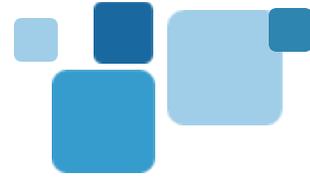


Chapter 5



Student Evaluation and Assessment Procedures

This chapter looks at:

- **Social developmental history**
- **Problem-solving consultation**
- **Classroom observation**
- **Functional behavioral assessment**
- **Mental health screening**
- **Mental health screening as part of an evaluation for EBD standardized assessments**
- **Functional adaptive behavior skills**
- **Normed/criterion references**
- **Behavior Rating Scale**

Chapter 5: 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 students' strengths and functioning within school, home, and community environments. As a systematic process of gathering information, assessment can be used to guide interventions, provide consultation to school staff and parents, and assist in the identification and planning for students. Various assessment methods school social workers use include interviews (student, parent, and staff); observations across home, school and community environments; record reviews; 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 behavioral 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 students' information (past and present) regarding their social, emotional, behavioral, academic functioning and development across school, home, and community settings. 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. Information gathered through multiple sources should cover students' developmental history, school history, family history, cultural influences, as well as current issues and concerns. Developmental histories include health history, birth and development history, 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.

Language history and the use of language other than English in the home should be explored. A series of questions related to language should be incorporated for English Language Learning students or those spending time in an environment where a language other than English is spoken. Guidance is provided by Roseberry-McKibbin, C. (1995). *Multicultural students with Special Language Needs*. Academic Communication Associates. The list of interview questions provided through this resource is recommended by the Minnesota Department of Education during the pre-referral process for a student being considered for special education evaluation.

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,
- alternative courses of action to obtain the goal,

- intended and unintended consequences of each course of action
- plan with action steps and a timeline to obtain the desired goal, and
- method of assessing goal attainment.

References

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-Meaers (Eds.), *The school services sourcebook: A guide for school-based professionals* (pp. 971-976). Oxford.

Capio, M., Swanlund, L., & Kelly, M. (2016). School social workers and the prereferral process: Problem-solving teams and data-driven decision making. In C.R. Massat, M.S. Kelly, & R. Constable (Eds.), *School social work: Practice, policy, and research* (8th ed.). Lyceum.

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

Roseberry-McKibbin, C. (1995). *Multicultural students with special language needs*. Academic Communication Associates.

Classroom Observation

School social workers often gather information regarding student behavior and performance in school settings 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, school social workers identify a presenting problem or target behavior prior to conducting a systematic observation.

During observation, school social workers collect data that 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 pre-referral 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 (FBA) 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 2004 mandates that functional behavioral assessments be conducted on children with disabilities in the following instances:

- 1) The child is removed from school for more than 10 days for behavior that is related to their disability.
- 2) The child is removed from school for more than 10 days for a behavior that is not related to their disability but the IEP team feels an FBA is needed.
- 3) The child is placed in an alternative setting for fewer than 45 days due to behavior involving a dangerous weapon, illicit drug use, or inflicting serious bodily harm.

FBA's should also be conducted and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP) created when developing an IEP for a student whose behaviors are interfering with his or her learning or the learning of others (20 U.S.C. §(d)(3)(B)(i) (2004).

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 Rules, part 3525.1329, subp. 3, item A (2007). Also, according to Minnesota Rules, 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 Rules, 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).

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 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 support 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.

Emotional 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. (Minnesota Rules, 3525.1329, subpt 3A (2007)).

Pupil Fair Dismissal Act

For information regarding suspension and expulsion policies in Minnesota: [Minnesota Department of Education Q & A: Pupil Fair Dismissal Act](#)

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. 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 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 measures to assess adaptive behavior, functional behavior, and social skills (LeCroy & Okamoto, 2002).

There are two main criteria that distinguish standardized assessments from non-standardized assessments (Jordan & Franklin, 2016): 1) Standardized assessments have "uniform administration and scoring procedures" (p. 83); and 2) they are based on established norms. Standardized assessments are evaluated according to reliability and validity. An assessment is considered reliable when it produces consistent measurement of a phenomenon over repeated uses. To assess reliability of a standardized measure, social workers should consider the reliability coefficient and choose a measure with the highest reliability (closest to 1.00). Assessments are considered valid when they actually measure what they claim to measure. Social workers should continually ask for an assessment tool "What and for whom is it valid?"

(Jordan & Franklin, 2016, p. 87). Validity can be assessed by examining a specific measure's validity studies.

Standardized assessment measures can be useful for their efficiency and their ease of scoring and interpretation, however it is important to remember that standardized assessments have limitations. They may not have been normed on culturally diverse populations, only assess one or two aspects of a student, and focus on problems instead of strengths. Assessment should always be customized based on the individual needs of the students. (Jordan & Franklin, 2016)

References

Jordan, C. & Franklin, C. (2016). *Clinical assessment for social workers: Quantitative and qualitative methods* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

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). Oxford.

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 Developmental Disabilities](#)" the manual contains a grid of nationally normed, technically adequate measures of adaptive behavior.

Normed/Criterion References Behavior Rating Scale

School social workers have many tools available to determine if a child's mental health concerns meet 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 choose from (see Appendix).