

Recommended Measures in Early Childhood Screening

What is Screening?

Screening is one part of a larger system of assessment for young children and is defined as “the use of a brief procedure or instrument designed to identify, from within a large population of children, those who may need further assessment to verify developmental and/or health risks” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2004). The primary goal of screening is to document normal aspects of a child’s health and development, while identifying potential problems that need further assessment and follow-up (Luehr & Hoxie, 1995). Screening is a brief procedure which indicates a child’s health and/or developmental status at a single point in time. A screening program always must include follow-up for those children who may not be meeting milestones and, therefore, would benefit from further, more in-depth assessment.

What Resources Are Available for Screening?

In 2004, Kentucky published *Kentucky’s Early Childhood Continuous Assessment Guide* (CAG: KDE, 2004) as part of the series, *Building a Strong Foundation for School Success* (KDE, 2003). The CAG was a result of many meetings and discussions by an Assessment Work Group of state-wide early childhood professionals who were convened to review and recommend appropriate screening and assessment instruments for children birth to 5 years of age. One chapter in the CAG is devoted to “Screening;” many of the recommendations below are taken from this resource. For training on screening tools recommended for use in Kentucky, contact the Training Into Practice Program at <http://kentuckypartnership.org/tipp>.

What Are Recommended Methods of Screening?

Two primary methods exist for screening young children. One method is a community screening, which is broad-based, widely publicized, and targets all children of a given age range. This type of screening generally is done at one point in time on a regular basis (e.g., annually). A second method is to conduct screening within a particular program or classroom. For this type of screening, administrators need to decide if the screening will be conducted at one point in time (e.g., annually) or if it will occur periodically. The latter allows for children to be screened who may enter the program later in the year and also permits limited tracking of the developmental progress of the children.

Who Can Administer Screenings; What Are Some Examples; What is the Cost?

In addition to being brief, screening tools should be able to be administered by paraprofessionals, volunteers, and families with appropriate training, unless the publisher specifies otherwise. Approved screening instruments for use in KY are listed on the last page of the “Screening” section in the CAG, and are reviewed and updated by the Assessment Work Group as new instruments become available. Criteria for selection of approved screeners include the following: is technically adequate, has a proven research base, includes families, is easy to score and administer, examines all domains of development, is appropriate for early childhood ages and diverse learners, is reasonable in cost, and provides training materials (KDE, 2004).

Screeners need to be designed to allow for ease of administration and to identify children in all types of early care settings. The cost of each KY-approved screener can be obtained from its publisher.

What is the Difference between Screening and Assessment?

A screening tool is designed only to identify children who may need additional assessment in order to determine their progress on age-appropriate norms. Screening tools are intended to be brief in administration, used with a large population of children, and contain items that examine broad developmental milestones. Screening tools are not designed to assess a child's specific strengths and weaknesses in various domains, to give guidance for planning intervention, or to plan program improvements. A screening tool is not to be confused with an assessment instrument. As described in the CAG (KDE, 2004), classroom or instructional assessments are designed to identify individual children's needs for instructional planning, to develop individualized plans, and to inform families and teams of children's progress. Assessment instruments include numerous items to assess child development in detail and are helpful for program planning. For further information on the appropriate uses of assessment instruments, see McCormick and Gooden's (2009) *Reliability Measures in Early Childhood Assessment*.

When Is It Not Appropriate to Use a Screening Tool?

It is not appropriate to use a screening tool for eligibility purposes or for instructional planning. Specifically, screening is not intended:

- for children who already are receiving special services,
- to determine program effectiveness,
- to diagnose a disability, or
- as the primary tool for determining a child's progress.

References

- Council of Chief State School Officers. (2004). *The words we use: A glossary of terms for early childhood education standards and assessments*. Retrieved May 11, 2004 from www.ccsso.org/eceaglossary
- Kentucky Department of Education. (2004). *Building a strong foundation for school success: Kentucky's early childhood continuous assessment guide*. Frankfort, KY: Author.
- Luehr, R., & Hoxie, A. (Eds.) (1995). *Early childhood screening: Program administration manual*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Department of Education.
- McCormick, K. & Gooden, C. (2009). *Reliability measures in early childhood assessment*. Kentucky Early Childhood Data System, Human Development Institute, University of Kentucky.

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