

# INVOLVING FAMILIES in Assessment and Intervention

A Toolkit for Early Childhood Educators

A photograph of a smiling man and a young girl sitting on a couch. The man is holding a colorful stacking toy (a ring of colorful blocks) and the girl is reaching out towards it. They are both smiling and appear to be enjoying the activity. The background is a bright, modern interior with large windows.

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**FREE tips, tools, and strategies for partnering with families—  
and working together to help their child learn and grow!**

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**A** young child's healthy development depends on many factors, including early assessment and intervention for children who have delays or disabilities. When parents and other caregivers are involved as active partners, everyone benefits: families, programs, and children!

In this toolkit, you'll get strategies, tip sheets, and other tools for keeping families involved and engaged throughout the whole process of assessment and intervention. Discover the why and the how of family participation, get guidance on overcoming challenges, and find links to more helpful resources.

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## The Why: Benefits of Family Involvement

Family input, engagement, and participation are critical success factors in assessment and intervention. That's because:

- Families are true experts on their child
- Family involvement is a mandate
- Families can ease the assessment process
- Family involvement increases their satisfaction

Read more about the benefits of family involvement on the next few pages!





# Families Are True Experts

As experts on their child, families can aid in assessment by offering critical information about their child from their unique perspectives. Families can share information about:

- **Their child's temperament and physical needs**, which may help you understand a child's reaction to different assessment situations. For example, a child who has poor fine motor skills may struggle with pen and paper assessments but perform well with oral questioning.
- **Their child's daily routine**. Knowing about routines will help you have culturally sensitive expectations for the child. For example, in some cultures parents assist their child with using utensils for many years, whereas in other cultures parents encourage independent feeding skills at a young age.
- **How they encourage and limit their child at home**. If a child is accustomed to receiving extrinsic rewards at home, they may have a hard time adjusting to intrinsic rewards used in a classroom. Limits and consequences vary between home and school, too.
- **Family dynamics**. Gaining information about the family's history, the child's previous life experiences, and the family's community involvement and cultural background can help you build rapport with the family and child and provide more accurate assessment.
- **Their child's preferences**. If a child prefers working in a quiet setting, for instance, you might allow the child to move to the hallway to be assessed.
- **Their priorities and goals for their child**. For example, a family's priority may be for the child to improve in the area of language development. Understanding this priority will help you develop goals for the child.



# Family Involvement is a Mandate

The importance of family involvement in assessment and intervention is reflected in both current legislation and the recommended practices and standards of leading early childhood organizations:

- Family involvement is emphasized several times in the [NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practice \(DAP\) Position Statement](#) on Practices for Observing, Documenting, and Assessing Children's Development and Learning. For example, the statement specifies that assessment should focus on progress toward goals that reflect families' input, and that families should be involved in screening/assessment as "essential sources of information."
- The [Head Start Program Performance Standards](#) include a section on parent and family engagement in education and child development services. Programs must ensure that "teachers inform parents about the purposes of and the results from screenings and assessments and discuss their child's progress."
- The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act \(IDEA\) of 2004](#) calls for "a written individualized family service plan developed by a multidisciplinary team, including the parents."
- The [DEC Recommended Practices](#) stress the importance of building trusting, respectful, and responsive partnerships with families. Practitioners are called to work as a team with the family to identify their preferences for assessment processes, gather crucial assessment information, and develop individualized goals and plans.

When you involve families, you're following the recommendations of today's authoritative voices on healthy early childhood development!



# Families Can Ease the Assessment Process

As collaborative team members during the assessment process, families can be instrumental in **identifying the best assessment strategies for their children**. They can ease the assessment process by participating in planning, taking part in interviews, helping to gather information and test the child, and determining whether the information collected is representative of their child's actual abilities.

Family input is an efficient way to **help you get a complete picture of the child's skills**. For example, with AEPS®-3, families are asked to make observations of their child in the home or in other familiar settings and fill out a form about their children's level of independence on each developmental skill.

