

Issues Related to Planning a Child's Evaluation and Assessment

Two things should take place during a planning conversation for evaluation and assessment. First, specific issues about the evaluation and assessment need to be discussed. Second, based on this conversation, decisions need to be made about how to structure the evaluation so that family and provider questions are answered in a comfortable, supportive environment.

The following issues should be discussed with families as part of the planning conversation for evaluation and assessment:

- Family preferences for mode of communication
- Child's participation (current and desired) in his or her daily settings and key family routines and activities
- Behavioral characteristics of the child
- Child's medical history
- What an eligibility evaluation and assessment looks like
- How eligibility is determined
- When and how evaluation and assessment results will be shared with a family

Family Preferences for Mode of Communication

Determine a child's and family's native language. Do not assume that a child understands your language even when a parent does, or vice versa. Also, find out if an interpreter is needed, or whether a child or parent is hearing impaired, and what kind of communication they use.

Sylvia's Story

Sylvia, a family service coordinator, learned several important communication tips from talking with a parent using a sign language translator. The most important point was to stop talking when she gave printed information to a parent who needed to look at the translator, and not the brochure, in order to understand her message.

Child's Participation in Daily Settings and Key Family Routines and Activities

Explore with a family how a child's strengths and challenges affect his or her participation in daily activities. For example, if a parent expresses concern that a child is not sitting up, explore the situations in which the parent would like to see the child sit and participate (e.g., playing with a brother, petting the family cat, sitting in a high chair at meal times with the family).

Also, clarify any referral concerns and questions that parents may have, including areas of development about which the family would like to have more information. Frequently, family members notice that their child is not talking or walking like other children of similar age, or there may be concerns due to a child's medical status or health issues. If these questions or information requests cannot be answered during an initial planning conversation, be sure they are relayed to the appropriate early intervention.

Katrina's Story

Katrina, a family service coordinator, listened to a mother express concerns about whether her daughter's hearing was actually assessed while in the NICU. She relayed the mother's concerns to the evaluators who would review the child's medical reports.

Behavioral Characteristics of a Child

Behavioral characteristics might influence evaluation and assessment results, such as the time of day when a child is most alert, or the responsiveness to strangers. Ask about having comfort objects available, such as a special stuffed animal or pacifier. Obviously, family members will provide the most comfort for a child who is wary or fatigued by unfamiliar people and materials.

Tyler's Story

Tyler's mother described how hard it was to calm him since he had dropped his beloved teddy bear at a yard sale, and it was sold to an unsuspecting neighbor. Ceila agreed wholeheartedly with the mother that the bear should be back in hand before eligibility evaluation.

Child's Medical History

- A child's medical history, including diagnosis and reports from previous assessments, can be used to streamline a child's evaluation for eligibility since it is not necessary to repeat evaluations if results are still valid. Federal and Maryland laws guarantee eligibility by virtue of having a condition that is associated with a high probability of developmental delay, such as a chromosomal disorder, prematurity, or low birth weight less than 1200 grams at birth.

What an Eligibility Evaluation and Assessment Looks Like

- Explain what an eligibility evaluation and assessment looks like so that families have an idea of what will happen. Include in your description:
 - Names and roles of providers who will participate in the evaluation and assessment, if known (if not, provide this information as soon as possible)
 - Summary of the five developmental areas (communication; language; physical including hearing and vision; social and emotional; and adaptive), which must be assessed according to federal/state law. It is often helpful to give simple examples of the five areas, so that families can understand what the evaluation team will be looking for

How Eligibility is Determined

- It is helpful to review with families that the purpose of the Part C early intervention program in Maryland, as defined by federal and state law, is to provide support and services to families when a child meets the following criteria:
 - Is 25% delayed in one of five developmental areas (cognitive, physical, including vision and hearing, communication, social and emotional; adaptive)
 - Demonstrates atypical development or behavior in one of the five areas that interferes with current development, and is likely to result in a subsequent delay (even when diagnostic instruments and procedures do not document a 25% delay)

- Has a diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay

When and How Results of Evaluation and Assessment will be Shared with the Family

- Families should receive immediate verbal feedback about any evaluation and assessment on the same day that these procedures are conducted. They should also have the opportunity to ask questions and share their observations about their child's performance. Information about when written reports will be completed should also be discussed.