

Topic: Use assessment data from multiple sources to create, modify, and adapt a safe learning environment that promotes the achievement of all learners.

Wilkinson, L. A. (2010). Facilitating the identification of autism spectrum disorders in school-age children. *Remedial and Special Education, 31*, 350-357.

Context

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are the second most serious developmental disability after mental retardation. Although at the time of publication the author reported that 1 in 150 children were identified with ASD, the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 1 out of 88 children are now being diagnosed with ASD (CDC, 2012). Yet, many believe that the number of children with ASD being served under IDEA significantly underestimates the actual prevalence and growth of the population.

Purpose of Article

The purpose of this article was to discuss the importance of early identification of children with ASD in schools, especially children with milder forms of autism. The authors provide a review of five screening instruments that hold promise in detecting the early warning signs of ASD.

Five Recommended Screening Tools

School-based support personnel, including special educators, school counselors, speech and language pathologists, and school psychologists should consider using the following five screening tools to ensure that children with ASD are identified early:

1. *Autism Spectrum Screening Questionnaire* (ASSQ; Ehlers, Gillberg, & Wing, 1999) covers children ages 7-16, has a parent and teacher form with 27 items, and takes approximately 10 minutes to complete.
2. *Childhood Autism Spectrum Test* (CAST; Scott, Baron-Cohen, Bolton, & Brayne, 2002) covers children ages 4-11, has a parent form with 37 items, and takes 10 minutes to complete.

3. *Children's Communication Checklist—Second Edition* (CCC-2; Bishop, 2003) covers children ages 4-16.11, has a parent or professional form with 70 items, and takes 10-15 minutes to complete.
4. *Social Communication Questionnaire* (SCQ; Rutter, Bailey, & Lord, 2003) covers ages 4 to adult, has a parent form with 40 items, and takes 10 minutes to complete.
5. *Social Responsiveness Scale* (SRS; Constantino & Gruber, 2005) covers ages 4-18; has a parent and teacher form with 65 items, and takes 10 to 20 minutes to complete.

All instruments have strong psychometric properties including sensitivity and specificity.

Guidance on Using the Screeners

The author provides guidance on how practitioners might implement the screening process.

- Step 1. The ASSQ or CAST could be used as an initial screen.
- Step 2. Children who meet the threshold criteria in Step 1 should be assessed using the CCC-2, SCQ, and/or SRS to further document the degree of ASD symptomatology.
- Step 3. Children who meet the threshold criteria in Step 2 should then be referred for a full and comprehensive multidisciplinary assessment.

Although there was strong support for using the five tools, the author also recognized the limitations of the instruments, including the danger of identifying false negatives (children who were not identified by the instrument but could have ASD). Additionally, some of the instruments are recommended for preschoolers

but little research supports their effectiveness with this young population. The tools do not provide the practitioner with information on the subtypes of ASD especially with more subtle or mild autistic symptoms. However, the author concluded that it might be more beneficial to over-identify children than to under-refer and risk not providing them important early intervention services.

Conclusion

The article provides an overview of five screening tools that school personnel could use to detect risk factors and warning signs of ASD assessment methodologies. Early identification of ASD is critical in assuring that children with ASD receive appropriate services under IDEA.

References

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