



Center for Early Education and Development

Questions About Kids

What Does It Mean When My Young Child is “Assessed”?

Why do Young Children get “Assessed”?

As a parent, you may have concerns about how your very young child is developing. You may have specific questions, such as: Why is her behavior sometimes different from what I see other children doing? Why is he so angry (or scared or aggressive) so much of the time? Shouldn't she be talking by now? Finding answers to questions about your child's development is important. And the earlier, the better. If there is a problem, you can work to solve it and steer your child's development in the right direction.

At times like this, you may need to have a formal assessment done to answer your questions, reduce your worries, and decide what to do. Because parents make the final decisions about their children, you need to understand the assessment process, and ask questions about anything that is unclear. Below is background information for parents about what happens in an assessment.

The Role of Parents

Parents are involved in the entire assessment process. Professionals need information provided by parents, and professionals and parents together define the purpose of the assessment and the questions to be answered. What do we want to know? What is the problem to be solved? What decisions need to be made, and what information is needed to make those decisions? These are questions for discussion between parents and professionals.

The Bigger Picture

Asking questions about the child and the child's world is essential. Knowing more about his or her world can help to better define the assessment plan and provide possible answers to the questions. What do we know about the child, the family, the community and culture, as well as the setting(s) in which the concerns arise? How common are the problems? Is there something about the environment or is there some history that might contribute to the current problem? What solutions have been tried before and how did they work?

The Parts of an Assessment

Thorough assessments — assessments that make you confident that the behavior or problem has been completely and properly documented and investigated — take time and typically involve a number of procedures. These may include a review of existing information and records, interviews with key people for relevant history and prior observations, direct observation of the child, and sometimes, the use of tests designed for specific problems. If tests are used, they must be appropriate for the age, development and culture of the child; for the behavior being measured; and for the assessment questions. Most tests require a trained, often licensed professional to administer and interpret them. When in doubt, parents should ask about the qualifications of the person giving the test and the usefulness of the methods for gathering or interpreting information.



Special Considerations

Assessing infants and toddlers is challenging. Just as infants and toddlers are limited in their ability to communicate and to understand, so too are adults limited in their ability to communicate and to understand. Parents and professionals must rely upon their knowledge, skills, and intuition to make sense of what they see, and strive to maintain the highest personal or professional standards while being keenly aware of their own biases and limitations.

The basic ethical principle of “informed consent” must be adhered to, letting people know that an assessment is recommended, what will happen during the assessment, and how the results will be used. It is the responsibility of parents to make appropriate decisions for their babies, and the responsibility of the professionals involved to keep parents informed of the options and alternatives during any formal observation or assessment.

The Results

When the assessment is complete, the professional will look at the results, figure out what they mean for your child, and talk to you about them. First, make sure you are clear about the problem and the process and ask questions if you are not. Talking about the results should help everyone involved have a shared understanding of your child, a shared vision about the goals for intervention, and a shared commitment to the steps that need to be taken to reach those goals to do what is best for your child.

Conclusion

An assessment can be a helpful tool for answering your questions, reducing your worries, ensuring that your child’s development is on track, and getting your child the help he or she may need. Throughout the assessment process, it is the responsibility of the professionals involved to attend to family privacy, confidentiality of the information gathered, and cultural sensitivity. And, most importantly, it is important that parents and professionals work together to ensure that the process is understood by those involved in the assessment process.

By Thom Davis, Ph.D., Licensed Psychologist, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

For More Information

For more information about assessment and developmental problems in very young children, call your health care provider or Minnesota Children with Special Health Needs/MDH at 1-800-728-5420.

Reference:

Gibbs, E.D. & Teti, D.M. (Eds.). (1990). *Interdisciplinary assessment of infants: A guide for early intervention professionals*. New York: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Questions About Kids is on the Web at:

<http://cehd.umn.edu/ceed>

**University of Minnesota
Center for Early Education and Development
1954 Buford Avenue, Suite 425
St. Paul, Minnesota, 55108**

Copyright © 2009 by Center for Early Education and Development

These materials may be freely reproduced for education/training or related activities. There is no requirement to obtain special permission for such uses. We do, however, ask that the following citation appear on all reproductions:

Reprinted with permission of the Center for Early Education and Development (CEED), College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota, 1954 Buford Avenue, Suite 425, St. Paul, Minnesota, 55108; phone: 612-625-3058; fax: 612-625-2093; e-mail: ceed@umn.edu; web site: <http://cehd.umn.edu/ceed>.

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
+ HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

The “Question About Kids” series is published by the Center for Early Education and Development to provide state-of-the-art information about young children and families. They are reviewed by a panel of child development experts at the University of Minnesota. For further information, contact the Center at 612-625-3058.