Measuring Social & Emotional Development in Children
Birth to Age 3

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Overview and Purpose

Measuring children's social and emotional development can provide valuable information about how children are progressing in areas such as forming close and secure relationships, regulating and expressing their emotions, and showing empathy toward others. Widely recognized purposes of assessing young children's social and emotional development include:

- Ensuring timely, appropriate developmental screening;
- Identifying significant concerns about children's development and determining eligibility for early intervention services;
- Informing intervention planning and decision-making; and
- Evaluating the quality and impact of services on children's outcomes.

This resource provides information to early childhood practitioners and administrators regarding fundamental assessment principles, measurement challenges for assessing social and emotional development, and a selection of tools currently available to measure social and emotional development for children birth to age 3. Table 1 presents administration information, and Table 2 presents assessment tool psychometric information.

Assessment Principles

The National Research Council (2008) identified assessment principles that can guide the measurement of children's development and learning across all domains, including social and emotional development:

- Methods and tools should correspond to the purpose of assessment;
- Tools should have adequate technical soundness, be age-appropriate and culturally sensitive, and include accommodations for children with disabilities; and
- Measurement of children's social and emotional development should be part of a broader comprehensive assessment and early intervention system

Measurement Challenges

Early childhood practitioners and administrators face several challenges in measuring the social and emotional development of very young children (Darling–Churchill & Lippman, 2016). Consequently, it is important to be mindful of these limitations in the selection and use of tools addressing social and emotional development.

1. Social and emotional development is comprised of multiple constructs, or domains, such as positive social relationships, emotion regulation, social and emotional competencies, and problem behaviors. In some cases, tools measure both competencies and problem behaviors. Therefore, it is important to select tools that measure the appropriate constructs to accurately describe children's development in these areas.

2. Because of the limited number of tools with adequate sensitivity to cultural and individual variability, it is difficult to measure the social and emotional development of very young children from diverse linguistic and cultural groups as well as those with disabilities.

3. Many measures of social and emotional development for children birth to 3 rely on adult report — for example, checklists or rating scales. Children's behavior and social skills often vary by context. Consequently, parents/caregivers and providers might rate the same child differently, due to their different experiences and perspectives. For this reason, it is important to consider in advance how these differing results will be interpreted, reported, and used to make informed decisions.

Terminology and Definitions

This resource provides a selection of tools with sufficient administration and technical information to allow quick comparisons across tools that measure social and emotional development among children ages birth to 3. Table 1 provides information on the publisher's/developer's stated purpose, followed by a summary purpose. This summary purpose is meant to provide guidance to readers in interpreting how publisher's/developer's stated purpose likely aligns with purposes included in the IDEA regulations for Part C for screening, evaluation, and assessment (Subpart D—Child Find, Evaluations and Assessments, and Individualized Family Service Plans §303.320 and §303.321; https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/c/d) and for child outcomes/program evaluation based on the Office of Special Education Program's (OSEP's) Results Driven Accountability focus on child and family outcomes (https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rda/index.html). No claim is made as to the validity of these interpretations from the point of view of publishers/developers, or OSEP.

- Screening: determine whether children are suspected of having a disability, as defined by states' Part C eligibility regulations, and should be referred for an early intervention evaluation (IDEA Part C regulations). Many state Part C programs do not conduct screening to determine whether an evaluation is needed.
- Evaluation: determine a child's initial and continuing eligibility, as defined by states' Part C eligibility regulations (IDEA Part C regulations).
- Assessment: identify initially, and on an ongoing basis, the child's and family's unique strengths and needs and the early intervention services appropriate to meet those needs throughout the period of the child's eligibility (IDEA Part C regulations).
- Child Outcomes for Annual Performance Reporting: collect aggregated measures of child outcomes following early intervention program participation for reporting to OSEP and evaluation to inform program improvement within a state or local program (OSEP Results Driven Accountability).

