Selecting a Developmental Screening Instrument

These guidelines established by Parents as Teachers national office will assist programs in selecting a screening tool to best meet their needs.

Developmental screening is used as a first step to identify children who may be developing outside of what is considered typical. Because screening is intended for all children, the tool should be brief and easy to administer and score. Screening tests are norm-referenced, meaning the child's performance is being compared to a large group of children upon which it was standardized. And that group of children must include groups like the one that is to be screened.

In *Developmental Screening in Early Childhood: A Guide,* by Sam Meisels, the author cites four criteria for selection of a screening tool:

1. Consists of a brief procedure designed to identify children who may have a condition that could affect their overall potential for success in school.
2. Samples the domain of developmental tasks, rather than the domain of specific academic readiness accomplishments.
3. Focuses on performance in a wide range of areas of development including speech, language, cognition, perception, social, emotional and motor.
4. Includes information about how the test was developed and standardized, its normative characteristics, and its reliability and validity.

Reliability of a test refers to the degree to which test scores are consistent, dependable and repeatable. Validity is defined as the degree to which the test measures what it was designed to measure. There also should be reasonable sensitivity and specificity, that is, the test identifies children at risk for developmental concerns (sensitivity) and children who are developing on target (specificity). Hopefully, inappropriate referrals will be avoided; however, some over-referral may result.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) states that we must recognize and be sensitive to individual diversity and be "culturally and linguistically responsive" (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003). When possible, select a tool that matches the population to be screened, including the native language and customs (Brassard & Boehm, 2007).

The creators of the screening tool must be specific about training requirements. Finally, there must be a means upon which to base decisions for rescreening or further evaluation. This should be clear and easily understood by those administering the test and by parents.

References

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