

Troubleshooting Tips for Performing Assessments

General suggestions:

If you have the child's attention: It's important to READ THE SCRIPT VERBATIM and not to amend the script.

For instance, don't repeat directions twice when the script indicates that they should only be given once. It's natural to want to help a child who is having difficulty, but all children need to get the same assessment, that's why we are such sticklers for staying with the script. Specific tasks where assessors seem to have more difficulty staying on-script (because they have more complex scripts) are the balance beam, toy sort and snack delay. Please review these tasks carefully to make sure you understand what you need to say depending on each child's response to the task.

Also, be aware that as you become more comfortable with the assessment, you may be tempted to ad-lib the script and stray from the exact wording of each task. Please fight this temptation; we need you to READ THE SCRIPT VERBATIM as much as possible, unless forced off-script by the child's behavior or lack of attention (see below).

If you don't have the child's attention: If it's clear that the child didn't hear the instructions or if the child's behavior requires multiple prompts just to get through the assessment, an extra prompt may be necessary. You will have to make this judgment yourself based on the individual child.

It's really important to COMPLETELY FILL OUT THE ASSESSMENT SCORE SHEETS. Any blank items represent lost data for the study. Please take the time to review your score sheets after each assessment to make sure they have been completely filled out.

If you are taping an assessment, please follow the directions for positioning and using the camera carefully. Make sure the camera is plugged in. Last fall, we had to throw out 10 of 72 tapes because of technical problems with taping. Also, make absolutely sure that the child's face is visible on the tape. We will be using these tapes to evaluate the child, so we need to have a clear view of the child's face on the tape.

If the child accidentally runs into furniture or falls, makes a choking sound, or in any other way appears to be at risk for injury, you need to STOP the assessment, return the child to class, AND note this on the assessment worksheet. We do not want a child to be injured in any way without having alerted the teacher and senior CSRP staff that there was an incident with "owie potential".

If the child requests 2 or more times to return to class, STOP the assessment and return them to class.

The MOST important part of doing an assessment is the ability to relate to the child as a person. If you find yourself becoming so irritated or frustrated with the child that you can no longer make warm eye contact or are no longer able to respond to the child's questions or concerns, it is time to end and to try again another day. Along the same lines, as you become more comfortable with performing assessments, please guard against becoming rushed or perfunctory in your interaction with the child, take your time and maintain a warm, positive attitude toward the child.

Specific task suggestions:

Balance Beam:

- Remember to say "Ready, go" and "OK" for each trial. We need these cues to assess reliability since both you and the child are usually out of the camera frame during this task.

- Use the exact prompts for each trial – these are designed to make the child go slower with each trial. If you don't give them exactly, the child won't have the chance to do this.

Pencil Tap:

- Give appropriate prompt after each practice trial – even if the child is successful. Assessors tend to do very well at giving the prompt if the child is incorrect, but often forget the prompt if the child is correct.

- Make sure to show fingers and tap during instructions.

- Remember-you can do up to (but not more than) 6 practice trials if the child needs them.

- Follow the script exactly on this task: give clear instructions first, and then proceed to practice trials. In the past, some assessors performed practice trials during the initial instructions, and this usually confused the child and made the assessor go over the 6 practice trial limit.

- Hold the child's hand to demonstrate how to tap if you reach that point in the script. In the past, some assessors let the child tap incorrectly too many times before demonstrating while holding the child's hand.

Tower Task:

- During practice trial, assessor must place first block: this models what the child should do in the actual trial. Place this first block deliberately a little distance away from the rest of the blocks so it is clear that they should place the next block on top of this one.

-Make sure that the child actually gets to practice taking turns correctly during the practice trial. If the child starts building alone right away, take down the tower if necessary and start again. During the practice trial, the child is supposed to get practice at doing the task correctly, so if you need to start again because he/she moved too fast, that's fine.

-Make sure that you move the practice tower a distance away from where you will build the actual tower. Some children become confused and think they are supposed to add blocks from the actual trial to the practice tower if you don't move the practice tower away.

-Remember-during the practice tower, you are supposed to prompt the child about taking turns. Then during the actual trial you remain silent if they take an extra turn.

-During the actual trial – make sure you give the child the opportunity to take an extra turn. In the past, some assessors jumped right in when it was their turn, when it appeared the child would have taken an extra turn if the assessor weren't right there with a block in his/her hand.

Tower Cleanup:

-Be prepared to start clock as soon as you hand the child the bag – look at the time as soon as that first block is put in the bag (can happen almost immediately)

-Make sure to gesture to both the practice and actual tower so the child knows that both towers need to be cleaned up.

-If the child doesn't notice some blocks left on the table or if some blocks were knocked onto the floor – the assessor should remind the child that those blocks need to be cleaned up as well. It's left to your judgment whether the child doesn't notice the additional blocks (should get prompt) or is just being slow/stalling (should not get prompt).

Toy Sort:

-Be prepared to start clock as soon as directions are complete. Many children tend to jump right in to sorting. If the child starts sorting while you are still giving directions, start timer immediately and code time of first toy sorted as “immediately”.

-Only demonstrate once where toys go – unless child is sorting incorrectly (then follow prompt). But if child asks where particular toy goes, it's OK to answer.

-If child is not sorting at any time, **make sure you wait one minute from the moment he/she stopped sorting to give prompt.**

Toy Wrap:

-Don't forget to turn the child's chair.

-If you catch the child peeking, don't forget to give prompt “No peeking.”

-Make sure you watch the child 50% of the time, or even more if you can. Then you are almost guaranteed to catch a peek. Practice rustling the paper and watching the child at the same time – then you can watch almost 100% of the time. Do not complete paperwork during this time; you really need to watch the child.

Toy Wait:

-Don't forget to turn the child's chair back around, even if the child turns around in the chair.

-Place the gift bag a little distance from the child, not right in front of them, and give the instructions to not touch the bag as soon as you place the bag.

-Make sure you watch the child 50% of the time. This is obviously hard to do when the child is facing you, but try not to get so caught up in looking busy that you don't see them touch the gift bag.

-Make sure to follow the script, "I need to finish this up..." – don't just instruct the child to turn back around.

Toy Return:

-Make sure you have clock ready to go and in front of you when you ask for toy back – children tend to give the toy back pretty quickly.

-If the child stalls, wait one full minute before giving the next prompt.

Snack Delay:

-Make sure the child finishes the M&M that you give them before moving on. The same holds true if they eat any other M&M during this task or during the Tongue Task.

-Remember to give prompts between trials (located at bottom of each trial's page). Even if the child is successful, they get a prompt and a reminder to wait for the timer and keep their hands flat. These prompts are easy to overlook, but please remember to give them.

-Be prepared to start the clock as soon as the M&M is put under the cup. Don't put M&M under cup until after instructions are completed.

-If the child goes for the M&M during the practice trial – stop him/her by putting your hand on the cup if necessary. During the practice trial, you are supposed to intervene to make sure the child understands the correct performance of the task.

-During the actual trials, if the child is standing up and making a move for the cups, don't tell him/her to sit down – let the child do whatever he/she intends to do and record behavior.

-If the child lifts the cup but does not touch or eat the M&M during a trial, but does eat it after the timer goes off and you say "Time" – then the child should be coded as a 3, not a 1.

Tongue Task:

-Follow script and complete all instructions before everyone puts the M&M on their tongue (otherwise may lengthen the amount of time the child has to hold the M&M on tongue).