Assessing a New learner

Suggested Steps to follow:

*These will vary based on funding source and time with the learner but regardless of the "days" the general progression should apply for most learners.

1. Complete a questionnaire with caregivers to determine learner goals and get background information about other treatments, and areas of concern including antecedents and consequences (Day 1)
2. Complete a direct observation where you directly observe the learner and take notes. Try to interact with the learner and record how they interact. (Day 1 or 2) You want to gauge:
   a. Connection
      i. Do they notice others in their environment?
      ii. Do they initiate interaction with others?
      iii. How do they respond to attempts to engage?
      iv. How do they respond to requests from others to complete demands, follow routine, etc?
   b. Communication
      i. Are they using gaze shift to communicate?
      ii. Are they using gestures to communicate?
      iii. Are they using body positioning/movement to communicate?
      iv. Are they using people as tools to communicate?
      v. Are they using sounds to communicate?
      vi. What is the communication output: sign, pictures, vocal words
      vii. Do they value communication partners?
   c. Developmental Performance
      i. If connection is strong enough, present a few simple questions based on the learner's age/developmental level and note how they respond
3. Have the parent complete any indirect assessment measures such as PEAK Indirect checklist, Vineland, etc by the time you come out next (Day 1 or 2)
4. Use the Stages described below in order to determine what types of programs to focus on for the learner
5. Probe through items you think the learner might need, DO NOT present too many demands in one session. Make sure to use reinforcement and prompting (Day 3)
6. If you are working with a learner and do not have a strong trusting connection and teaching relationship, you may need to use demand fading and develop a stronger teaching relationship prior to writing skill acquisition programs based on commonly used behavior analytic assessments (Day 3)
7. Take notes on the learner's performance, strength of teaching relationship, preference for items, and ABC data on any behaviors of concern (Day 3)
8. Play with the learner A LOT and try to figure out what they prefer to do (Day 3)
   a. Follow the learner's lead
   b. Imitate the learner
   c. Observe the learner and be available to them

      d.   Create fun activities → does the learner come to you to indicate what they like?

9. Try to do a preference assessment within the first couple sessions. DO NOT do a preference assessment until you know what type of assessment (free operant, paired choice, MSWO) will work best with the learner.

10. Determine if there are any challenging behaviors that will interfere with formal training: weak teaching relationship, tantrums, etc. If the learner does not readily follow directions, demonstrates difficulty navigating removal of preferred items/waiting/being told no, etc, you will need to focus programming heavily on reducing these issues first. This can be done with demand fading; teaching tolerance, coping, and self-advocacy skills for removal of items/waiting/being told no and for tantrums to gain access; and by increasing functional communication and emotional regulation skills.

11. Make sure for the assessments listed below that the learner performs the skills in each area. If a learner seems stage 2, make sure the learner is performing the stage 1 skills first. You don't need to formally test them, but test ones that you aren't sure of.

12. Make sure if the learner is engaging in challenging behavior, that you determine plans that include the 3 steps to compassion (Comprehensive, incorporate the big 4, and use shaping) in developing the intervention plan based on your assessment. You may start with a general plan and then individualize for your learner when you implement it.

Stage 1 – A stage one learner is typically a learner who is just starting programming around the age of 2-4. Some learners who are older may fit into this category if they have never had therapy before. Stage 1 learners typically demonstrate few skills, do not engage with others in their environment to form a teaching relationship, and do not demonstrate learner readiness skills. For a stage 1 learner you want to assess the following items at minimum:

- **Instructional Motivation** –
    - Will the learner take preferred items?
    - Will the learner allow preferred items be taken away?
    - Will the learner allow prompting with simple demands?
    - How often can you present demands to the learner?
    - Will the learner sit?
- **Mand Training** –
    - How does the learner indicate he/she wants an item?
    - Does the learner engage in joint attention skills?
    - Does the learner engage in pre-communicative behavior (gaze shifting, showing, giving, approach, etc)
    - Does the learner make vocalizations?
    - Does the learner say any words or form signs?
    - Do the parents require the learner to communicate?
- **Attending** –
    - Will the learner attend to and track reinforcing items?
    - Will the learner attend to and track non-reinforcing items?
- **Matching**
    - Does the learner match identical items?
    - Does the learner match identical pictures?
    - Does the learner match 2d to 3d identical?
    - Does the learner match 3D to 2d identical?
    - Does the learner match non-identical items, pictures, and 2d/3d 3d/2d?
    - Does the learner match associated pictures?
- **Motor imitation**
    - Does the learner continue a movement they are doing when an adult imitates them?
    - Does the learner imitate preferred motor movements when the adult models them?
    - Does the learner imitate basic motor movements?
    - Does the learner imitate fine motor movements?
    - Does the learner imitate advanced motor movements: intensity, speed, repetition?
- **Object imitation**
    - Does the learner continue a movement they are doing when an adult imitates them?
    - Does the learner imitate preferred motor movements when the adult models them?
    - Does the learner imitate with objects and no distracters?
    - Does the learner imitate with object discriminating?
- **Shape sorter**
    - Does the learner put shapes in the shape sorter?

