Meaningful Assessment

Take some time to review the following summary, which is wholly based on the article: Appropriate and Meaningful Assessment in Family-Centered Programs by James Elicker and Mary Benson McMullen in the July 2013 issue of Young Children.

The process of developmentally appropriate assessment with infants and toddlers:

- Is a continual process that allows the caregiver to notice, note, think about, and then interact with families about the best way to support their child's development.
- Focuses on “who” the child is, and builds their strengths, as opposed to focusing on what the child cannot do.
- Takes into account the individual, including rates of development, temperaments, learning styles, interests, and preferences
- Respects families’ goals and vision for the child
- Employs various types of information: deep knowledge gained from getting to know the child and also from interactions with the child's family

Information gathering isn’t easy or quick, and will include many sources and formats.

- Your observations can occur from anecdotes or milestones that you observe or that families share. In addition to logs about caregiving routines about toileting and feeding, you may jot notes when they happen (on a notebook, sticky notes, a strategically-placed whiteboard, etc.); or you may prefer to record your observations when children nap.
- Journals and blogs. You may record your thoughts about what you see in a daily log, a weekly log, and/or a family journal. Family journals employ two-way communication to enrich both caregiver and family understanding of the whole child.
- Photo documentation is a rich way to share with families a children's experiences in your care setting.
- Developmental screenings can be helpful to identify special or medical needs. They can be completed by parents, caregivers, medical or social service staff, or early intervention professionals. These screenings can also be a starting point to identify a child's strengths. (Some examples include: Ages and Stages Questionnaire, BRIGANCE Early Childhood Screens, Denver II.)
- Structured assessments use a criterion-referenced developmental scale to assess a child's strengths. They work best when they're used as authentic assessments based on daily observations (as opposed to a uniform 'test' given to all children in care). Anecdotal observations from families can help identify a child's trajectory of development in the
• scale. Before making use of such an assessment, make sure your program's philosophy matches well with the assessment. (Some examples include: AEPS, BRIGANCE Inventory of Early Development III, Teaching Strategies Gold, The Ounce Scale.)

• **Portfolios** help provide a structure around collection and display of a child's achievements. Each portfolio is unique and can include work samples like drawings and paintings, items the child collected from the natural world, such as twigs, and caregiver reflections and reports.

• **Developmental profiles** help caregivers understand the continuum a child is on within a range of regularly expected development. This framework is helpful when viewed over time, perhaps two or three times a year.

• **Collaboration and reflection** helps underscore the partnership that caregivers and families share in a child's well-being. Formal conferences are encouraged a minimum of two or three times annually, not forgetting the time to connect daily during drop off and pick up. The strength of an open communication network becomes even more important when challenges or misunderstandings arise between caregivers and families.

• **Planning and goal setting** lets caregivers provide new experiences for the infants and toddlers in their care to achieve mutually agreed-on goals with the child's family.

**Source:**