Behavioral Observation and Screening in Child Care

Module 1: Introduction and Overview
**Observation** is when a child care worker recognizes and notes an identifiable performance or behavior and uses instruments such as checklists, anecdotal records and running records. The instruments are used to measure progress against a standard and to share results with assessment experts.

**Screening** means an instrument intended to identify and monitor normal development or possible developmental delay. Screening programs are not diagnostic, and are not based on whether a child has passed a certain curriculum.
Tommy

- can stand on his tiptoes, but cannot yet turn somersaults.
- can sing much of the “ABC” song, but doesn’t yet recognize letters.
- is easily frustrated, and hasn’t yet begun to work on showing emotion in more socially acceptable ways.
- can scribble back and forth with a crayon, but cannot yet use scissors.
- is beginning to share, but is not yet very cooperative.
Key Point

The caregiver must use a child’s age in order to interpret the child’s behaviors.
402.305 Licensing Standards; Child Care Facilities

(1) LICENSING STANDARDS.--The department shall establish licensing standards that each licensed child care facility must meet regardless of the origin or source of the fees used to operate the facility or the type of children served by the facility.

(a) The standards shall be designed to address the following areas:

1. The health, sanitation, safety, and adequate physical surroundings for all children in child care.
2. The health and nutrition of all children in child care.
3. The child development needs of all children in child care.
402.305 Licensing Standards; Child Care Facilities

(2) PERSONNEL.--Minimum standards for child care personnel shall include minimum requirements as to:
(d) Minimum training requirements for child care personnel.

1. Such minimum standards for training shall ensure that all child care personnel and operators of family day care homes serving at-risk children in a subsidized child care program pursuant to s. 402.3015 take an approved 40-clock-hour introductory course in child care, which course covers at least the following topic areas:

   e. Observation of developmental behaviors, including using a checklist or other similar observation tools and techniques to determine a child’s developmental level.
402.313 Family Day Care Homes

(1) Family day care homes shall be licensed under this act if they are presently being licensed under an existing county licensing ordinance, if they are participating in the subsidized child care program, or if the board of county commissioners passes a resolution that family day care homes be licensed. If no county authority exists for the licensing of a family day care home, the department shall have the authority to license family day care homes under contract for the purchase-of-service system in the subsidized child care program.

(a) If not subject to license, family day care homes shall register annually with the department, providing the following information:

6. Proof of successful completion of the 30-hour training course, as evidenced by passage of a competency examination, which shall include:

e. Observation of developmental behaviors, including using a checklist or other similar observation tools and techniques to determine a child’s developmental level.
Key Point

The Florida Legislature has mandated that child care providers complete a course that covers the topic of observation of developmental behaviors, including using a checklist or other similar observation tools and techniques, to determine the child’s developmental age level.
Activity: Parental Contact Hours Vs. Caregiver Contact Hours

6:15 a.m. Lucy wakes up, eats, gets dressed, brushes her teeth and hair
7:00 a.m. Lucy’s mom puts her in the car and they leave for child care - they talk and listen to the morning traffic report all the way to school,
7:30 a.m. Lucy’s mom carries her inside, signs her in, gives her hugs and kisses.
7:35 a.m. Lucy’s mom leaves for work.
    Lucy spends the day in her child care program.

6:00 p.m. Lucy’s mom picks her up from child care
6:30 p.m. They arrive home - Lucy watches cartoons while her mom makes dinner and then they eat. Lucy watches television while her mom cleans up the dinner dishes.
7:30 p.m. Lucy and her mom either read books, watch television, or talk during bath time.
8:15 p.m. Lucy brushes her teeth and puts on her pajamas.
    8:30 p.m. Lucy gives her mom hugs, kisses, and goes to sleep.
Key Point

Parents could be unaware of the signs of developmental delay. It is the child care provider who can help identify a child who might benefit from professional intervention.
Key Benefits of Developmental Screening

• Early detection of problems allows for timely referral for **intervention**.

• The caregiver’s attention can be focused on activities that **strengthen** the child’s skills.

• Increased volume and quality of information available to the parents regarding “in-the-home” activities that **support** normal development.

