



## What Families Want to Know About Assessment

1. **Assessment means working together to learn about your child.** Parents and professionals work together from the beginning. Parents know more about their child than anyone else, and professionals know about children and development in general. Together as a team, a thorough look at the child and his or her strengths can be completed. Family members can decide the role they wish to play in their child's assessment and who else should be part of the assessment team. They may choose to assist team members, observe and explain what the child is doing, or they may complete assessments with professionals watching and recording. Many factors influence how an infant or young child grows and learns. Some examples are the child's health, temperament, daily family life, experiences outside the home, and the families' values, beliefs and traditions. All these things affect the way a child plays, moves, eats, talks, listens, and develops in every way. How a child "organizes" experiences is important too. For example, how long does a child pay attention to you or a toy? How does he get what he wants or get you to help him? How does the child show feelings? What does the child like to do? What are his fears? Thinking about all these questions collectively will help you and the professionals understand your child's development.

2. **An assessment should give a picture of your child in typical daily activities and settings.** An assessment is a chance to learn about everything a child can already do, what she is interested in and enjoys, and where she is having difficulties. Both professionals and parents can learn most from observing the child in several familiar settings (playing both at home and at child care, for example), with familiar people and materials. In addition, parents, relatives and others who know the child well should offer the professionals on the team as much information as they can about the child's development. They can do this through meetings, written reports (such as baby progress books or health records) or with snap shots and home videos. Observation of the child at home is more important than any special test. There is no single test that provides all of the information and no test is complete without parent input.

3. **Watching a young child do something he enjoys with someone he trusts is an important part of an assessment.** A developmental assessment is the time to learn about how a child uses his or her abilities to interact with people and objects in the environment. Children usually function at their best with the people they are most comfortable with and places where they feel at ease. Professionals can learn by observing what a child and parent (or other caregiver) do on their own. The examiner also can coach parents to try a certain game or interaction in order to give the child a chance to show a specific ability. Assessment information can be gathered during typical routines and activities such as how a child eats during a snack, use of objects during play or use of gestures while picking up toys or snack materials and putting them away.

4. **Assessment should be informative and helpful.** Family members are often advised to seek a developmental assessment as a first step in the process of deciding whether the child might benefit from early intervention. In most communities, assessment or evaluation must be completed before publicly funded interventions can begin. A good assessment is a helpful "intervention", whether or not it marks the beginning of a longer treatment program. Family members and parents say they learn new ideas and realize they are not alone with their questions when they have the chance to observe and talk about their child's development with experienced professionals. Professionals should use the assessment as an opportunity to describe the child's abilities and the progression of future skill development.