TABLE 1: Assessment Tools Administration Information [a]

Assessment Tool Name & Developer	Availability	Publisher's / Developer's Stated Purpose (Summary Purpose) [b]	Constructs	Age Range	Administration	Scoring
Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional, Second Edition (ASQ:SE-2) **Developer:** Jane Squires, Diane Bricker, and Elizabeth Twombly	Brookes Publishing, http://www.brookespublishing.com/resource-center/screening-and-assessment/asq/asq-se-2/	Identify any need for further assessment or ongoing monitoring. (Screening)	Self-regulation, compliance, communication, adaptive behaviors, autonomy, affect, and interaction with people.	1–72 months (2, 6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 48, and 60 months)	**Who Completes:** Parent/caregiver, early childhood professional **Length:** 30-item questionnaires at each age **Time to Complete:** 10–15 minutes **Other Available Languages:** Spanish	**Who Scores:** Trained paraprofessional **Scoring Options:** Manual, electronic **Time to Score:** 2–3 minutes
Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function-Preschool Version (BRIEF-P) **Developer:** Gerard Gioia, Kimberly Espy, & Peter Isquith	PAR Inc. (Psychological Assessment Resources), https://www.parinc.com/Products/Pkey/26	Assesses executive functioning in preschool-aged children. (Assessment)	Inhibit, shift, emotional control, working memory, plan/organize.	2–5 years, 11 months	**Who Completes:** Parent / caregiver, early childhood professional **Length:** 63 items **Time to Complete:** 10–15 minutes **Other Available Languages:** Multiple	**Who Scores:** Anyone can score; trained professional interprets **Scoring Options:** Manual, electronic **Time to Score:** 15–20 minutes

Assessment Tool Name & Developer	Availability	Publisher's / Developer's Stated Purpose (Summary Purpose) [b]	Constructs	Age Range	Administration	Scoring
Brief Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment (BIT-SEA) **Developer:** Alice Carter & Margaret Briggs-Gowan	New publisher agreement in process with Mapi Research Trust, Lyon, France https://eprovide.mapi-trust.org Dr. Alice Carter alices.carter@umb.edu Dr. Briggs-Gowan mbriggsgowan@uchc.edu	Screener for identifying social and emotional/behavioral problems and delays in social and emotional competence. (Screening)	Expressed as Problem Scores and Competence Scores: activity / impulsivity, aggression / defiance, peer aggression, depression / withdrawal, general anxiety, separation distress, inhibition to novelty, sleep, negative emotionality, eating, sensory sensitivity, compliance, attention, imitation / play, mastery motivation, empathy, pro-social peer relations.	12–36 months	**Who Completes:** Parent / caregiver, child care provider **Length:** 42 items **Time to Complete:** 7–15 minutes **Other Available Languages:** Multiple	**Who Scores:** Trained professional **Scoring Options:** Manual (electronic is possible with new publisher) **Time to Score:** 1–2 minutes

Assessment Tool Name & Developer	Availability	Publisher's / Developer's Stated Purpose (Summary Purpose) [b]	Constructs	Age Range	Administration	Scoring
Child Behavior Check List Pre-school (CBCL/1½–5) and Child Teacher Report Form (C-TRF) Developer: Thomas M. Achenbach	Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment (ASEBA) http://www.aseba.org/ preschool.html	Clinical instruments primarily designed to assess behavioral and emotional problems in children and adolescents. Practical applications include using ASEBA measures in educational settings to identify problems that individual children may have, to suggest the need for additional evaluation, to guide the development of individualized intervention plans, and to track changes in functioning. ASEBA measures can be used as both predictors and outcomes in basic and applied developmental and child clinical research. (Screening, Assessment, Child Outcomes/Program Evaluation)	Syndrome Scales: emotionally reactive, anxious/depressed, somatic complaints, withdrawn, sleep problems, attention problems, aggressive behavior. DSM-5 Oriented Scales: depressive problems, anxiety problems, autism spectrum problems, attention deficit/hyperactivity problems, oppositional defiant problems.	18–60 months	**Who Completes:** Parent / caregiver, early childhood professional **Length:** 100 items **Time to Complete:** 10–15 minutes **Other Available Languages:** Multiple	**Who Scores:** Trained professional **Scoring Options:** Manual, electronic **Time to Score:** Information not publicly available