Even with active family involvement in assessment, remember that **it's still your responsibility to help families choose a course of action** for achieving the child's goals. Families are the most familiar with their child, but they're not always familiar with appropriate interventions or developmentally appropriate practices. Share your expertise, help guide families, and facilitate teamwork when working together.



**For an example of a family report, see this [filled-in sample form from AEPS-3](#).**





# Family Involvement Increases Satisfaction

Another benefit of family involvement is increased family satisfaction. Research has shown\* that using family-centered practices—such as including parents and other family members as partners in assessment and intervention—leads to **feelings of empowerment** and a higher level of **parent well-being**. And when families are empowered and engaged, young children reap the benefits.

\*Dunst, C. J., Bruder, M. B., Trivette, C. M., & Hamby, D. W. (2006). Everyday activity settings, natural learning environments, and early intervention practices. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 3(1), 3-10.

\*Hanft, B. E., & Pilkington, P. E. (2000). Therapy in natural environments: The means or end goal for early intervention? *Infants & Young Children*, 12(4), 1-13.



## The How: 5 Steps to Strengthening Family Participation

The **why** of family involvement is clear—but **how** can you keep families engaged throughout assessment and intervention? Follow this five-step process to encourage consistent family participation. On the next few pages, you'll learn how to:

- Share introductory information with families
- Involve families in observing and gathering information
- Partner with families for IFSP/IEP development and intervention planning
- Work with families on teaching/intervention strategies
- Share results and engage families in progress monitoring





## STEP 1 Share introductory information with families

It's important to start things on the right foot with families! One way to do this is by talking with the child's primary caregivers and other family members to explain the purpose of assessment and how it will work. This might take the form of a back-to-school night, a video chat, or an introductory meeting in a place that's convenient and comfortable for the family.

However you choose to talk to families, here are some steps you might want to prioritize:

- ✓ Explain to the family your program's philosophy, procedures, and range of services and resources.
- ✓ Share any family handouts that will help them get a better idea of how assessment works and why it will benefit their child.
- ✓ Encourage the family to discuss their general concerns and interests.
- ✓ Find out how they would like to be involved in their child's assessment, goal/outcome development, teaching/intervention, and progress monitoring activities.
- ✓ Complete the necessary program forms with the family.
- ✓ Discuss the procedures your program has in place to maintain confidentiality.

On the next page, you'll find a sample **What is AEPS-3?** family handout. Helpful, parent-friendly documents like these are a great way to teach the families in your program about assessment and get them involved in the process.

# What Is ae<sup>®</sup>ps3?

The third edition of the proven *Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System for Infants and Children*, or AEPS-3, helps children in the developmental range from birth to age 6 learn skills and concepts that will improve their own and others' lives—skills such as walking and talking, playing with others, solving problems, and being more independent.

AEPS-3 gathers information about child skills and abilities to identify important goals and outcomes for your child in eight areas:

- **FINE MOTOR** (using arms and hands to reach, grasp, use writing tools)
- **GROSS MOTOR** (balancing, changing position, moving around, playing)
- **ADAPTIVE** (self-care and safety)
- **SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL** (interacting with others, expressing and regulating emotions)
- **SOCIAL-COMMUNICATION** (understanding and using words and sentences to communicate with others)
- **COGNITIVE** (imitation, solving problems, using reasoning)
- **LITERACY** (prereading and reading)
- **MATH** (using numbers)

AEPS-3 is a *linked system* because its test items connect with teaching content and family materials. This linking pinpoints skills your child needs and then helps your child gain these skills.

The AEPS-3 Test looks at what children do during their daily routines and play so we can effectively

- Assess your child's current skills and abilities
- Identify which skills and abilities to work on with your child
- Develop goals and outcomes for IFSPs (individualized family service plans) and IEPs (individualized education programs)
- Plan teaching and intervention aligned with your child's interests
- Monitor your child's progress over time

We use information from the test to help choose goals for teaching or intervention and to keep track of your child's progress.

