

EARLY HEAD START TIP SHEET

No. 52

Assessment for Infants & Toddlers, July 2014

What Is Ongoing Assessment?

Response:

Ongoing assessment is a **process** used to determine how a child is developing across all developmental domains and to track his growth, development, and learning over time. It is a continuous cycle that allows staff to make informed decisions about individualizing care based on observations and documentation. Ongoing assessment begins when a child is enrolled in a program and continues throughout his participation.

Purpose

The purpose of ongoing assessment is to

- identify each infant's and toddler's unique developmental strengths and needs;
- plan and individualize the curriculum to support those needs and strengths;
- provide information that is immediately useful for parents/families with the goal of actively engaging them in understanding and supporting their child's developmental progress and learning;
- measure each child's progress toward individual and program school readiness goals; and
- identify resources and services to best support each child and the family.

Process

The ongoing assessment process starts with planning for collecting information (data) about a child's development; this includes determining sources of data as well as how to, when to, and who will collect such data. The process involves gathering data, using the program's assessment tool(s) to interpret the data, making preliminary scoring or rating decisions on assessment items, using data to individualize for each child, and sharing the data with others. Ongoing assessment relies on input from families, teachers, family child care providers, home visitors, and other staff who know the child.

Key elements of a successful assessment process include staff's

- knowledge of child development, including how very young dual language learners acquire more than one language and family and cultural contexts that affect language acquisition and all other learning;
- knowledge of various methods for gathering data (e.g., structured observations, checklists, informal family input, formal parent report measures, portfolio records, work samples, video);
- knowledge of best practices for assessing young dual language learners;
- use of a valid, reliable, culturally, and linguistically appropriate tool created specifically for ongoing assessment in all developmental domains;
- training on how to properly use the selected assessment tool including accurate interpretation of the results;

- understanding of how to use the assessment results to individualize for each child's current developmental level(s) and next steps in the child's development and learning; and
- active engagement of parents and family members as equal partners throughout the ongoing assessment process.

Additionally, management staff are responsible for developing and implementing systems to support the assessment process and key elements.

Questions to Consider for Planning and Programming the Ongoing Assessment Process:

- How is the program's ongoing assessment process grounded in sound child development and early childhood educational practice?
- How does the program ensure that staff gather ongoing assessment information in a child's home language(s), second language, and in a culturally sensitive manner?
- How does the program ensure that information is gathered from multiple sources including: parents and family members; teachers; home visitors; family child care providers; others who may work with the child, such as therapists or mental health consultants; and Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP) for infants and toddlers with disabilities?
- How are parents/families engaged in the ongoing assessment process?
- What systems are in place to support staff in engaging in the ongoing assessment process? For example, how does the program ensure that staff have knowledge of child development as well as abilities to observe and record objectively? Do staff have dedicated time on a regular basis to review assessment data to plan for each child and family?
- How does the program ensure that staff communicate results from ongoing assessment to parents/family members and other early childhood professionals, such as therapists or consultants, in a timely manner?

Questions to Consider About the Assessment Tool:

- How does the program decide which assessment tool to use?
- How does the program select an assessment tool that is valid, reliable, and culturally and linguistically appropriate for the children served in the program?
- In the absence of valid and reliable assessment tools in a child's home language(s), what additional strategies are used, such as observation and input from family members, in conjunction with the tool that staff are trained to use?
- How are staff trained in using the program's chosen assessment tool(s) and using assessment results to plan and individualize for each child?
- How often do staff receive follow-up training or other forms of support related to the use of the program's chosen assessment tool(s)?

Performance Standards, Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations and Head Start Act, P.L. 110-134:

- 1304.3(a)(1)(i)-(ii) Assessment means the ongoing procedures used by appropriate qualified personnel throughout the period of a child's eligibility to identify:
 - (i) The child's unique strengths and needs and the services appropriate to meet those needs; and the resources, priorities; and

(ii) Concerns of the family and the supports and services necessary to enhance the family's capacity to meet the developmental needs of their child.

- 1304.20(d) Grantees and delegate agencies must implement ongoing procedures by which Early Head Start and Head Start staff can identify any new or recurring medical, dental, or developmental concerns so that they may quickly make appropriate referrals. These procedures must include: periodic observations and recording, as appropriate, of individual children's developmental progress, changes in physical appearance and emotional and behavioral patterns. In addition, these procedures must include observations from parents and staff.
- 1304.20(f)(1) Grantee and delegate agencies must use the information from the screening for developmental, sensory, and behavioral concerns, the ongoing observations, medical and dental evaluations and treatments, and insights from the child's parents to help staff and parents determine how the program can best respond to each child's individual characteristics, strengths, and needs.
- 1304.20(f)(2)(i) To support individualization for children with disabilities in their programs, grantee and delegate agencies must assure that services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families support the attainment of the expected outcomes contained in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) for children identified under the infants and toddlers with disabilities program (Part C) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as implemented by their State or Tribal government.
- 1304.21(a)(1)(i) Child development and education approach for all children . . . must be developmentally and linguistically appropriate, recognizing that children have individual rates of development as well as individual interests, temperaments, languages, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles.
- 1304.21(a)(2)(ii) Parents must be provided opportunities to increase their child observation skills and to share assessments with staff that will help plan the learning experiences.
- 1307.2 *Child-level assessment data* means the data collected by an agency on an individual child from one or more valid and reliable assessments of a child's status and progress, including but not limited to direct assessment, structured observations, checklists staff or parent report measures, and portfolio records or work samples.
- 1307.3(2)(ii) A Head Start or Early Head Start agency shall be required to . . . analyze individual ongoing, child-level assessment data for all children birth to age five participating in the program and using that data in combination with input from parents and families to determine each child's status and progress with regard to, at a minimum, language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development and to individualize the experiences, instructional strategies, and services to best support each child.