Assessment Tool Name & Developer	Availability	Publisher's / Developer's Stated Purpose (Summary Purpose) [b]	Constructs	Age Range	Administration	Scoring
The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment Clinical Form (DECA-C) Developer: Paul LeBuffe & Jack Naglieri	Kaplan Early Learning, https://www.kaplanco.com/product/98817/devereux-early-childhood-assessment-deca-c-clinical-kit?c=17%7CEA1000	The primary purpose of the DECA-C is to support early intervention efforts to reduce or eliminate significant emotional and behavioral concerns in preschool children. The DECA-C may also be used to guide interventions, help identify children needing special services, assess outcomes, and help programs meet Head Start, IDEA, and similar standards. (Evaluation, Assessment, Child Outcomes/Program Evaluation)	Total Protective Factors (TPF): initiative, self-control, attachment. Total Behavioral Concerns (TBC): attention problems, aggression, withdrawal / depression, emotional control problems.	2–5 years	**Who Completes:** Parent / caregiver, early childhood professional **Length:** 62 items **Time to Complete:** Paper, 10–15 minutes; electronic, 5–10 minutes **Other Available Languages:** Spanish	**Who Scores:** Trained professional **Scoring Options:** Manual, electronic **Time to Score:** 10–15 minutes
The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment for Infants (DECA-I) Developer: Mary Mackrain & Paul LeBuffe	Kaplan Early Learning, https://www.kaplanco.com/product/16139/deca-i-t-kit?c=17%7CEA1000	Tool for assessing protective factors and screening for potential risks in the social and emotional development of very young children. This assessment is appropriate for child and program outcomes. (Screening, Assessment, Child Outcomes/Program Evaluation)	Initiative, attachment / relationships, and total protective factors scales.	1–18 months	**Who Completes:** Parent / caregiver, child care provider **Length:** 33 items **Time to Complete:** Paper, 5–10 minutes; electronic, 3-5 minutes **Other Available Languages:** Spanish	**Who Scores:** Training is not required but is offered to support users **Scoring Options:** Manual, electronic **Time to Score:** Information not publicly available

Assessment Tool Name & Developer	Availability	Publisher's / Developer's Stated Purpose (Summary Purpose) [b]	Constructs	Age Range	Administration	Scoring
The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment for Toddlers (DECA-T) **Developer:** Mary Mackrain & Paul LeBuffe	Kaplan Early Learning, https://www.kaplanco.com/product/16139/deca-i-t-kit?c=17%7CEA1000	Tool for assessing protective factors and screening for potential risks in the social and emotional development of very young children. This assessment is appropriate for child and program outcomes. (Screening, Assessment, Child Outcomes/Program Evaluation)	Initiative, attachment / relationships, self-regulation, and total protective factors scales.	18–36 months	**Who Completes:** Parent / caregiver, early childhood professional **Length:** 36 items **Time to Complete:** Paper, 5–10 minutes; electronic, 3–5 minutes **Other Available Languages:** Spanish	**Who Scores:** Training is not required but is offered to support users **Scoring Options:** Manual, electronic **Time to Score:** Information not publicly available