Part of what makes AEPS-3 such a helpful tool is that family involvement and input are key. You are an essential team member.



**Welcome! Visit [www.aepsinteractive.com](http://www.aepsinteractive.com) to learn more.**

Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System for Infants and Children, Third Edition (AEPS<sup>®</sup>-3), by Bricker, Dionne, Grisham, Johnson, Macy, Slentz, & Waddell.  
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## STEP 2 Involve families in observing and gathering information

If the family is willing to participate in assessment, they can be very helpful in observing their child and gathering key information. Your program should collect important input from caregivers about:

- ▶ **The child and family in general.** Gather family perspectives on the child's developmental skills and participation in daily, family, and community activities. This information can help your team choose appropriate intervention targets and design teaching strategies. (If you're using AEPS-3, the Family Report aids in this process.)
- ▶ **The child's specific skills.** Gather information from the family about which skills the child has mastered, and which ones they're still working toward. (In AEPS-3, The Family Assessment of Child Skills helps users accomplish this. Its items parallel goals on the AEPS-3 Test but are written in simpler language, with examples that families from widely varied backgrounds and educational experiences can understand.)

No matter which assessment tool you're using, involving families in gathering assessment information will make the most of their expertise—and ensure that you have the most complete picture of the child's skills and development.



# 7 strategies for involving families in gathering assessment information

Families are a crucial source of information during early childhood assessment! Benefit from their expertise by asking families to...



Provide written or verbal information regarding the child's background, family priorities and concerns, the child's likes and dislikes, and the family's daily routine. Use the **AEPS-3 Family Report** to gather this information



Confirm or question information previously gathered



Observe the child in other settings and/or gather information regarding the child's skills in other settings and activities. Use the **AEPS-3 Family Assessment of Child Skills** to gather families' observations



Facilitate observations of children during conventional and authentic assessment activities



Complete formal and informal checklists regarding the child's skills and behaviors



Identify strategies and procedures for best observing and documenting their child's performance



Help interpret information and participate in all steps of the process



## **STEP 3** Partner with families to discuss results and plan next steps

After the assessment data is collected, your team—including the child’s parents/ caregivers—should meet to plan next steps. If possible, make sure the meeting includes a program staff member who is familiar with the child and family and with whom they are comfortable.

At the meeting (and after), aim to:

- ✓ Summarize the results of assessment for families (see page 18 for a tip sheet on effective communication with families).
- ✓ Discuss the family’s goals for their child and skills they are expected to develop next.
- ✓ If appropriate for the child, prioritize the IFSP/IEP outcomes or goals. Let the family determine the priorities whenever possible, and develop an intervention and plan for each priority outcome or goal. (The tip sheet on the next page can help you work with families to develop a plan.)
- ✓ Design teaching/intervention activities customized to the child’s needs and goals.
- ✓ Determine an acceptable plan to monitor progress for each goal/outcome.
- ✓ If appropriate, work together to produce an IFSP/IEP document (this may require more than one meeting).
- ✓ Obtain signatures and distribute copies of the final IFSP/IEP document.

# Questions to ask families when developing teaching and intervention plans

If the results of a child's assessment indicate delays or disabilities that require an IFSP or IEP, schedule a meeting to create an intervention plan together. Here are some questions to ask families during this important planning meeting.

