

Chapter V

STUDENT EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES



Social Developmental Study
Problem-solving Consultation
Classroom Observation
Functional Behavioral Assessment
Mental Health Screening
MH Screening as Part of an Evaluation For EBD
Standardized Assessments
Functional Adaptive Behavior Skills
Normed/Criterion References Behavior Rating Scale

Chapter V: Student Evaluation and Assessment Procedures

Objective: To provide an overview of the assessment and evaluation processes used by school social workers.

School Social Workers use assessment to learn about the strengths and functioning of a student within the school, home and community environments. Assessment is a systematic process of gathering information that can be used to guide a school social worker in deciding on interventions, providing consultation to school staff and parents and assisting in the identification and planning for students. School Social workers use a variety of methods in assessment which may include student, parent and staff interviews; observations across home, school and community environments; review of records; administration of questionnaires and rating scales; and sociometric techniques. School Social workers use assessment to guide their own delivery of service and also to assist school assessment teams. Assessments need to be individualized and vary depending on the purpose for the assessment. School Social Workers need to use culturally sensitive assessment practices.

This section will further detail the assessment and evaluation processes of Social Developmental Study, Problem-Solving Consultation, Observations, Functional Behavior Assessments, Adaptive Behavior Assessment, Mental Health Screening and Standardized Assessments.

Social Developmental Study

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (34 C.F.R. § 300.24) identifies “preparing a social or developmental history regarding a child with a disability” as a key function of social work services in the schools. A Social Developmental Study is a comprehensive assessment process used by school social workers to obtain information about a student’s social, emotional and behavior functioning within the context of school, home and community. It includes cultural, environmental and family influence on the student’s learning and behavior. A Social Developmental Study contributes valuable information to school assessment teams, staff and parents in identifying student strengths and areas of need, developing interventions and positive behavior support plans, identifying eligibility for special services in school and assisting the school social worker in identifying and connecting students and parents to needed community resources and counseling.

A Social Developmental Study gathers past and present information on a student’s social, emotional, behavioral, academic functioning and development across the school, home and community setting. Multiple sources are used to obtain information including: interviews with parents, teachers, the student and others; observations of the student in multiple school settings and the home when possible; a review of school records; and, agency reports and evaluations.

The information gathered through multiple sources should cover the student’s developmental history, school history, family history, cultural influences and current issues and concerns. The developmental history will include health history, birth and development, interpersonal relationships, social play, emotional development, temperament, coping skills, problem solving skills, interests, activities, talents, adaptive behavior, self esteem, independence, self awareness and responsibilities. School history will include early learning experiences both in and out of the home, day care, preschool, formal and informal learning experiences, parent and teacher observation of student’s learning, behavior, social and emotional functioning in school environments over time. Family history, cultural background and current issues will cover current family structure and relationships, parenting patterns, family interests and activities, stressors or areas of concern, history of present or past learning, social or emotional issues within the family or extended family and cultural and religious influences.

The information about the family and student obtained through a Social Developmental Study is summarized and reported within the comprehensive assessment report prepared by a school’s assessment team. Parents, teachers, the student and others need to be informed of how the information they have contributed to the Social Developmental Study will be reported and with whom it will be shared. Some information may be too confidential to be included in an assessment report for school records. Only information relevant to the student’s learning should be included.

School social workers use their training and skills in interviewing and knowledge about child development, families, mental health, behavior, schools and learning to guide them in preparing each Social Developmental Study. See appendix for a sample of questions that may be included. Each Social Developmental Study will be individualized to meet the needs of the student being assessed.

Problem-solving Consultation

Consultation in school social work is a process of collaborating with others in service of student learning. The process is generally solution-focused and acknowledges the wisdom that the consultee and the consultant offer in their work together.

School social workers serving as consultants can assume the following roles: “objective observer/reflector, fact finder, process counselor, alternative identifier and linkage resource person, trainer/educator/ informational expert (and) advocate” (Gianesen, 2007, p. 180). The consultation can target school-wide issues or problems of individual students.

Often, before initiating a formal referral for assessment, teachers, parents and administrators contact school social workers to discuss concerns about a student, and decide what to do. The purpose of these initial consultative contacts is to clearly identify and articulate the following:

- the problem (when the problem happens, how long the problem has been occurring, how often the problem happens, how others respond to the problem, etc.),
- the desired goal (what specifically will be happening when the problem is no longer a problem),
- specific criteria that can be used to determine when the goal is obtained,
- the alternative courses of action to obtain the goal,
- the intended and unintended consequences of each course of action
- the plan with action steps and a timeline to obtain the desired goal, and
- the method of assessing goal attainment.

