

Developmental Screening

Contents

Purpose	2
When to Conduct a Developmental Screening.....	2
Child Find Screenings	2
Screenings at ESIT Referral and Intake	2
Who can conduct a screening?	3
What screening tool can be used?.....	3
When to select a screening or an evaluation.....	3
Screening is appropriate when:	3
Evaluation is required when:	3
Vision and Hearing Screening	4
Social Emotional Screening.....	4
Screening Procedures	4
Screening Results	5
Practice Considerations	5
Proceeding to Evaluation	5
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families	6



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Original Date: October 2013 | Revised Date: January 2026

Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) | Approved for distribution by DeEtte Snyder, Workforce Development Manager

Purpose

To provide guidance regarding the appropriate use of developmental screening and how it relates to Early Support for Infants and Toddler (ESIT) eligibility evaluation and assessment procedures according to [F.R. § 303.320\(a\)\(3\)](#).

Screenings are intended to identify children who may have developmental delays and require an eligibility evaluation. **Screenings do not establish eligibility for ESIT services.**

Note: This practice guide uses the term “family” or “parent” to refer to parent(s), foster parent(s), kinship caregivers, or legal guardians of the child who have decision making authority.

When to Conduct a Developmental Screening

There are two situations when screenings typically take place: Child Find events and after a child has been referred to ESIT. These situations are very different and come with specific considerations and requirements.

Child Find Screenings

An ESIT Provider Agency may develop procedures to screen infants and toddlers in the community as a part of Child Find activities hosted by the agency. Developmental screenings conducted as part of Child Find activities are considered a “pre-ESIT” activity as they occur prior to a referral to ESIT. Developmental screenings done at Child Find activities are optional under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ([34 CFR §303.320](#)).

Developmental screening in all developmental areas, including vision and hearing, can be very helpful in supporting parents’ understanding of child development and identifying developmental concerns. Parents who participate in Child Find activities should understand that their child is being screened and not evaluated. If developmental concerns are identified, the parent can then give consent for an official referral to ESIT.

Screenings at ESIT Referral and Intake

If a child is referred to ESIT **with** an identified developmental concern, a screening is not needed, and the team can proceed with the multi-disciplinary eligibility evaluation.

If a child is referred to ESIT **without** an identified developmental concern, the team can conduct a developmental screening following the screening procedures outlined below. **The screening is included as part of the 45-day timeline that starts at referral.**

When a child is referred to ESIT, the reason for referral may not be known until the Intake Coordinator or Family Resources Coordinator (FRC) makes initial contact with the family. At intake, information about the parent’s concerns and information about the child’s development

Original Date: October 2013 | Revised Date: January 2026

Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) | Approved for distribution by DeEtte Snyder, Workforce Development Manager

through screening may be gathered. Consent for screening and Prior Written Notice is required to ensure the parent is aware the screening is not an evaluation and the results must be shared with the family to support decisions regarding next steps. (See Screening Procedures below.)

Who can conduct a screening?

Any ESIT provider, including a Family Resource Coordinator or another provider identified in the [Qualified Personnel Guidelines](#), can conduct a screening, as long as the provider has been trained according to the tool's requirement.

What screening tool can be used?

A commonly used developmental screening tool used in Washington is the Ages & Stages Questionnaire, 3rd Edition (2009). The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA) provides a list of [developmental screening tools](#).

When to select a screening or an evaluation

The following are examples of when screening is appropriate and when a full multi-disciplinary eligibility evaluation is required.

Screening is appropriate when:

- An ESIT Provider Agency conducts a free community Child Find event and includes developmental screening at the event.
- A parent is curious about their child's development but has no specific concerns and has not requested a full evaluation.
- The ESIT team intends to do a full evaluation but requires more information to determine which areas are of greatest concern in order to choose the most appropriate disciplines and evaluation tools for the initial eligibility evaluation. The team needs to be aware of timing as the 45-day timeline begins at the date of referral.

Evaluation is required when:

- A parent expresses concern about their child's development in any area.
- A parent requests a full evaluation, regardless of prior screening results. [F.R. § 303.320\(a\)\(3\)](#)
- A child receives developmental screening services at a community Child Find event and concerns are identified.
- A physician or other referral source refers a child due to any developmental concern or diagnosed condition. (Note: An [established condition](#) automatically established eligibility and an evaluation is not required for eligibility).

Vision and Hearing Screening

The Three-Pronged Approach (TPA) is the Washington DCYF ESIT protocol for documenting the screening of vision and hearing for every child referred for ESIT services. Typically, the protocol begins at intake and is completed during the initial eligibility process. The information gathered is included within the initial IFSP. It is best to complete the TPA as close to intake as possible to allow time to include specialists at evaluation if needed. Additionally, the TPA is updated at each annual IFSP update. Instructions and forms for the TPA are available on the DCYF ESIT [Practice Guidance](#) page and training is available in the DCYF Training Portal.

The TPA can be used as a part of Child Find screening, though not required. However, if a child's vision and hearing were screened at a Child Find event using any tool, equipment, or method and child is then referred to ESIT, the vision and hearing screening information from Child Find is documented within the TPA Summary Form.

