



overview

Child Assessment evaluates individual developmental patterns and milestones, including the development of gross motor and fine motor skills. Observing and documenting each child's development helps to:

- Identify delays or any unusual development for early intervention
- Understand each child's capabilities so that lesson plans address the needs of all children
- Sequence skill development throughout a curriculum
- Know how to adapt physical activity programs and environments
- Observe a child's behavior and understand more about the reasons or context for those behaviors

"I have used my observations to plan opportunities that encourage physical activity for an infant, three 2-year-olds, one 4-year-old and two 6-year-olds. Some of the ways that I have done this is to watch for the types of activities that are piquing their curiosity at each age."

*– Brenda Flannery,
Lil Blessings Child Care,
Crandon*

assessing the children in your program

The **Gross Motor Developmental Milestones Quick Reference Chart** (on pages 16 and 17) will help you observe and assess the physical development of individual children in your care. Features include:

- A focus on physical development and skills
- Skill categories within the physical development domain
- Suggestions for sequencing physical skill development
- Separate versions created for different age groups

how to fit assessment into your day

Observing the physical and gross motor development of the children in your care does not have to feel like an extra responsibility to fit into the day. You can purposefully plan activities to help you assess skills and strategically place your recording tools for easy access during the day. You can make useful observations while you interact with children, lead activities, support child-initiated play, and reflect back on the day's events.

Documentation

To make documentation easy, think about how your environment is set up and which methods of documenting will work best for you. In their book *Focused Observations: How to Observe Children for Assessment and Curriculum Planning*, Gaye Gronlund and Marlyn James discuss a variety of tools and ideas you can use to record a child's development. Included are an observations record, a quick check recording sheet, a file folder and sticky notes, and a folder with index cards.

You may want to carry a pad of paper or a ring of index cards to jot down notes throughout the day, or you may prefer to have a clipboard for each child that you fill in during quieter times of the day or after children have gone home.

Don't be discouraged if you have to try a few methods to find out what works best for you and your program. This just means that you have really figured out what works best!

quick tips

- Have the tools used to record observations and assessment easily accessible in your home or classroom. For example, keep an index card for each child on a ring that clips to your belt loop.
- Observation and assessment are an ongoing process. Once you have completed your action steps, start observation and assessment again to evaluate progress and identify new areas for improvement.
- Keep a journal of successful physical activity. You can look back and see progress and remember why you do what you do!

what comes after assessment?

Create action steps for child development.

Once you have assessed the children in your care, use the information gained to create schedules and lesson plans that provide time to practice skills and foster physical development. Because your assessment has provided a picture of the

physical development of all of your children, you can prepare adaptations for children at different skill levels. Be sure to communicate successes to parents and give them ideas of how to continue their child's growth and development at home.

considerations for all ages

Children grow up fast and it is important to record and document their development.

- **Use a variety of activities** to help assess skills children have mastered, skills they continue to practice and improve, and skills that may need extra attention
- **Make regular observations** of how children respond to and participate in physical activity, how they initiate their own physical activity, and how they continue to develop physically
- **Communicate observations with parents.** Consider adding a physical development section to your daily report or creating a development portfolio that is frequently shared with parents
- **Involve parents in assessment** by inviting them to share their observations from home or encouraging them to contribute to their child's portfolio

infants

Assess infants' physical development by engaging them in a variety of activities that will help you see their progress toward various milestones, such as grabbing, sitting, and crawling. For example, use the Tummy Time activity below to assess infants' development in terms of lifting their heads, holding their heads up, rolling over, and crawling. Use your interactions as a method of assessment as well. Lead infants in little activities throughout the day, such as grabbing for different objects, dancing around the room with an infant in your arms, and moving infants' arms, legs, fingers, and toes as you name these body parts out loud. Observe how infants react to different activities and how they start to initiate their own movements as well as their continued physical development.



quick tip

With increased mobility in toddlers, be sure to arrange safe, low places for climbing and provide toys that can be pushed or pulled. This will help them develop all of the gross motor skills, including traveling, and manipulative and stabilizing skills.

quick tip

Touch a toy to the infants' hands to encourage grabbing every day. As they develop, you will see infants progress from using their entire arms to swipe at objects to using their entire hands to grab, then just using their fingers to grab.

activity idea

Tummy Time

Place an infant on his or her tummy. Roll brightly colored soft play balls nearby. Encourage the infant to follow the balls (visually from side to side), reach for, and touch the balls.

Equipment: Soft blanket or mat, colored balls

Time frame: 5-10 minutes or until interest is lost

Adaptations: Adjust the distance that balls are rolled; change the texture or size of balls

toddlers

By providing a variety of materials and toys that emphasize gross motor development, such as soft materials to throw and catch (e.g., scarves and Mylar balloons) and portable toys that can be pushed or pulled, you will have the opportunity to observe the toddlers in your care as they explore the materials available.

