

Guidelines for Coming to Consensus and Increasing Inter-rater Reliability

A thorough explanation and details of development are beyond the scope of this document. It is incumbent upon early childhood professionals to have a thorough knowledge of development. Resources listed at the end of this booklet can be used as one mechanism for professionals to increase their knowledge. Observation of typically developing children and specific coursework are other methods to increase professional competency in child development.

Determining the indicator ratings requires teams to synthesize an enormous amount of information about a child's functioning from multiple sources and across different settings to identify an overall sense of the child's functioning at a given point in time in three outcome areas. Family members are always a critical part of the team. Ratings should take into account the way the child interacts with each of the team members, including the family, at home, in the community and in assessment situations with professionals. Best practice for assessment, as well as for the child indicator rating, involves basing decisions about the child on multiple sources of information including assessment tools, observation, and parent report.

It takes some practice for teams to become comfortable with this process. When team members take time to collectively discuss the indicator rating descriptors and describe specific examples from assessments and observations that influenced their rating, then teams have been very successful in consistently applying the criteria and reaching consensus. Teams that use this process report that it feels much more objective and clear. However, sometimes teams jump quickly to a rating number without describing the evidence influencing the rating or thinking through the decision points that led them to that rating. Rushing to a rating quickly without supporting evidence and discussion of criteria allows more variability in different ratings and creates a process that many people describe as more subjective. We encourage teams to reflect on their discussion process and become comfortable with the rating's description and criteria.

To Decide on an Indicator Statement...

- Understand the differences between the indicator statements
- Involve all team members
- Review the available sources of information to determine how the child functions across a variety of situations and settings
- Know what behaviors and skills are appropriate for the child's age; How do children who are developing typically function on this indicator?
- Are the skills and behaviors demonstrated what one would expect for a child this age?
- If not, are they like those of a younger child? Are they the skills and behaviors that come just before the age-expected skills and behaviors?
- If not, are they like those of a MUCH younger child? Are they farther away from age expected skills and behaviors? (much earlier or atypical skills and behaviors).