For more information on consultation in school social work see the following resources:

Albers, C., & Kratochwill, T. (2006). Teacher and principal consultations: Best practices. In C. Franklin, M. B. Harris, & P. Allen-Meares (Eds.) *The school services sourcebook: A guide for school-based professional* (pp. 971-976). NY: Oxford.

Dinkmeyer, D., & Simon, B. (1991). *Consultation: Creating school-based interventions* (2nd ed.). Philadelphia: Brunner-Routledge.

Gianesen, J. (2007). Consultation in school social work. In L. Bye & M. Alvarez (Eds.) *School Social Work: Theory to practice* (pp. 175-194). Belmont, CA: Thomson/Brooks/Cole.

Classroom Observation

School social workers often gather information regarding a student’s behavior and performance in the school setting by conducting observations. Observations may be conducted as part of a formal special education evaluation. In these cases, school social workers will most likely conduct a systematic observation. To complete a systematic observation, the school social worker will identify a presenting problem or target behavior prior to conducting the systematic observation. During the observation, the school social worker will collect data that will assist in identifying the frequency, duration and intensity of a specific problem behavior. Data may include a count of how many times a particular behavior occurs during a certain time period, a comparison of a particular student’s behavior to a peer’s behavior or specific information regarding the duration of a target behavior and length of time between episodes of the behavior.

School social workers may conduct more informal observations to become familiar with a particular student's school performance within a particular teacher's classroom. By conducting informal observations, social workers may be better able to assist classroom teachers in developing prereferral interventions, assist parents in making appropriate referrals to community services and gather valuable information about students with whom they work. (See appendix for various formats).

Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)

Functional behavior assessment and the development of student-specific positive behavior interventions is critical for providing appropriate specialized services for students with disabilities that demonstrate challenging behaviors in the school setting. Because each student has unique educational needs related to his or her disability, a school social worker is in a unique position to assist the child's team in understanding the function of the behavior and guide the team in developing positive skill-building interventions for the child.

IDEA 1997 amendments mandate that functional behavioral assessments be conducted and interventions plans developed when disciplinary sanctions may potentially result in extended removal of students from educational settings. They also encourage the use of "positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports" when addressing the needs of students whose behavior impedes their learning or the learning of others (34 C.F.R. 300.346(a)(2)(I)).

Even though a literal reading of the regulation could indicate that functional behavioral assessment is only required when students with disabilities are involved in disciplinary action, a rationale can be made that the 1997 IDEA statutory language suggests that an FBA be implemented as needed throughout the special education decision-making process (Tilly et al., 1998). This position stems from a series of connections between related sections of the 1997 IDEA Amendments:

300.532(a)(2)(b) states: "...the local education agency shall... use a variety of assessment tools to gather relevant functional and developmental information."

300.532(d) states "Tests and other evaluation materials include those tailored to assess specific areas of educational need and not merely those that are designed to provide a single general intelligence quotient."

34 C.F.R. 300.346(a)(2)(I) states that "...in the case of a child whose behavior impedes his or her learning or that of others, consider where appropriate, strategies, including positive behavioral interventions, strategies and supports to address the behavior."

The Minnesota criterion for the disability area of emotional and behavioral disorders currently requires that an FBA be conducted as part of the determination process for eligibility for emotional/behavioral disabilities (Minnesota Rule 3525.1329). Also, according to MN Rule, an FBA is required before a student's IEP team makes a determination that conditional procedures should be in a student's comprehensive behavior intervention plan (Minnesota Rule 3525.2710 subp. 4F). The Minnesota Rule that governs behavioral interventions for students with disabilities states "The objective of any behavioral intervention must be that pupils acquire appropriate behaviors and skills. It is critical that behavioral intervention programs focus on

skills acquisition rather than merely behavior reduction or elimination. Behavioral intervention policies, programs, or procedures must be designed to enable a pupil to benefit from an appropriate, individualized educational program as well as develop skills to enable him or her to function as independently as possible in their communities” (Minnesota Rule 3525.0850). Tilly, W. D., Knoster, T. P., Kovaleski, J., Bambara, L., Dunlap, G., & Kincaid, D. (1998).

Mental Health Screening

A school social worker may be called upon to conduct mental health screening activities as part of a comprehensive evaluation of a child for an emotional or behavioral disability (Minn. Rule 3528.1329)¹ or as a result of numerous school suspensions (Minn. Stat. § 121A.45, subd. 3)².

Definition of Mental Health Screening

Mental health screening is a brief, culturally sensitive process designed to identify children and adolescents who may be at risk of having impaired mental health functioning that warrants immediate attention, intervention or referral for diagnostic assessment. The primary purpose for screening is to identify the need for further assessment using a valid, reliable screening instruments.