Social Emotional Screening

The State Identified Measurable Results (SIMR) of Washington's State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) is that there will be an increased percentage of infants and toddlers with disabilities who will substantially increase their rate of growth in positive social-emotional skills, including social relationships, by the time they exit the early intervention program. Implementing broader social-emotional screening at intake for all children is one method to ensure needs are not missed. The use of a social emotional screening tool, such as Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional (ASQ:SE), is recommended, though not required, and may inform the selection of an in-depth tool for eligibility.

Things to consider when using a social emotional screening tool include:

- A screening is not needed if the family, referral source, and/or team have already identified social-emotional concerns. A specific and in-depth social emotional assessment tool should be included in the eligibility evaluation.
- After completing the ASQ:SE it is determined that a more in-depth social-emotional assessment is not warranted, you must still complete the social-emotional section of the comprehensive standardized tool you are using for eligibility.
- Essential skills for an effective screener in conducting social emotional screening include the ability to be comfortable with challenging conversations and active listening with appropriate follow up questions.

Screening Procedures

If the decision is made to conduct a screening (after referral and/or at intake), the FRC will complete the following steps:

Original Date: October 2013 | Revised Date: January 2026

Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) | Approved for distribution by DeEtte Snyder, Workforce Development Manager

1. Explain that a screening is not an evaluation and the parent has a right to a full evaluation.
2. Provide the family with the **ESIT Parent Rights (Part C Procedural Safeguards)** and **Prior Written Notice** that a screening will be conducted.
3. Obtain the signature of the parent to indicate **consent for the screening**. Consent for screening is required to ensure the parent is aware the screening is not an evaluation.
4. Maintain copies of the signed consent in the child's record.

Screening Results

Once screening is completed, the ESIT team and family will discuss results and make decisions about the next steps.

- *If results of screening **show potential delays** in any area* - schedule an evaluation with parent consent as soon as possible while keeping in mind the 45-day timeline.
- *If results of the screening **show no potential delays** in any area* - reassure the family that the results of the screening do not indicate a developmental delay. However, also inform them they still have the right to a full evaluation if desired. Additionally, provide family with information about community resources to further enhance child development, if needed. For example, [Help Me Grow Washington](#) resources, community playgroups like library story time, or Early Head Start if the family qualifies. If the family has additional or continuing concerns, schedule an evaluation with consent as soon as possible while keeping in mind the 45-day timeline.
- *If results are **inconclusive** (i.e. close to cutoff scores and/or difficult to interpret in consideration of cultural or linguistic factors)* - discuss with the family about potential next steps such as rescreen with an interpreter using another tool, rescreen in the future, or conduct an evaluation with consent and schedule as soon as possible to be mindful of the 45-day timeline.

Practice Considerations

Proceeding to Evaluation

The decision to proceed to evaluation is not always based on screening results showing potential delays. Parents still have the decision-making authority to proceed with evaluation or not, regardless of the screening results. For example, it may be determined through a conversation with the parent, following a screening, that the child is now able to perform skills they were not demonstrating at the time of the screening. In this case, the family can still be offered an evaluation but is informed their child no longer shows developmental concerns based on the recently obtained skills.

On the other hand, some children who score above the cutoff in a screening may still require

Original Date: October 2013 | Revised Date: January 2026

Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) | Approved for distribution by DeEtte Snyder, Workforce Development Manager

further assessment and evaluation. Observations of functional skills not identified by the screening tool, parent concerns, or the desire for full evaluation are valid reasons to conduct a multi-disciplinary eligibility evaluation even if the screening does not indicate a potential delay.

Additionally, the ESIT team, including the family, may determine that a full evaluation is necessary based on a parent's description of other concerning developmental patterns not identified in the screening.

Here is a resource from Ages and Stages to assist with family conversations for sharing results and assisting in next steps: [Sharing screening results with families](#).

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families

Special consideration should be taken when administering screening tools and interpreting screening results for children who are culturally or linguistically diverse. There are several factors that can affect a child's scores on a screening tool such as the child's primary language, cultural expectations for developmental behaviors or skills, or environmental factors that do not provide opportunities to practice a skill such as dressing, using stairs, feeding themselves etc.

Here is a resource from Ages and Stages to assist with working with an interpreter during screening procedures: [9 best practices when using an interpreter during screening](#).

Additionally, many screening tools are based on a particular view of development and may not be aligned to the family's culture, including child rearing or developmental values or norms. It is especially important for the parents to understand the intent of an item as described in the protocol when they are used as a reporter of their child's skills or behaviors within their family routine. This can influence the interpretation of a child's performance and the screening score/results. Therefore, it is recommended that if the tool is not culturally responsive or English is the family's second language, the provider conducting the screening should use a flexible and family centered screening process, including the interpretation of results and discussion with the family.

Being flexible and family centered means that often a screening tool, and at times the screening process itself, may need to be adapted to be culturally responsive to families. Strategies to adapt a screening tool include:

- If the skill is relevant but the activity is not, then ADAPT the item.
- If the skill itself is not aligned with the family's values or priorities, or cannot be adapted, OMIT the item and adjust scoring.
- Use this [materials and item adaptation guide](#) from Ages and Stages to assist in this process.