



FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

ASSESSMENT

....the process of collecting information that can be used in decision making, career-planning, and service plan development for a young person.

There are four overlapping domains of assessment:

1. **Educational** assessments include academic tests that measure academic achievement or performance, like math or English language literacy tests, and cognitive ability tests that measure intellectual skills or diagnose neuropsychological issues such as learning disabilities.
2. **Vocational** assessments measure career interests, job aptitudes and skills, and work capacities; occupation-specific skill certifications are also included.
3. **Psychological** assessments measure neuropsychological, behavioral, social, and emotional skills and abilities; mental health screenings and chemical dependency tests are also included in this category.
4. **Medical assessments** measure physical and functional capabilities such as vision or speech, and may also include drug testing.

Assessment may be formal or informal.

Formal assessments consist primarily of standardized tests or performance reviews that have been validated and tested using samples of the intended test groups. They have specific test administration and scoring procedures, as well as credential or training requirements for test administrators. Test scores may be criterion-based (based on knowledge or ability in a specific academic or vocational area) or norm-referenced (based on a comparison to the sample of the test-taker's peers). They are usually purchased from publishers or test development companies.

Informal assessments include observations, interviews, record reviews, and performance reviews that are less structured than formal assessments and may not be validated or tested for reliability. Some are developed by teachers or youth service practitioners, and some are available for free on the Internet. Informal assessments may include portfolios, interest inventories, work samples, and personal preference questionnaires.

Choosing Published Tests and Assessments

There are a number of factors to consider when choosing tests and assessments. The ideal assessment instrument is

1. reliable,
2. fair,
3. valid,
4. cost-effective,
5. of appropriate length,
6. well matched to the qualifications of the test administrator, and
7. easy to administer.

The instrument should also provide information on cultural considerations and accommodations for youth with disabilities. Results should be provided in easy-to-understand language and formats.

Tips for Administering Formal (Standardized) Assessments

This information can be helpful to you as a workforce professional.

- Select the test carefully based on its intended purpose and audience.
- Be sure you have the proper credentials and have been trained to administer the test.
- Ask an experienced test administrator to observe you when administering a test for the first time or two.
- Develop a checklist to ensure that all required materials and supplies are assembled and ready for the testing session.
- Be sure that the test site is clean and well lighted, and that distractions for test-takers are minimized.
- Do not deviate from test administration instructions or the results may be invalid.
- Ensure that accommodations or alternate formats for English Language Learners are approved by the test publisher.
- Observe the test-takers during the test to be certain that they are not experiencing any difficulties.
- Have a contingency plan in place to handle unexpected events (e.g. a sick test-taker) in order to eliminate or minimize disruptions to the test.
- Store test materials in a secure location when they are not being used.

Tips for Administering Informal Assessments

Unstructured environments are often used for informal assessments, but care is needed in selecting the assessment to ensure it is appropriate to the intended purpose and audience. “Fun” assessments that have not been validated, such as on-line career interest inventories or personality quizzes, may be used to focus young people’s attention on a topic. Information gathered from informal assessments may be used to refer students for formal assessments. Information gleaned from informal assessments should be incorporated into the decision-making process but should not drive the process.

Cultural Considerations in Assessment

Because many education and youth development programs are serving a growing number of young people from culturally diverse backgrounds, it is important to develop a cultural diversity plan. The plan should consider the following:

- Recruiting youth services practitioners who reflect the cultural diversity of youth populations served;
- Ensuring that professionals and hired consultants providing youth assessment testing are culturally and linguistically competent; and
- Ensuring that all testing instruments, strategies, and methods selected for assessment purposes are valid and reliable for all youth populations served.

Accommodations for Youth with Disabilities

Accommodations are changes to a classroom, work preparation program, community-based organization, work site, or assessment procedure made in order to enable people with disabilities to learn, work, demonstrate their knowledge, or receive services. Accommodations are not designed to lower expectations for performance in school or work; rather, they are designed to mitigate the effects of a disability and to level the playing field. It is important that accommodations be carefully selected based on the knowledge, skill, or ability being tested since an accommodation may be valid for assessing some skills but not others.

Resources

Career OneStop Testing and Assessment Center

http://www.careeronestop.org/TESTING/Testing_AssessmentHome.asp

These centers contain a range of career assessment strategies, testing guides, and planning resources including links to different types of career assessments, employer guidelines for testing, and certification and credentialing information.

Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education

<http://www.apa.org/science/jctpweb.html>

This code presents standards for educational test developers and users in developing and selecting tests, interpreting scores, striving for fairness, and informing test takers.

Education Testing Service (ETS)

<http://www.ets.org/disability/index.html>

ETS's website contains information and testing policies for tests such as SAT, GRE, PRAXIS, TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), and other tests published by ETS.

It also describes reasonable accommodations and contains guidelines for documenting different types of disabilities.

High School/High Tech Program Manual

http://www.ncwdyouth.info/resources_&Publications/hsht_manual.html

This resource provides a foundation for developing partnerships to increase the pipeline of young people preparing for jobs in technology-related occupations. Using evidence-based quality design features, HS/HT builds collaborations with organizations to assist your state or community better meet the needs of youth with disabilities.

Transition Coalition

<http://www.transitioncoalition.org/assessing/book01/ch1a.htm>

This website provides tools such as an online book, Assessments for Transition Planning, and information on the purposes of transition assessments, standardized and informal assessments, and administration guidelines.

National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info>

The NCWD/Youth website contains resources and publications on issues relating to youth with disabilities, including assessment. Of particular interest are Chapter 6 of the High School/High Tech Manual (listed separately above) and the new assessment guide listed below.

Career Planning Begins with Assessment

http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources_&Publications/assessment.html

To successfully make the transition from school to adult life and the world of work, adolescents and young adults need guidance and encouragement from caring, supportive adults. The best decisions and choices made by transitioning youth are based on sound information including appropriate assessments that focus on the talents, knowledge, skills, interests, values, and aptitudes of each individual. This guide serves as a resource for multiple audiences within the workforce development system.

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The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) is composed of partners with expertise in disability, education, employment, and workforce development issues. NCWD/Youth is housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, DC. The Collaborative is charged with assisting state and local workforce development systems to integrate youth with disabilities into their service strategies.

At the time of printing, every possible effort was made to compile accurate and up-to-date website information. Internet information changes frequently.

NCWD/Youth

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