this child in the learning continuum?
- What is this child's learning style?
- 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 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 early childhood educators move from observation to instruction, leading to a deeper understanding of each child. An assessment system assists educators to:

- Gather information about each child and the group to guide planning.
- Understand and appreciate each child's strengths, progress, and needs.
- Plan challenging but achievable activities for each child.
- 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 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 learning 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.
- 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?

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.
- Schedule regular observations of each child.

What information should I gather?

- Record observations and anecdotal records about what children are doing.
- Collect work samples, such as drawings, writing, 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 each child's progress toward learning goals.
- 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.

Effective assessment:

- Is developmentally appropriate.
- Is ongoing.
- Is scheduled regularly during daily activities.
- Documents both the process and content of each child's learning.

- Ask children to tell about pictures they create and write down the stories.
- Take digital photos during busy play times to be reviewed later.
- Organize and store documentation materials in labeled folders or portfolios.

Where to learn more:

Jablon, J.R., Dombro, A.L., & Dichtelmiller, M.L. (1999). *The Power of Observation*. Washington, D.C.: Teaching Strategies, Inc.

McAfee, O., Leong, D.J., & Bodrova, E. (2004). *Basics of Assessment: A Primer for Early Childhood Educators*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

"Critical Issue: Assessing Young Children's Progress Appropriately." (1999). Retrieved October 6, 2004 from <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/earlychild/ea500.htm>



Maine's Network of Child Care Resource Development Centers

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