

A Family Guide to Authentic Assessments for Young Children

What are authentic assessments?

Authentic assessments are tools that teaching teams use every day to understand

- What children know.
- How children are developing.
- What they can do to support children's growth.



How do authentic assessments work?

At home, you assess things every day. You check to see if your child is feeling well enough to attend school. You observe how they are getting along with friends when you go to the playground and what kinds of things they are interested in. These observations help you understand your child and how you can help them continue to grow. Your child's teachers use authentic assessments in much the same way.

Teaching teams collect samples of children's work, take photographs of children's learning and play, and observe what your children do during the school day (for example, during center time, outdoors, small groups, etc). Teaching teams use this information to understand how each child is doing and to plan activities that support their growth.

How is information from authentic assessments used?

Authentic assessments are used to understand children's thinking, development and learning. They are helpful to families, teachers and programs in different ways.

Families can use data from your child's authentic assessments to:

- Understand how to best support your child's growth and development.
- Understand how your child learns best in the classroom.

Teaching teams can use authentic assessment data to:

- Understand your child's abilities and make decisions about how to help him/her continue to grow.
- Plan daily activities based on your child's skills and interests, such as:
 - Select books for the classroom to help your child learn more about a skill or concept.
 - Choose games during outdoor time that encourage your child to work with others and learn new skills in a fun way.
 - Lead activities that will help your child develop social and emotional skills such as how to play with others and understand how others feel.
- Communicate with families during conferences using work samples and/or reports.

Programs can use authentic assessment data to:

- Order materials to support the learning needs of children.
- Identify resources to help teaching teams meet the learning needs of all children.



What areas of development are assessed?

Young children’s development is usually divided into five areas or “domains” for assessment:

- *Approaches to Learning* - how children engage in learning experiences. This is important because the way children approach learning influences their development across all domains.
- *Social and Emotional Development* - how children develop relationships as well as recognize and manage emotions. These are lifelong skills necessary for development and learning.
- *Language, Literacy and Communication* - how children listen, understand, and use language with their emerging literacy skills and other developing abilities to communicate.
- *Cognition* - the skills and concepts children use to understand and organize the world around them, including math, art, science, and social studies.
- *Physical Development and Health* - the skills and abilities children develop to physically maneuver and stay safe in their environment.

It is important for teaching teams to assess all of these areas through observations and analyzing work samples to best understand and provide complete support for your child. Please note that the areas described above may be slightly different depending on the tool your program uses.

How can you help with authentic assessments?

You know your child best! Talk to your child’s teachers often. Working together can help make sure your child gets the support needed for the most learning and growth.

- You can share information about your child’s interests and skills with your child’s teachers.
- You can talk about your child’s development with their teachers. This helps you and your child’s teachers to work together to support your child’s growth.
- Ask your child’s teachers about authentic assessment and be open to their recommendations.

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