• Provides a common reference point and basis for interaction for parents, child care workers, and child development specialists.
Key Point

Proper screening leads to sound assessment so that early detection of potential developmental delays will determine the correct referral and intervention.
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Module 2: Child Development and Developmental Delay
Development in the Human Brain

- We learn throughout our lives, but it seems that there are early periods during which our brains most easily acquire the basic foundations for later skill development.

- If we miss an early window of opportunity, some later development is more difficult or even sometimes permanently compromised.

- When we discover that a child is struggling with a developmental task, we can involve that child in activities and exercises that place extra emphasis on the skills he needs to acquire.
What is a Developmental Disability?

Developmental disability -- A chronic condition that is diagnosed in childhood and substantially limits major life activities in adulthood.

Two specific developmental disabilities that you may see in children in your care are:

• **Autism** -- a group of brain-based neurological disorders characterized by **social** impairments, communication difficulties, and restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior

• **Down syndrome** -- a genetic disorder that results in a number of physical characteristics and intellectual impairments
Inclusion

When child care programs fully support children with developmental disabilities, they are said to be inclusive.

A child care program can be inclusive by:

• using Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)
• establishing a routine and schedule
• fostering friendships
• nurturing language development
• facilitating imaginative play
• assisting families in meeting their children’s needs
Positive Behavior Supports

Prevention, redirection, and positive reinforcement are three types of positive behavior supports.

- **Prevention** is a strategy that stops challenging behaviors before they begin, and it is the primary method child care professionals use to encourage children to discard these behaviors.

- **Redirection** is a strategy that is used to guide children’s behavior by recognizing challenging behavior at its earliest stages and taking steps to stop it from escalating.

- **Positive reinforcement** is a strategy in which desired behaviors are rewarded so that the child is encouraged to repeat them.
Key Point

Caregivers must have a solid understanding of child development in relation to age divisions and be aware that all interactions with a child have an effect on the child’s development and learning. It is important to be conscious of what the child is learning while in your care.
Principles of Child Development

Development in young children occurs **rapidly** and typically progresses in **spurts**.

Early childhood educators must recognize not only the existence of general stages and **sequences** of development, but also the enormous **variation** that there is between children. It is quite normal for there to be variation in the patterns and timing of growth and development.
Skills are acquired in a logical sequence.

A sequence or pattern of developmental consists of predictable steps along a developmental pathway that is common for the majority of children.
Behavioral Observation and Screening

Key Point

All children develop at their own rates because each child is unique. Heredity and environment work together to make each child special and different from all others. Together, these factors account for the individual variations you see in children.
Key Point

Developmental progress is rarely smooth and even. Irregularities, such as periods of stammering, characterize development. Periodic regression is normal and should be expected.
Key Point

Early experiences and opportunities to practice new skills are important.
Key Point

Cultural influences are important. The social setting and culture the child lives in influences the ways the child grows and develops.
Developmental Domains

• Physical Health
• Motor Development
• Cognitive Development & General Knowledge
• Language & Communication
• Approaches to Learning
• Social & Emotional
Physical Health

Changes in body shape and proportion. Includes changes in:

- weight
- height
- head circumference
- visual perception
- hearing
Motor Development

Child’s ability to move around and control various body parts.

Examples include:
- Grasping
- Rolling over
- Sitting up
- Hopping on one foot
Cognitive Development & General Knowledge

Child’s intellectual or mental abilities. Involves finding, processing, and organizing information and using it appropriately.

Includes skills and activities:
- Discovering
- Interpreting
- Sorting
- Classifying
- Remembering information.
Language & Communication

A child’s ability to develop himself and to receive and understand the verbal communication of others.

Involves child’s ability to learn:
- Vocabulary and Grammar
- Reading and Writing
- How to construct an understanding of things around them
Social & Emotional

Focuses of how children feel about themselves and their relationships with others.

Refers to children’s:
- Individual behaviors and responses to play and work activities
- Attachments to caregivers and parents
- Relationships with siblings and friends
Approaches to Learning

Refers to how skills and knowledge are acquired through three qualities:

- eagerness and curiosity
- persistence
- creativity and problem solving

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Age Divisions

For the purpose of this course, we will talk about children using the same divisions as the Florida School Readiness Performance Standards.