Why Early Detection of Emotional and Behavioral Problems Is Important

A growing body of research has shown that early identification, assessment and intervention for emotional and behavioral problems for young children through adolescence can help prevent more serious problems, such as educational failure, substance abuse, involvement in the criminal justice system or suicide.

Early intervention can help reduce the significant impacts that children and adolescents with serious mental health problems may experience. Early intervention can also benefit children and youth with less serious problems by providing appropriate supports and treatment before these conditions worsen. Screening is the first step in early intervention, recognizing emotional and behavioral problems and providing help at an early and effective point. If problems are detected, further assessment and evaluation can determine the appropriate care and services needed.

Principles and Standards for Mental Health Screening Activities

The early detection of emotional and behavioral disorders screening activities must adhere to standards and principles in whatever setting screening occurs.

- Screening must be voluntary, and parental consent obtained with clear procedures for notifying parents of the screening to be conducted and of the results.
- Screening instruments used must be shown to be both valid and reliable in identifying children in need of further assessment.
- Any person conducting screening must be qualified and appropriately trained.
- Screening must take into consideration the cultural background of a family and must be age-appropriate for the child or youth.
- Screening must never be used to make a diagnosis or to label children.
- If problems are detected, screening must be followed by an appropriate assessment, conducted by trained personnel, with linkage provided to appropriate services and supports.
- Always, confidentiality must be ensured.

References

Screening and Early Detection of Mental Health Problems in Children and Adolescents.

Testimony before the house appropriation subcommittee on labor/health and human services and education by Secretary Leavitt (2005) Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (<http://www.samhsa.gov/>)

¹Emotional or Behavioral Disorders Evaluation

The evaluation findings must be supported by current or existing data from:

- (1) clinically significant scores on standardized, nationally normed behavior rating scales;
- (2) individually administered, standardized, nationally normed tests of intellectual ability and academic achievement;
- (3) three systematic observations in the classroom or other learning environment;
- (4) record review;
- (5) interviews with parent, pupil, and teacher;
- (6) health history review procedures;
- (7) a mental health screening; and
- (8) functional behavioral assessment.

The evaluation may include data from vocational skills measures; personality measures; self-report scales; adaptive behavior rating scales; communication measures; diagnostic assessment and mental health evaluation reviews; environmental, socio-cultural, and ethnic information reviews; gross and fine motor and sensory motor measures; or chemical health assessments.

²Pupil Fair Dismissal Act

The Pupil Fair Dismissal Act (PFDA), which applies to all students enrolled in a public school, was amended in 2004 to include the following language:

If a pupil's total days of removal from school exceeds ten cumulative days in a school year, the school district shall make reasonable attempts to convene a meeting with the pupil and the pupil's parent or guardian prior to subsequently removing the pupil from school, and with the permission of the parent or guardian, arrange for a mental health screening for the pupil. The district is not required to pay for the mental health screening for the pupil. The purpose of this meeting is to attempt to determine the pupil's need for assessment or other services or whether the parent or guardian should have the pupil assessed or diagnosed to determine whether the pupil needs treatment for a mental health disorder.

Mental Health screening as part an Evaluation for an Emotional or Behavioral Disorder

A mental health screening, in the context of the EBD criteria, refers to an analysis of the data collected during a comprehensive evaluation that establishes that the student has a pattern of emotional or behavioral responses, withdrawal or anxiety, depression, problems with mood, or feelings of self-worth; disordered thought processes with unusual behavior patterns and atypical communication styles; or aggression, hyperactivity or impulsivity.

These problems must adversely affect educational or developmental performance, including intrapersonal, academic, vocational or social skills; be significantly different from appropriate age, cultural, or ethnic norms; and signify that the student has an established pattern of behavior for the purposes of referring a student for further evaluation of mental health needs among students evaluated for EBD eligibility. This is important especially in cases where the student may need a related service to benefit from special education instruction. A mental health screening is not a specific instrument or tool, nor is it as extensive as a formal mental health assessment done for purposes of establishing a mental health diagnosis (as outlined in DSM-IV, ICD 10). Definitions of mental health that appear in other parts of health or human service sections of Minnesota or federal law do not apply to this rule.

The mental health screening information is gathered from existing data such as the behavior rating scales, social developmental history, interviews and observations. Information gathered during an evaluation for EBD may suggest a possible mental health need for which further evaluation is indicated and the student's family may choose to seek further assessment from an appropriately licensed mental health professional or contact other agencies for coordinating interagency services. If information about a coexisting mental health is confirmed, the IEP team should consider school-based related services to meet that student's need and help the student to benefit from his or her special education services. Whether the IEP team needs to procure the assessment, or instead recommend that the family obtain one, hinges on whether the IEP team needs the assessment to provide special education and related services to the student.