You can also structure activities for toddlers so specific gross motor skills and physical activities can be observed. For example, the Scavenger Hunt described at right allows you to observe traveling skills such as walking or running, manipulative skills such as pushing and pulling, and stabilizing skills such as standing and balancing while reaching. If a truck push toy is placed on the opposite side of the room, you could observe the toddler walking, pushing and balancing. If a ball is placed on a shelf that is a little higher than the toddler, you could observe the child's ability to reach and balance. The options are endless and they are all up to you!

quick tip

Create activity cards that capture animals, objects, or people in different balancing positions. For example, show a stork standing on one foot, a frog squatting, or a toy soldier standing at attention. Try making cards for other skill sets, such traveling skills or object-manipulation skills.

activity ideas

Scavenger Hunt

Place favorite toys all over the room so toddlers must get to the toys by crawling, cruising, or walking. Choose a variety of toys that will give toddlers a chance to feel different textures, see different colors, and carry objects of different shapes and weights. Use this time to observe and record gross motor skills.

Equipment: Children's favorite toys

Time Frame: 5-10 minutes or until interest is lost

Adaptations: Adjust the distance between items

preschoolers & older children

Structure a variety of activities to observe children's gross motor skills and physical development. Think about specific skills you are interested in assessing and how you can engage children in practicing those skills. For example, you might want to use yoga cards to have children practice different balancing skills, such as standing on one foot, squatting, and standing on tiptoes. Additionally, you could create dice to use in practicing different traveling skills. Have a different traveling skill, such as walking, running, or sliding, on each side of the die. Then have children roll the die and practice the skill!

Space Invaders

Prepare a 10-foot by 10-foot square marked with clear lines. As children move through this space, assess the personal space and general space that children travel in. Use cues such as "Look at our small play area. When I say 'go,' walk around our play area without bumping into anyone else." You can use this time to observe and record posture, speed and comfort. Say, "Now run in our play area without bumping into anyone else." Observe and record again.

Equipment: Four cones or place-markers and tape

Time Frame: 10 minutes

Adaptations: Make multiple play areas to accommodate more than 4 or 5 children. Encourage children to use other locomotor skills, such as walking backward or hopping. Play music in the background.

multi-age groups

Multi-age groups of children bring a special quality to the assessment process. Younger children watch older children to see how they move. Regardless of age, providers should always try to understand each child's preferred method of learning. But with a multi-age group you can really see how interactions between children who have mastered a skill and children who are learning a skill can promote physical and gross motor development. Your observations can then inform your lesson-planning processes so that more activities are structured in a way that helps children of varying ages learn.

quick tip

Often the best way to learn something is to teach it to someone else. Have an older child teach a new physical activity or gross motor skill to a younger child.

activity idea

Follow the Leader, Simon Says, or Copy-cat

Choose an activity in which children have to mimic one another, such as Follow the Leader, Simon Says, or Copy-cat. Instruct older children to lead different activities so you have an opportunity to observe the skills of younger children. If you have specific skills that you would like to assess, make cards or dice that can be rolled to give the older children guidance in selecting activities. Then switch and have the younger children lead the game.

Equipment: None necessary, but props such as dice, bean bags, or scarves could be used

Time Frame: Variable

Adaptations: Go indoors and outdoors for variation. Depending on the size of your group, you may want to expand or limit the space available.



inclusion

Do not assume a child has a developmental delay or disability if he or she has yet to reach a developmental milestone. Think about possible explanations, including health problems, the family's culture, and the child's history. After exploring these options, if you still feel a child may not be developing normally, then take action.

If you have concerns about how a child is developing, discuss your observations and concerns with the child's parents. Sensitivity is important. Your goal in discussing this with the parents is to support them in providing the best care for their child. This can be done through giving parents support and understanding. It is best to objectively tell them your observation and recommend they discuss this with their child's pediatrician.

cultural competency

Understanding a family's values and culture before starting assessment is helpful, but it is never too late to learn more. As you are assessing the individual development of each child in your care, you will see differences, and it is important to understand why these differences exist.

Culture can be one reason for differences. For example, in one family it may be the norm for a child to wait patiently to be invited to join an activity, while in another family, the child may be encouraged to actively explore their environment at any time.

When assessing development, asking "why?" is critical. It is important to understand why a child has or has not achieved a developmental milestone. Understanding a family's values and culture will help you make reasonable conclusions about a child's development. Be sure to look at the broader picture of a child's life before drawing conclusions about

development. When culture and assessment are brought together, you also have the advantage of using the information to create culturally appropriate lesson plans and classroom environments so they are truly supportive to the children in your care.

engaging families

Use portfolios to share children's physical and gross motor development progress with families. This could include photos, quotes from the children, and objective, strengths-based observations!

engaging communities

Encourage your community to assess its own commitment to physical activity. Counties, cities, and neighborhoods routinely conduct community needs assessments. Challenge your community to make physical activity a part of its next needs assessment!

tips for communicating with parents

Be strengths-based...

- Be kind
- Be warm
- Be real
- Be of service
- Be child-focused
- Be aware of parent reactions

Be an active listener...

- Present
- Patient (avoid interrupting)
- Accepting
- Nonjudgmental
- Curious

Be a cooperative partner...

- Share information with parents
- Invite parents to share information
- Create next steps with parents