- Birth to 8 months
- 8 to 18 months
- 18 to 24 months
- 24 to 36 months
- 3 year-olds (36 to 48 months)
- 4 year-olds (48 to 60 months)
- 5 year-olds (60 to 72 months)
- School-Agers (+5 years)
Age-level Expectancies

- Age-level expectancies represent a range (rather than an exact point in time) when specific skills will be achieved.
- Age expectancies for specific skills should always be interpreted as approximate midpoints in a range of months.
- It is sequence and not age that is the important factor in evaluating a child’s progress.
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Module 3: Observation and Screening Basics
Observation and Screening Do’s and Don’ts List

Throughout this module you will make a list of “do’s” and “don’ts” for observation and screening.
For example:

**Do**

- Have a variety of activities available so the child can demonstrate the skills you are looking for.

**Do Not**

- Guide the child’s responses.
- Misrepresent the child’s abilities.
Penny Observation
Key Point

Caregivers should always make notes during the observation process. Making notes before or after the observation process can compromise results.
Caregivers must be objective in their observations. Subjective information is open to interpretation and is not useful for describing behavior.
General Observational Guidelines for Caregivers

1. Know what to expect.
2. Observe a child over a period of time.
3. Keep in mind that difficulties in a single area are not necessarily cause for alarm.
4. Record only what the child is doing.
Tools for Recording Observations of Children

- Checklists
- Anecdotal Records
- Running Records
Tools for Recording Observations of Children

• Record only **facts**.
• Record every **detail** - don’t leave out anything.
• Take brief notes throughout the day, but fill in the details as soon as possible.
• Use **action** words that describe but do not judge.
• Record the **facts** in the order they occur.
Key Point

Observing of children in natural settings lets the observer report what the child is able to do in an environment that supports the child to perform her best.
Observation Skills

- The observer must be totally **objective**.
- Do not try to observe more than **one child** at a time.
- Do not influence the child’s **responses** by your presence.
- Make sure there is **adequate space** for the observation.
- Make sure that **distractions** are kept to a minimum.
- Use an area that is **familiar** to the child.
- Make sure you build a relationship with the **child** and the **parents**.
Participant Observation

Allows you to interact with children directly and ask them to do certain things.
Overt Observation

You do not hide the fact that you are observing a child’s actions.
Non-Participant Observation

The observer is concealed behind a screen or 2-way mirror and does not interact with the child.

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Covert Observation

When the children are not told they are being observed.
Key Point

The six major developmental domains are: Physical Health, Motor Development, Cognitive Development & General Knowledge, Language & Communication, Approaches to Learning, and Social & Emotional.
Key Point

Screening means an instrument intended to identify and monitor normal development or possible developmental delay. Screening programs are not diagnostic, and are not based on whether a child has passed a certain curriculum.
Developmental Screening

• The screening process can not confirm a disability.
• Screening helps to identify children that could benefit from early childhood intervention programs.
• Most screening instruments are divided into the categories of physical, cognitive, language, and social/emotional.
• The social/emotional developmental domain is more difficult to test.
Considerations When Choosing a Screening Instrument

- The screening instrument should support a comfortable and positive experience for the child.
- The screening instrument should have a report on the reliability and validity of the data.
- The screening instrument should provide score data from a tested population that is used to compare against the results of the children in your care.
- When choosing the screening instrument time is an important consideration. Twenty minutes is the standard amount of time for a preschool child.
- Consider the cost of the instrument. The instrument should be effective and affordable.
- Choose an instrument that is designed to test children one at a time, not in groups.
- The person that performs the screening should have an understanding of the screening process and some experience in child growth and development.
  - Consider your referral process. The results of the screening should be useful to the specialist who performs the assessment.
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Module 4: Screening Instruments
Screening

The main purpose of any good screening tool is to identify children who are in need of further evaluation to determine whether they are candidates for early intervention services. However, useful screening tools need to do more than just describe behaviors. A useful first-level screening program should be practical for assessing large numbers of children, and do so:

- **Easily**
- **Accurately**
- **Affordably**
Key Point

The Florida Legislature has mandated screening for developmental delays but has not mandated the use of any specific instrument. Child care providers are encouraged to use whichever screening tool works best for them.
Developmental Screening

Instruments:

Focus on observation and provide initial information that can facilitate learning.
Achievement Screenings

Measure knowledge or skills a child has learned.
Social-Emotional/Behavioral Screenings

Brief screenings that target social/emotional issues.
Readiness Screenings

Brief achievement type screening geared to screen whether a child is ready to benefit from a specific program.
Instructional Assessments

Assessments based on children’s work in the classroom focused on measuring the child’s performance.
Sound screening tools are:

- **reliable**
- **valid**
- **free of bias**
Common Elements of Screening Instruments

- **A record keeping system** for tracking the individual children as they progress through the program;

- **Information sheets** where you record the child’s name, parents’ names, the child’s age at the time of the screening, name of the screener and their relationship to the child (parent, child care provider, nurse, doctor);

- A series of **questions** you answer reflecting the child’s abilities;

- **Scoring sheets** on which you record the child’s actions and responses;

- **Interpretation scale** for locating the child’s data in relation to the norms of other children their age;

- **Decision guide** to help with the screening results (continue screening at next interval, referral).
Key Point

There are many screening tools available. A child care program’s style, staffing, approach to learning, resources and level of parental involvement are all important factors in choosing an instrument.
Key Point

Materials used for observation and screening activities must match the age of the child being screened.
Adjusted Age

When using a screening instrument, we need to make adjustments for children under the age of 2 who were born premature. We call this calculation a child’s adjusted age.

To calculate:

Chronological Age
- # of weeks Premature
  Adjusted Age
Key Point

Many items in specific tools are representative of children’s skills at specific ages. Observers use common sense, avoid literal instructions, and occasionally make substitutions when tools mention a specific tool or toy.
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Module 5: Screening Procedures
Key Point

It is important to involve parents as full partners in the behavioral observation and screening process.
Four Basic Tasks

• **Organizing**: Planning the process you will use, identifying how you will engage parents and at what points in the process, obtaining the materials if any are needed, developing forms.

• **Scheduling**: Identifying the time and location for the activity, scheduling staff or substitutes if the activity requires 1:1 attention to an individual child.

• **Executing**: Obtaining permission from parents, conducting the activity, recording the activity, scoring the activity if appropriate, working with parents.

• **Following Through**: Talking with parents, beginning to identify the next steps.
Key Point

The four basic tasks involved in developing and maintaining a successful behavioral observation and screening process are: organizing, scheduling, executing and follow through.
Identifying Strategies that Work

- Collaborating with Parents
- Planning and Scheduling Screening Activities
- Initial follow-through
Key Point

Obtaining parental permission to screen is the first step of any observation and screening activity. Obtaining this information should be built into the enrollment process.
Key Point

It is important to communicate the results of the screening activity with the parents and to help parents identify the appropriate next step.
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Module 6: Referral Process and Resources
Next Steps

Remember, child care professionals screen children. We do NOT diagnose children. Child care professionals share their observations and screening with families for further evaluation by other professionals. Trained professionals will complete formal assessments and make a diagnosis, NOT child care professionals.
Key Point

Permission to screen a child does not give you permission to make a referral or to share the results of the screening with another professional outside your organization without the parent’s permission.
Points to Remember When Talking to Parents

Answers to the “Fill in the Blanks”
(Please fill in the blanks)

1. Schedule
2. Explain
3. Screening
4. Show
5. Explain
6. Understandable
7. Inform
8. Explain
9. Talk
10. Answer
11) Request
12) Sign
Key Point

Communicating with parents is important. You must be clear about the need for assessment and its benefits to the child.
Key Point

It is a best practice to encourage parents to make the first call to the service-providing agency.
Key Point

Follow-up assessment services are available to all Florida children, when indicated by observation and screening through the Early Intervention Program operated by the Florida Department of Health and the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System. The specific providers differ from region to region so you must identify referral sources in your local area.