Assessment Tool Name & Developer	Availability	Publisher's / Developer's Stated Purpose (Summary Purpose) [b]	Constructs	Age Range	Administration	Scoring
Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment (ITSEA) **Developer:** Alice Carter & Margaret Briggs-Gowan	New publisher agreement in process with Mapi Research Trust, Lyon, France https://eprovide.mapi-trust.org Dr. Alice Carter alices.carter@umb.edu Dr. Briggs-Gowan mbriggsgowan@uchc.edu	Assess a wide array of social and emotional and behavioral problems and competencies. (Assessment)	Four domains with three to six scales in each domain. 1. Externalizing: activity / impulsivity, aggression / defiance, peer aggression. 2. Internalizing: depression / withdrawal, general anxiety, separation distress, inhibition to novelty. 3. Dysregulation: sleep, negative emotionality, eating, sensory sensitivity. 4. Competence: Compliance, attention, imitation / play, mastery motivation, empathy, pro-social peer relations.	12–36 months	**Who Completes:** Parent / caregiver, child care provider **Length:** 166 items **Time to Complete:** 20–30 minutes as questionnaire; 35–45 as interview **Other Available Languages:** Spanish	**Who Scores:** Trained professional **Scoring Options:** Manual (electronic is possible with new publisher) **Time to Score:** Information not publicly available

Assessment Tool Name & Developer	Availability	Publisher's / Developer's Stated Purpose (Summary Purpose) [b]	Constructs	Age Range	Administration	Scoring
Maternal and Paternal Postnatal Attachment Scales (MPAQ and PPAQ) Developer: John Condon and Carolyn Corkindale	Free of charge, http://hdl.handle.net/2328/35291 http://hdl.handle.net/2328/35293	Assess the mother's/father's emotional response to her/his infant along a number of dimensions relating to parent-to-infant attachment. (Assessment)	Mother's and father's quality of attachment, absence of hostility, pleasure in interaction; produces Global Attachment Score.	Infancy (first year of life; research includes 4 weeks to 15 months)	**Who Completes:** Mothers and fathers **Length:** 19 items **Time to Complete:** 5 minutes **Other Available Languages:** None	**Who Scores:** Trained professional **Scoring Options:** Manual **Time to Score:** 2 minutes
Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters-II (MESSY-II) Developer: Johnny Lee Matson	Disability Consultants, LLC, http://www.disabilityconsultants.org/MESSY.php	Provide information on communication and general social skills behavior that can be identified both for treatment goals and to evaluate treatment efficacy. (Assessment, Child Outcomes/Program Evaluation)	Hostile, adaptive / appropriate, and inappropriate assertiveness / overconfident.	2–16 years	**Who Completes:** Parent / caregiver, early childhood professional **Length:** MESSY-II, 57 items (MESSY parent, 62 items; MESSY teacher, 64 items) **Time to Complete:** 10–15 minutes **Other Available Languages:** Multiple	**Who Scores:** Information not publicly available **Scoring Options:** Information not publicly available **Time to Score:** 5–10 minutes

Assessment Tool Name & Developer	Availability	Publisher's / Developer's Stated Purpose (Summary Purpose) [b]	Constructs	Age Range	Administration	Scoring
Social-Emotional Assessment / Evaluation Measure (SEAM) and SEAM Family Profile **Developers:** Jane Squires, Diane Bricker, Misti Waddell, Kristin Funk, Jantina Clifford, and Robert Hoselton	Brookes Publishing, http://www. brookespublishing. com/resource-center/ screening-and-assessment/seam/	Assessing and monitoring social-emotional and behavioral development to assist in the early identification of social-emotional difficulties and behavior disorders and to prevent problems by building positive partnerships with families and optimizing positive parent–child interactions in the first years of life. Use the SEAM results to develop high-quality and developmentally appropriate social-emotional goals and objectives for children and their families. (Assessment)	Infant: Healthy interactions, range of emotions, social emotional response regulation, empathy, shared attention / engagement with others, exploration, self-image, regulation of activity level, cooperation, range of adaptive skills. Toddler: Same as infant, adding independence.	2–66 months (infant: 2–18 months; toddler: 18–36 months)	**Who Completes:** Parent / caregiver, early childhood professional **Length:** SEAM, 35 items each for infant and toddler; SEAM Family Profile, 9 items for infant; 17 items for toddler **Time to Complete:** SEAM, 10–30 minutes; SEAM Family Profile, 10–15 minutes **Other Available Languages:** Spanish	**Who Scores:** Trained professional **Scoring Options:** Manual conversion to quantitative scores possible; qualitative information **Time to Score:** Information not publicly available

