

TATS eUpdate
Evaluation and Assessment of Young Children

**Communicating and Collaborating with Families
During the Screening, Evaluation and Assessment Process**
December 2007

Best Practice:

Parents of young children with special needs play a vital role in the screening, evaluation and assessment process. Parents and family members do more than provide consent for services, they offer information that can guide the process and provide input into development of a well-designed educational plan. The establishment of a positive parent-professional collaboration can result in education and empowerment of the family members and can provide the early intervention team with valuable information.

Preparing for the Assessment

One step of preparing families for the assessment process is explaining the steps in that process. This can help decrease families' concerns and fears. Meeting with families prior to the assessment and establishing rapport with the parents or other family members is a good way to do this. Some tips for success:

- Verify the assessment is complete, accurate, and presented in such a way as to maximize understanding. Explanations may need to be repeated and given in different formats. Written material following a verbal conference gives the family time to study what was said and process the information.
- Ask families if they have any questions/concerns they would like to see addressed during the assessment.
- The family has valuable information to share about their child that may not be observed during the formal evaluation sessions and may positively or negatively affect the assessment process and information gathering. This includes:
 - Developmental milestones
 - Child preferences – likes and dislikes
 - Activity level of child
 - The best way to interact with the child
 - Differences in the child's behavior across settings
 - Social interactions outside of the evaluation setting
 - The best time of day for the child to be evaluated
 - How the child interacts with other adults

At the Team Meeting

When the assessment team meets, all team members (including family members) should introduce themselves, and explain their role in the assessment process. If notes are going to be taken by the team, there should be some information provided to the family about what types of notes are going to be taken and the reason for taking notes. Finally, the meeting should not be a one-way question and answer session. Family members and all members of the team should have the opportunity to ask questions, request further clarification, and provide input.

Sharing Assessment Results with Families

If families are active participants in the process, sharing information about the results of the assessment may be easier. Information that is shared must be in a format that is useful to the family. Discussions can occur during the process of the assessment or a meeting with the family which should be held after the assessment to discuss the results. Follow up can occur either by phone or in person to answer any questions. A written report for the family (in their primary language) is vital. As with all members of the team, families need the same information as other team members. Results of assessments should be shared with the family as soon as possible.

Reflection:

1. How are parents, or families, involved in the screening, evaluation and/or assessment process?
2. What policies or procedures are in place to reduce anxiety or address parental fears and concerns?
3. Have team members been trained to work with parents and families?
4. Are the current methods used to establish a parent-professional collaboration working?
5. Are parents able to provide feedback to the team? If yes, how so?

The greatest compliment that was ever paid me was when someone asked me what I thought, and attended to my answer. - Henry David Thoreau

References and Resources:

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Technical Assistance & Training System (TATS)

Statewide project providing technical assistance and training to programs in Florida serving prekindergarten children with disabilities. Website provides information and resources on curriculum and instruction, evaluation and assessment, family involvement, inclusion, program effectiveness/quality, and transition, as well as, linking early childhood partners. www.tats.ucf.edu

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