The following standards from 1308 are for programs serving children 3–5 years old, but they are important for all Head Start programs serving children from birth to five.

- 1308.6(d) (d) Developmental assessment . . . is the collection of information on each child's functioning in these areas: gross and fine motor skills, perceptual discrimination, cognition, attention skills, self-help, social and receptive skills and expressive language. The disabilities coordinator must coordinate with the education coordinator in the on-going assessment of each Head Start child's functioning in all developmental areas by including this developmental information in later diagnostic and program planning activities for children with disabilities.

- 1308.18(a) The grantee must ensure that the disabilities coordinator and the health coordinator work closely together in the assessment process and follow up to assure that the special needs of each child with disabilities are met.

Head Start Act:

- 641A(a)(1)(B) scientifically based and developmentally appropriate education performance standards related to school readiness that are based on the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework to ensure that the children participating in the program, at a minimum, develop and demonstrate-- (i) language knowledge and skills, including oral language and listening comprehension; (ii) literacy knowledge and skills, including phonological awareness, print awareness and skills, and alphabetic knowledge; (iii) mathematics knowledge and skills; (iv) science knowledge and skills; (v) cognitive abilities related to academic achievement and child development; (vi) approaches to learning related to child development and early learning; (vii) social and emotional development related to early learning, school success, and social problem solving; (viii) abilities in creative arts; (ix) physical development; and (x) in the case of limited English proficient children, progress toward acquisition of the English language while making meaningful progress in attaining the knowledge, skills, abilities, and development described in clauses (i) through (ix), including progress made through the use of culturally and linguistically appropriate instructional services.
- 641A(b)(2) The measures under this section shall
 - (A) be developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate for the population served;
 - (B) be reviewed periodically, based on advances in the science of early childhood development;
 - (C) be consistent with relevant, nationally recognized professional and technical standards related to the assessment of young children;
 - (D) be valid and reliable in the language in which they are administered;
 - (E) be administered by staff with appropriate training for such administration;
 - (F) provide for accommodations for children with disabilities and children who are limited English proficient;
 - (G) be high-quality research-based measures that have been demonstrated to assist with the purpose for which they were devised.
- 641A(b)(3)(A) The measures shall be designed, as appropriate, for the purpose of
 - (i) helping to develop the skills, knowledge, abilities, and development described in subsection (a)(1)(B) of children participating in Head Start programs, with an emphasis on measuring skills that scientifically valid research has demonstrated are related to children's school readiness and later success in school;
 - (ii) improving classroom practices, including reviewing children's strengths and weaknesses and individualizing instruction to better meet the needs of the children involved;
 - (iii) identifying the special needs of children;
 - (iv) improving overall program performance in order to help programs identify problem areas that may require additional training and technical assistance resources.
- 642(f)(5) use research-based assessment methods that reflect the characteristics described in section 641A(b)(2) in order to support the educational instruction and school readiness of children in the program

Resources:

Early Head Start National Resource Center. *EHS TA Paper No. 17: Individualizing Care for Infants and Toddlers – Part 2*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Administration for Children and Families/Office of Head Start. 2014.

Early Head Start National Resource Center. *EHS TA Paper No. 15: Observation: The Heart of Individualizing Responsive Care*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Administration for Children and Families/Office of Head Start. 2013.

Early Head Start National Resource Center. *What Is Quality Data for Programs Serving Infants and Toddlers?* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Administration for Children and Families/Office of Head Start. 2013.

Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. *Resources for Measuring Services and Outcomes in Head Start Programs Serving Infants and Toddlers*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Administration for Children and Families/Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. 2011.
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/resources_for_measuring_services_and_outcomes.pdf.

National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness. *Gathering and Using Language Information that Families Share*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Administration for Children and Families/Office of Head Start. n.d.
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/docs/dll_background_info.pdf.

National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement. *Family Engagement and Ongoing Child Assessment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Administration for Children and Families/Office of Head Start. 2011. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/docs/family-engagement-and-ongoing-child-assessment-081111.pdf>.

National Research Council. *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. 2008. http://158.71.31.30/sites/default/files/opre/early_child_assess.pdf.

The following resource from the National Center for Quality Teaching and Learning is a tool to help preschool programs decide on assessment tools and curricula that align with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. However, the elements for analyzing assessment tools—how well the tools reflect **coverage** and **balance** of the five essential domains and the **depth** and **difficulty** for the range of skills and developmental levels of the children in the program—can be applied to tools that assess infant–toddler development and learning.

National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning. *Curriculum, Assessment and the Head Start Framework: An Alignment Tool*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Administration for Children and Families/Office of Head Start. 2011.
<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/docs/alignment-guide.pdf>.

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This Tip Sheet is not a regulatory document. Its intent is to provide a basis for dialogue, clarification, and problem solving among Office of Head Start, Regional Offices, TA consultants, and grantees. If you need further clarification on Head Start policies and regulations, please contact your Regional Program Specialist.