

Recommended Best Practices for Using the Formative Assessment Process

Research says formative assessment is a *process* for collecting evidence of children’s knowledge and skills, over time during a child’s development.¹ At Teaching Strategies, we recognize the importance of the connection between a whole-child curriculum and the use of the formative assessment process to create high-quality learning environments for children and developmentally appropriate individualized instruction. This document provides recommendations for practices that can help early childhood educators use and maximize the benefits of the formative assessment process.

What to practice

- *Initial assessment.* Conduct a comprehensive assessment within the first few weeks of enrollment to establish an understanding of each child’s current development.
- *Ongoing assessment.* Based on your program’s goals and processes to reflect on data to drive in instruction, encourage teachers to conduct regular observations throughout the school year. There are no prescribed number of times for observations; it will depend on each program, each teacher, and each classroom. Researchers do not provide a specific amount of time to collect data for a marking period (e.g., a GOLD checkpoint) or for measuring “achievement” at the end of a defined period or experience. Also, marking periods can range from two weeks for some programs, to every 60 days to two times a year or every six months.

How to practice

- *Use various data collection methods.* Utilize a variety of methods like observations, anecdotal records, photos, videos, and results from standardized assessments to varied evidences of children’s knowledge, skills, and abilities across different domains.
- *Make frequent observations.* Conduct regular, short observations throughout the day or week to capture children’s learning as it is emerging.
- *Focus on progress, not just performance.* Analyze the data you collect to identify individual growth patterns rather than solely comparing children to norms.
- *Collaborate with families.* Include families in the data collection process by gathering information about the child’s home environment and development.

Why to practice

- *To identify individual needs.* The formative assessment process enables educators to quickly identify children who might require additional support or interventions and facilitates the creation of personalized learning goals based on each child’s unique development.

¹ Nail, L. 2021. Institute of Education Sciences. *New video supports formative assessment in early childhood classrooms: Every child shines.*

- *To make curriculum responsive.* Educators will have better ideas about how to make modifications in the curriculum to better meet the needs of the children in the classroom.
- *To foster more communication with families.* Data collected during the formative assessment process provides valuable, strengths-based information to share with parents about their child's progress.

Additional resources

From the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
[DAP: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing Children's Development and Learning](#)

From the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC)
[Ongoing Child Assessment](#)

From Teaching Strategies
[Research Foundation: Teaching Strategies GOLD® Assessment System](#)

[Making Good on the Promise of Whole-Child Assessment](#)

[5 Strategies for Developing the Art of Collecting Quality Observations](#)