Assessment Tool Name & Developer	Availability	Publisher's / Developer's Stated Purpose (Summary Purpose) [b]	Constructs	Age Range	Administration	Scoring
Temperament and Atypical Behavior Scale (TABS) and TABS screener **Developers:** Stephen Bagnato, John Neisworth, John Salvia, & Frances Hunt	Brookes Publishing, http://www.brookespublishing.com/resource-center/screening-and-assessment/tabs/	Screening and assessment tool to detect critical temperament and self-regulation issues to determine eligibility for early intervention and behavioral support services, design IFSPs or IEPs, and develop wraparound mental health behavioral support plans. (Screening, Evaluation, Assessment)	Temperament, attention, attachment, social behavior, play, vocal and oral behavior, sense and movement, self-stimulation and self-injury, and neurobehavioral state Four subscales: detached, hyper-sensitive/active, underreactive, and dysregulated.	11–71 months	**Who Completes:** Parent / caregiver, early childhood professional **Length:** Screener, 15 items; full scale, 55 items **Time to Complete:** Screener, 5 minutes; full scale, 15 minutes **Other Available Languages:** None	**Who Scores:** Trained professional **Scoring Options:** Information not publicly available **Time to Score:** Information not publicly available

[a] Information in this table comes from publisher websites and/or published materials (e.g., technical/examiner manuals, journal publications) cited in the psychometric information table in this resource. Information on who administers and/or scores is meant to represent the minimum level of specific training needed and includes all roles with more than the minimum level of specific training and educational/experiential background.

[b] Summary Purpose: The publisher's/developer's stated purpose for the tool is summarized using terms for screening, evaluation, and assessment from IDEA regulations for Part C (Subpart D—Child Find, Evaluations and Assessments, and Individualized Family Service Plans §303.320 and §303.321; https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/c/d) and for child outcomes/program evaluation based on OSEP's Results Driven Accountability focus on child outcomes (https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rda/index.html).

TABLE 2: Assessment Tools Psychometric Information

Assessment Tool	Internal Consistency Reliability	Test-retest Reliability	Convergent / Concurrent / Criterion Validity [a]	Reference(s) [b]
Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function-Pre-school Version (BRIEF-P)	Parents, 0.80−0.95 Teachers, 0.90−0.97	Parents, 0.78−0.90 Teachers, 0.65−0.94	Parents and teachers, > 0.70	Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2015; Sherman & Brooks, 2010;
Brief Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment (BIT-SEA)	Parent/caregiver: Problem Scores, 0.79; Competence Scores, 0.65 Teacher/child care provider: Problem Scores, 0.80 Competence Scores, 0.66	Problem Scores, 0.87 Competence Scores, 0.85	Problem Scores, 0.71 Competence Scores, 0.30	Briggs-Gowan et al., 2004
Child Behavior Check List Preschool (CBCL/1½−5) and Child Teacher Report Form (C-TRF)	CBCL /1½−5: Syndrome scales, 0.66−0.92 DSM-Oriented scales, 0.63−0.86	CBCL /1½−5, 0.85 C-TRF, 0.81	0.46−0.77	Achenbach & Rescorla (2000); Achenbach & Rescorla, 2008; Berry et al., 2004
The Devereux Early Child-hood Assessment Clinical Form (DECA-C)	Parents: Total Protective Factors (TPF), 0.91; Total Behavioral Concerns (TBC), 0.88 Teachers: TPF, 0.94; TBC, 0.93	Parents, TPF, 0.74; TBC, 0.88 Teachers, TBF, 0.94; TBC, 0.86	Criterion classification accuracy: TPF, 0.69; TBC, 0.74	Devereux Center for Resilient Children (DCRC), n.d.; LeBuffe & Naglieri, 2003
The Devereux Early Child-hood Assessment for Infants (DECA-I)	TPF across four age ranges: Parents, 0.90−0.94; teachers, 0.93− 0.94	TPF: parents, 0.91; teachers, 0.84; overall, 0.85	TPF: criterion classifica-tion accuracy, 0.63	DCRC, n.d.; Powell, Mackrain, & LeBuffe, 2007
The Devereux Early Child-hood Assessment for Tod-dlers (DECA-T)	TPF: parents, 0.94; teachers, 0.95	TPF: parents, 0.99; teachers, 0.91; overall, 0.97	TPF: criterion classifi-cation accuracy, 0.70; convergent, 0.91	DCRC, n.d.; Powell, Mackrain, & LeBuffe, 2007

