

Family-Directed Assessment Guidance

Purpose of Document

This document provides guidance to Early ACCESS stakeholders on family-directed assessment practices. The Iowa Administrative Rules for Early ACCESS (EA) reflect the 2011 IDEA Part C regulations. The purpose of this document is to clarify the Lead Agency's interpretation of the family-directed assessment process and what it means for Iowa. In addition, resources are provided at the end of the document.

Iowa Rules

The Iowa Administrative Rules for Early ACCESS were revised May 2012 to align with the 2011 IDEA Part C regulations.

120.321(5) Procedures for assessment of the child and family.

- a. An assessment of each infant or toddler with a disability must be conducted by qualified personnel in order to identify the child's unique strengths and needs and the early intervention services appropriate to meet those needs. The assessment of the child must include the following:
 - (1) A review of the results of the evaluation conducted under subrule 120.321(4);
 - (2) Personal observations of the child; and
 - (3) The identification of the child's needs in each of the developmental areas in subrule 120.21(1)
- b. A family-directed assessment must be conducted by qualified personnel in order to identify the family's resources, priorities, and concerns and the supports and services necessary to enhance the family's capacity to meet the developmental needs of the family's infant or toddler with a disability.

The family-directed assessment must:

- (1) Be voluntary on the part of each family member participating in the assessment;
- (2) Be based on information obtained through an assessment tool and also through an interview with those family members who elect to participate in the assessment; and
- (3) Include the family's description of its resources, priorities and concerns related to enhancing the child's development.

There are additional requirements in the Rules. The assessment is to be:

- family-directed;
- conducted by qualified personnel (who are trained in the areas in which they are conducting evaluations, assessments and services);
- voluntary on the part of each family member;
- based on information obtained through an interview process; and
- effective in identifying the family's resources, priorities, and concerns and the supports and services necessary to enhance the family's capacity to meet the developmental needs of the family's infant or toddler with a disability.

Iowa's Interpretation of the Regulations

The Lead Agency emphasizes that the family-directed assessment is a family-centered process that begins during the family engagement phase of a new referral and the 45-day timeline.

The regulation language requiring an "assessment tool" supports the research related to the importance of family involvement and family priority in the success of the IFSP and the IFSP outcomes. Rich conversations around interview questions should be the focal point and guide the team in creating outcomes that are most important to the family in supporting their child's development.

Using a tool, this interview should lead to a clear and accurate reflection (documented on the Family Statements page) of the resources, priorities and concerns that are identified by the family over the 45-day time period and as part of the ongoing process. Without this interview and these conversations, it would be very difficult to create an IFSP. This belief should be shared with families so that they are clearly aware this is a family-directed process and that both are most critical to outcome development.

Guidance on These Interpretations

The following provides a framework for Early ACCESS providers regarding the overall intent of the family-directed assessment process and its regulations and rules.

It is important to remember *where* this language is included in the regulations (Procedures for child and family assessment) and *what* potentially it is trying to improve. The intended purpose is to ensure thoughtful time and consideration is given to the family interview instead of merely a procedural step of checking a box during IFSP development. Hence, “through an assessment tool” implies something is used to glean more useful and helpful information that is available to all families at several points in their early intervention (EI) journey. The family is thereby a true partner in sharing what they feel useful to work on together with EI. It is not the use of a diagnostic instrument about family risk or other determinants for high risk factors. This should be kept in mind when identifying potential tools or developing tools for family-directed assessment in IFSP development.

Such tools that do exist include:

- ECO-mapping (to get a good picture of family informal and formal support networks);
- Robin McWilliam’s Routine Based Interview (RBI) which is both a tool and a process;
- Juliann Woods’ tools for assistance with interviews of the family for discovering child strengths and family routines and resources (<http://fgrbi.fsu.edu>);
- The FACS (Family Assessment Conversation Statements) adapted from Family Statements page of the Iowa IFSP; and
- The Puckett Institute tools, such as the ABC Matrix.

Other states and programs have developed “tools” over the years. Again, the “tools” are checklists, clever forms, processes that are more formalized interview questions and protocols.

This use of an assessment tool is not to be a standardized measure of family risk factors for abuse, neglect, poverty or lacking parenting skills. That is not what this section of regulation addresses, nor the intended purpose of IDEA Part C early intervention. Family support programs use these types of developed instruments for parent eligibility to their programs based on numbers of risk factors.

More Guidance from the Lead Agency

The following are practice points the Lead Agency wishes to emphasize in addition to the ECTA Center guidance:

- This is a systemic process and is to be used with all Early ACCESS families.
- The family-directed assessment process is an opportunity to embed Principle 4 of Early ACCESS Family Centered Principles: The ongoing work between families and providers is about identifying family concerns (priorities, hopes, needs, goals or wishes), finding family strengths, and the services and supports that will provide necessary resources to meet those needs.
- Service providers should view the family assessment as an important process which can provide essential information on the family and child, aiding the family's participation in the development of child and family outcomes. The “voluntary participation” requirement allowing the family the option to decline should be seen for what it is--a choice provided for families. Declining the assessment should not be viewed by service providers as a time saving option with less documentation requirements.
- These guiding conversations are necessary to understand and get to know the family. A family may choose not to document these conversations on the Family Statements page of the IFSP, but should clearly understand why this information is important to the process of development of their IFSP.

This process can be an effective means to help the family learn to “effectively communicate their child’s [and thus the family’s] needs” (one of the three family outcomes measured through the annual Family Survey).

Tools that have been commonly used in the field and/or published (see listing above) are preferred over locally developed tools or processes that have not gone through an outside review of their effectiveness in guiding the IFSP process and development. This outside review process must be coordinated with the EA State Coordinator/Team.

Resources

The Early ACCESS Leadership Group (EA Regional Liaisons, Coordinators and EC Supervisors) received professional development materials from a number of experts which can be accessed for further learning. They include:

- Robin McWilliam's Routines Based Early Intervention (RBI);
- ECO Mapping (included in the above RBI book);
- Family Guided Routines Based Intervention website of Juliann Woods (<http://fgrbi.fsu.edu/>)
- ABC Matrix--training was provided in the past--contact those in your AEA/agency;
- AEPS Family Report (Assessment Evaluation Programming System).

Iowa's participation by Early ACCESS in the Distance Mentoring Model of Personnel Development with Juliann Woods and staff from FSU supports and further defines the family- directed assessment process.