- ▶ **How would the family like to see desired outcomes achieved?** Encourage the family to identify their ideal plan for helping their child make progress toward outcomes.
- ▶ **Which people or agencies would be willing and able to participate, and would this help?** Ask families to help determine whether the participation of these people/agencies will help their family gain the information or skills they need to enhance their child's development.
- ▶ **Which teaching/intervention activities are most likely to achieve the desired outcome for the child?** Encourage collaborative decision-making about preferred activities, with the family having the final decision about which ones to use.
- ▶ **Are the activities compatible with the family's culture?** Before moving forward, talk to caregivers to be sure that selected teaching/intervention activities fit with their family's structure and values.
- ▶ **What resources are needed for families to participate in teaching/intervention activities? Do families have access to them?** You may have specific teaching/intervention strategies that will help caregivers provide skill practice for the child at home. Establish up front which resources families need to complete activities, and ensure that these resources are readily available to families or easy to acquire.
- ▶ **Will participation by any family member adversely affect another family member?** Check that the intervention plan does not isolate any family member from the rest of their family or neglect any family members. If there may be an adverse effect, is the ratio of cost to benefit acceptable to the family? If not, are there alternatives?
- ▶ **How will we know when the outcome is achieved?** Which evaluation activities should we use? Write evaluation criteria in family-friendly language, and ensure that evaluation activities reflect the needs and interests of the family.





## **STEP 4** Work with families on teaching and intervention strategies

This step focuses on implementing the plans developed in the previous step. During this teaching phase, the child's entire team—including families—should be involved in supporting the child's work on developing specific new skills. (See the next page for an example of a classroom embedding schedule you might share with families.)

More practice opportunities will often lead a child to develop new skills. Teaching strategies should occur across the day, at various times, in different settings, with various materials, and by different people in the child's life. You might suggest specific teaching strategies that will help caregivers provide skill practice, and family members may be able to identify favorite activities that give the child more practice opportunities. Family members often report the child's use of a new skill at home before other team members are aware of it, so a child's progress and skill acquisition often depend on regular team communication.

# Sample Classroom Embedding Schedule

Sharing a schedule like this one with families can help them understand the instruction occurring in your classroom, and how their child's target behaviors are being addressed throughout the day.

## Embedding Schedule

aepps3

**DIRECTIONS:** This template can be used for individual children or small groups of children, in home and classroom settings. Follow these steps:

1. Identify targeted goals/outcomes from the assessment data.
2. Clearly define each desired goal/outcome, and write a concise description of each one in the blanks provided at the top of each column (one goal/outcome per column).
3. List all or a portion of the daily schedule in the boxes in the left column.
4. Find the blank box in the template where the targeted goal/outcome from the top row intersects with an activity in the daily schedule column at left. In that box, write a bullet point that concisely describes the focused strategy adults will deliver to create an embedded learning opportunity.

Daily Schedule	Goal/Outcome: <u>Initiates and completes independent activities</u> Focused Strategy	Goal/Outcome: <u>Provides and seeks information when conversing using words, phrases, or sentences</u> Focused Strategy	Goal/Outcome: <u>Counts out 3 items</u> Focused Strategy
<b>Art</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peer modeling</li> <li>- Have art materials easily accessible</li> <li>- Allow extra time to complete projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ask open-ended questions about artwork</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Counts objects to go on art project</li> <li>- Counts art supplies (crayons, markers)</li> </ul>
<b>Block Play</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peer modeling</li> <li>- Use first-then boards to show what to do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use "forgetting" teaching strategy</li> <li>- Ask probing questions about block creations; scaffold answers if needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Counts out blocks</li> </ul>
<b>Writing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peer modeling</li> <li>- Have writing materials easily accessible</li> <li>- Draw dot-to-dot shapes for tracing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ask questions about what he is writing and drawing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Counts out pencils, crayons, and markers</li> </ul>

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**DOWNLOAD** this filled-in sample form from AEPS-3 here: <https://bpub.fyi/Embedding-sample>

**DOWNLOAD** a blank Classroom Embedding Schedule here: <https://aepps.fyi/Embedding>





## **STEP 5** Share results and engage families in progress monitoring

Keep families in the loop about their child's progress toward goals. Remember, too, that family members should be encouraged to report changes in the child's skills at home, which provides a much-needed perspective. Some tools, like AEPS®-3, have forms that caregivers can review and update to help them monitor their child's progress.