Assessment Tool	Internal Consistency Reliability	Test-retest Reliability	Convergent / Concurrent / Criterion Validity [a]	Reference(s) [b]
Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment (ITSEA)	Externalizing (Ext), 0.87 Internalizing (Int), 0.80 Dysregulation (Dys), 0.86 Competence (Com), 0.90	Domains, 0.82–0.90; scales, 0.69–0.85	Ext: 0.08–0.73 Int: 0.18–0.57 Dys: 0.23–0.62 Com: 0.12–0.33	Berry et al., 2004; Carter et al., 2003
Maternal and Paternal Postnatal Attachment Scales (MPAQ and PPAQ)	Maternal, acceptable: 0.79 Paternal, acceptable: 0.85	Information not publicly available (prior version with four different scales, 0.86)	Combined maternal and paternal, 0.40 (unadjusted) and 0.34 (adjusted)	Condon & Corkindale, 1998; Feldstein et al., 2004

Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters-II (MESSY-II)	Parent:
	  Hostile, 0.92
	  Adaptive/Appropriate, 0.88
	Inappropriately Assertive/Overconfident, 0.86
		Information not publicly available for MESSY-II (MESSY data are available)	Information not publicly available for MESSY-II (MESSY data are available)	Matson et al., 2010; Matson et al., 2012

Social-Emotional Assessment/Evaluation Measure (SEAM)	Infant, 0.90 Toddler, 0.91	Infant, 0.99 Toddler, 0.97	Infant: 0.42–0.75 Toddler: 0.26–0.65	Squires et al., 2014
Temperament and Behavior Rating Scale (TABS)	0.88–0.95	0.94	0.91	Neisworth et al., 1999

[a] Figures are reported as absolute values. Some comparisons involve tools measuring the opposite type of construct (problems vs. strengths) or that are oppositely scored.

[b] References may address both administration information in Table 1 and the psychometric information in this table. Publisher's websites referenced in Table 1 also may contain administration and psychometric information.

End Notes

Definitions of technical soundness components reviewed here are defined as follows (UHHS, 2014):

- **Internal Consistency Reliability:** Items in an assessment are meant to measure a given construct or set of constructs that make up a developmental domain, and many tools measure more than one domain. This property measures how closely items or indicators within a tool are related to one another. This property indicates the degree to which items within a domain are related to each other yet distinct enough to eliminate redundancies in the full measurement tool.

- **Test-retest reliability:** Indicates whether the tool will yield the same score across two administrations, indicating that the tool provides a consistent assessment of a skill, regardless of other factors (e.g., child's mood or health, time of the day or year)

- **Convergent/concurrent/criterion validity:** The degree to which a tool correlates with other tools assessing the same construct that are considered valid (concurrent validity) or is related to a criterion variable, such as a clinical diagnosis (criterion validity).

Appendix B of UHHS (2004) provides one suggested set of guidelines for interpreting psychometric statistics in screening tools: internal consistency reliability, 0.70 or higher=acceptable and 0.69 or below=low/weak; test-retest reliability, 0.70 or higher=acceptable and 0.69 or below=low/weak; convergent/concurrent validity, 0.50 or higher=strong/high; 0.30 – 0.49=moderate and 0.29 or below=weak/low.

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