Standardized Assessments

Standardized and criterion referenced assessment tools are often used in schools by school social workers and other school personnel. Standardized academic achievement assessments are commonly administered by special education teachers to determine a student's level of knowledge in reading, writing, and math. Standardized aptitude assessments are generally administered by the school psychologist to determine a student's ability to learn. School social workers often administer standardized adaptive behavior, functional behavior, and social assessments.

Standardized assessment tools "are ready-made instruments with proven records" (Franklin & Corcoran, 2003, p. 86). They are referred to as "standardized" because the same questions and procedures for administering and scoring the instrument are used regardless of who is being assessed or who is doing the assessment (LeCroy & Okamoto, 2002).

Standardized assessments are evaluated according to reliability and validity. An assessment is considered reliable when over time it "consistently measures some phenomenon with

accuracy” (Royce, 1999, p. 101.) Assessments are considered valid when they actually measure what they claim to measure. For example, if an instrument claims to measure self esteem, it actually measures self esteem. There are many different types of validity including content validity (which means the instrument samples the entire range of what it was designed to measure), criterion validity (which means the instrument’s scales are similar to other instruments designed to measure the same construct), and construct validity (which means the instrument is “able to discriminate among groups of individuals along the lines you would expect”) (Royce, 1999, p. 107).

Standardized assessment tools can be norm-referenced or criterion-referenced. Norm-referenced assessments use scores from a large sample to determine typical or average results for a given population. Scores can be reported as a standard score, a grade equivalent, a national percentile rank, a normal curve equivalent, or a national stanine (Mertler, 2003). Criterion-referenced assessments use ratings of competency or mastery on specific skills. Social skills assessments often use the criterion-referenced method.

Standardized assessments are used to: screen for early intervention; rapidly assess conditions; diagnose different social, emotional, behavioral or learning problems; and assess the effectiveness of interventions (LeCroy & Okamoto, 2002). It is important to remember that standardized assessments have limitations. They may not have been normed on culturally diverse populations and they only assess one or two aspects of a student. Assessment should always be customized based on the individual needs of the students.

Franklin, C., & Corcoran, K. (2003). Quantitative methods of measuring client behavior. In C. Jordan & C. Franklin (Eds.) *Clinical assessment for social workers*, pp. 71-96. Chicago, IL: Lyceum.

LeCroy, C., & Okamoto, S. (2002). Guidelines for selecting and using assessment tools with children. In A. Roberts & G. Greene (Eds.) *Social workers’ desk reference*, pp. 211-221. New York, NY: Oxford.

Mertler, C. (2003). Using standardized test data to guide instruction and intervention. ERIC Digest. Retrieved April 17, 2007 from <http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-4/standardized-test.html>

Royce, D. (1999). *Research methods in social work*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Thompson Learning.

Functional/Adaptive Behavior Skills

To substantiate the determination that a student has a Developmental Cognitive Delay or otherwise determine a student’s adaptive functioning, social workers may conduct a functional adaptive behavior evaluation. This type of evaluation requires that a school social worker meet with a parent or guardian to gather information regarding their child’s ability to complete a variety of functional tasks successfully. Some examples of adaptive functional tasks include a student’s ability to engage in self care, understand the concept of money or time, or engage in household chores. There are several standardized instruments that are utilized by school districts to determine a level of functional adaptive functioning (Scales of Independent Behavior, Revised, Adaptive Behavior System II, Vineland). Results from functional adaptive testing are interpreted by the evaluator to determine level of support needed in each the 7

domains of adaptive behavior identified by the Minnesota Department of Education and need to be listed. Once these results are interpreted, they are utilized to determine eligibility for special education services and the development of IEP goals and objectives.

Click on this link to access the DCD manual “Promising Practices for the Identification of Students with Development Disabilities” the manual contains a grid of nationally normed, technically adequate measures of adaptive behavior. http://education.state.mn.us/mde/Learning_Support/Special_Education/Categorical_Disability_Information/Developmental_Cognitive_Disabilities/index.html

Normed/Criterion References Behavior Rating Scale

School social workers have many tools available to determine if a child’s mental health concerns meets criteria for further assessment. In general, school social workers should consult with parents prior to screening, discuss results of screening with parents and assist parents in linking to community-based services.

There are several assessment tools that gather information from a variety of sources and gather several types of information depending upon the situation. School social workers have a number of Normed/Criterion Referenced Behavior Rating Scales from which to chose from (see appendix).