Compare the information you get from families with the results recorded in your own reports. Using the progress monitoring information you gather, work together to revise the child's goals and intervention activities as needed.



# 5 Ways to Share Information with Families

Here are some ways to share information with parents about their child's development and progress toward goals:



**Visual representations** of learning opportunities related to targeted behaviors can be used to inform parents about their child's school experiences. These visual representations are referred to as embedding schedules. Embedding schedules (like this one at [aeps.fyi/Embedding](https://aeps.fyi/Embedding)) include target behaviors or goals for the child that will be addressed, activities that occur throughout the day, and examples of specific skills that the child can practice within an activity.



**Lesson planning forms** are another tool for helping families understand how important concepts and standards are being addressed through play. The forms include the daily classroom/program schedule with accompanying activities that will occur throughout the day, standards or broad outcomes for all children that will be the focus of each activity, and suggestions for how the family can promote the identified skills at home.



**Formal meetings or informal notes and phone calls** are a good opportunity to communicate a child's progress. Hold parent conferences to share assessment results and talk with parents about their child's strengths and challenges. You'll also need to develop multiple ways to communicate with families due to differences in schedules, preferences, literacy levels, and primary language. Program websites, blogs, email, and texting can help you communicate with families.



**IFSP or IEP meetings** are held to share the progress of a child receiving special education services. During these meetings, inform parents when their child has reached proficiency for an individualized goal and create a new goal together. If the child has not yet reached proficiency, plans could also be made to adjust goals or continue work on goals.



**In-home learning activities and suggestions** can help parents learn new ways to promote the child's targeted behaviors within their daily routines. For example, if a child is working on fine motor skills, you might provide developmentally appropriate art activities that will further develop those skills. (See the [ASQ Learning Activities](#) for fun and effective activity ideas.)

# Troubleshooting: How to Overcome Challenges to Family Participation

Use these practical tips to address some of the biggest challenges to family involvement in assessment and intervention.



## Family fears and concerns

- **Address concerns up front.** At your first meeting, give families the opportunity to voice their concerns. Provide them with accurate, parent-friendly information about assessment and intervention (such as the What is AEPS-3? handout on page 10).
- **Share information—but don't overwhelm them.** Print materials are helpful for some families, but others may find it burdensome to have to read them. Ask the family about their preferences and avoid giving them more information than they can comfortably manage.
- **Offer families choices.** Encourage families to help choose which areas of assessment they believe are important, how they'd like to be involved, and what type of assessment information will be gathered. Offering choices is empowering and affirms the importance of their role as decision makers and partners.



## Busy schedules

- **Give plenty of advance notice.** Families juggling many responsibilities may need extra time to arrange their schedules to meet with you. Plan meetings well in advance so that families can make arrangements to attend. (Be sure to send reminders, too!)
- **Ask families what their needs are.** What supports do they need to help them stay involved? For example, is child care an issue? Do they have reliable transportation?
- **Be flexible.** If a family's schedule or other factors make it difficult to attend meetings during the day, offer alternative options. Consider holding meetings in the evening or at a time when a babysitter can be provided at your school or program. Home visits or conference calls may work well for families with transportation issues.



## Cultural/language barriers

- **Select a tool designed with diversity in mind.** Choose a tool that's appropriate for use with all children, with content that can be adapted to accommodate family diversity. For example, AEPS-3's content is generic and flexible, so that professionals can test and teach within the philosophies, beliefs, schedules, and expectations of each family.
- **Strengthen your knowledge of other cultures.** Seek out books and other resources that help you understand and honor the customs, beliefs, and values of the families you work with. Eleanor W. Lynch & Marci J. Hanson have two great books that can help: [Understanding Families](#) and [Developing Cross-Cultural Competence](#).
- **Secure an interpreter for meetings.** This is a powerful way to support diverse families and facilitate family involvement. (This blog post, [Tips on Using Interpreters for IEP Meetings](#), has some broad, practical guidelines.)



# Keep Learning: 12 Blog Posts to Read and Share

Read these practical posts on the Brookes Publishing blog for more tips and guidance on assessment, intervention, and working with families!

## Assessment & Intervention

- [Screening & Assessment of Dual Language Learners: 4 Essential Resources](#)
- [AEPS-3: 10 Questions About the New Edition, Answered!](#)
- [4 Benefits of the PSP Approach to Early Intervention Teaming](#)
- [8 Recommended Resources to Help You Support Kindergarten Readiness](#)
- [11 Fun Animal Activities That Encourage Early Language & Literacy Skills](#)
- [10 Essentials for Promoting Young Children's Social-Emotional Development](#)

## Working with Families

- [25 Questions Early Childhood Professionals Should Ask Families](#)
- [12 Tips on Creating a Culturally Appropriate Intervention Process](#)
- [5 Tips for Building a Reciprocal Relationship with Parents of Young Children](#)
- [Promoting Developmentally Supportive Parenting: 3 Key Components to Focus on with Families](#)
- [8 Strategies for Engaging the Families of Young Children](#)
- [Tips on Using Interpreters for IEP Meetings](#)

Find these posts and many more at  
[blog.brookespublishing.com](http://blog.brookespublishing.com)

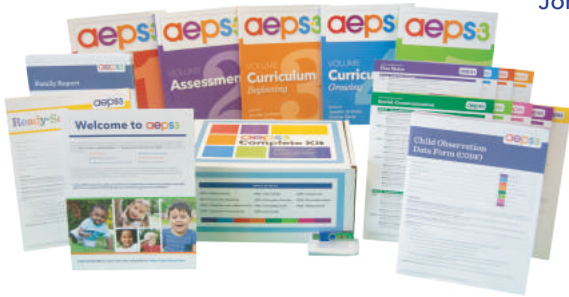


# The information in this toolkit was adapted from these essential resources:



## Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System for Infants and Children, Third Edition (AEPS®-3)

By Diane Bricker, Ph.D., Carmen Dionne, Ph.D., Jennifer Grisham, Ed.D., JoAnn (JJ) Johnson, Ph.D., Marisa Macy, Ph.D., Kristine Slentz, Ph.D., & Misti Waddell, M.S.



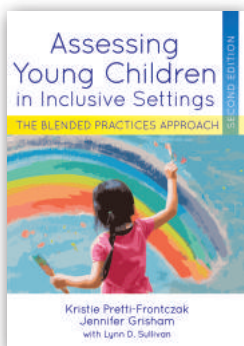
Streamlined and enhanced with user-requested updates, AEPS-3 gives your program the most accurate, useful child data and a proven way to turn data into effective action. Goal setting, IFSP/IEP development, teaching and intervention, progress monitoring, family communication—it's all integrated in the AEPS-3 linked system.

### WHAT'S NEW

- One continuous, seamless test for birth to 6 years
- Two new test areas: Literacy and Math
- Ready-Set: a new, shorter measure focused on school readiness skills
- Reimagined tiered curriculum organized around routines and activities
- Redesigned AEPSi web-based management system

...and more!

► **LEARN MORE** at [www.aepsinteractive.com](http://www.aepsinteractive.com)



## Assessing Young Children in Inclusive Settings The Blended Practices Approach, *Second Edition*

By Kristie Pretti-Frontczak, Ph.D., & Jennifer Grisham, Ed.D., with Lynn D. Sullivan, M.Ed.

This new second edition is an in-depth guide to the how and why of high-quality assessment in the context of inclusive early childhood settings.

Developed to align with Division for Early Childhood Recommended Practices, this book takes a blended approach to assessment, combining the latest recommended practices from early childhood education and early childhood special education. Educators will learn how to select and use assessment

instruments, conduct authentic assessment during daily activities, collaborate with families, conduct eligibility assessments, and more.

► **LEARN MORE** at [bpub.fyi/AYC-2e](http://bpub.fyi/AYC-2e)



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