- o   Does the learner put shapes in the shape sorter without assistance to find shapes?
- **Basic Puzzles**
    - o   Does the learner do simple 3 piece knob puzzles?
    - o   Does the learner do puzzles without knobs?
    - o   Does the learner do puzzles with 4-6 interlocking pieces?
    - o   Does the learner do puzzles with 12 interlocking pieces?
- **Orienting**
    - o   If you hide a preferred item does the learner find it?
    - o   Does the learner find the preferred item regardless of how it is presented (in a bowl, on the table)?
    - o   Does the learner give an item when asked without needing to discriminate?
- **Play skills**
    - o   Does the learner explore the environment on their own and engage with items in the environment?
    - o   Does the learner engage with another person with toys or objects of their choosing?
    - o   Does the learner engage in social play (peek a boo), sensory social routines, and other types of joint activity routines?
- **Barriers to Learning**
    - o   Review the materials from the webinar [Rediscover your Roots Part 1: Putting the Analysis back in behavior analysis](#) and assess and develop programming for any barriers to learning.
- **Core Autism Symptoms**
    - o   Review the [PDF document](#) that highlights core Autism Symptoms to determine if these need to be targeted
    - o   Does the learner engage in gaze shifting? → Looking toward you during play/communication
    - o   Is it easier to engage in shared enjoyment? → does the learner readily interact with you during preferred activities or is the learner fixated on objects
    - o   How Does the learner demonstrate communicative intent? → reaching for items, approaching items, looking at items, pointing to items

Go through these questions for each area with your learner. When you get to one where the learner has difficulty, this is where you would start. These should be in order from easiest to most difficult. If your learner doesn't demonstrate the skill in the first question, you probably won't need to test the other questions. You might not be able to assess all of these if there is a weak teaching relationship. If that is the case, do demand fading and build a stronger teaching relationship and then probe these as the relationship increases.

Stage 2
Look at what areas the learner lacks the most. You want to try to even the areas out. Most middle learners will have a lot of receptive programs because you typically need to master those before doing expressive programs. Make sure to look at what they are working on at school and probe these areas if necessary.

- **Advanced puzzles**
    - o   Does the learner do 6-8 piece interlocking puzzles with a frame?
    - o   Does the learner do 12 piece or higher puzzles without a frame?

- **Block designs**
  - o Does the learner imitate simple block designs?
  - o Does the learner imitate hidden block designs?
- **Patterns**
  - o Does the learner match patterns?
  - o Does the learner extend patterns?
- **Sorting**
  - o Does the learner sort non-identical items?
  - o Does the learner sort by feature?
  - o Does the learner sort by function?
  - o Does the learner sort by class?
- **Receptive identification of objects/pictures**
  - o Does the learner receptively identify objects? How many
  - o Does the learner receptively identify pictures? How many
- **Receptive commands**
  - o Does the learner follow commands to do fun activities?
  - o Does the learner follow simple 1 step commands? How many
  - o Does the learner follow 2 step commands?
- **Receptive identification of feature, function class, associated pictures**
  - o Does the learner receptively identify features? How many (which one has a)
  - o Does the learner receptively identify functions? How many (which one do you)
  - o Does the learner receptively identify class? How many (which one is a)
  - o Does the learner receptively identify associations? How many (which one goes with)
- **A few advanced imitation tasks**
  - o Does the learner imitate intensity?
  - o Does the learner imitate repetition?
  - o Does the learner imitate speed?
  - o Does the learner imitate static vs. kinetic?
- **Vocal imitation**
  - o Does the learner imitate sounds?
  - o Does the learner imitate words?
  - o Does the learner imitate phrases?
  - o Does the learner imitate number sequences?
- **Labeling items/pictures as they are mastered receptively**
  - o Does the learner label items/pictures, how many?
- **Fill in songs**
  - o Does the learner fill in words from songs? How many
- **Fill in fun activities**
  - o Does the learner fill in words from fun activities? How many
- **Mand Training**
  - o Does the learner request items using 3-4 words?
- **Play skills**

- o Does the learner share toys?
- o Does the learner play with sets of toys?
- **Barriers to Learning**
  - o Review the materials from the webinar [Rediscover your Roots Part 1: Putting the Analysis back in behavior analysis](#) and assess and develop programming for any barriers to learning.
- **Core Autism Symptoms**
  - o Review the [PDF document](#) that highlights core Autism Symptoms to determine if these need to be targeted

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Stage 3
An advanced learner is one who is demonstrating the basic skills and is ready to start intraverbals and stringing words together

- **Patterns**
  - o Does the learner extend a pattern?
  - o Does the learner extend irregular patterns from pattern worksheets?
- **Sequencing**
  - o Does the learner put a sequence a pictures in order. How many?
- **Seriation**
  - o Does the learner put items in order based on size, steps of drawing the item, shade, abc, 123?
- **Mazes**
  - o Does the learner complete simple mazes?
- **Receptive pronouns, community helpers, actions, prepositions**
  - o Does the learner receptively identify pronouns?
  - o Does the learner receptively identify community helpers?
  - o Does the learner receptively identify actions?
  - o Does the learner receptively identify prepositions (show me on) (put the --- on)?
- **Receptive identification based on 2 characteristics**
  - o Does the learner identify items when given 2 characteristics (the red ball)?
- **Labeling feature, function, class, pronouns, community helpers, actions, prepositions as he masters them receptively**
  - o Does the learner label features (what does a ---- have)?
  - o Does the learner label item given feature (which one has a ----)?

Created by Megan Miller, PhD, BCBA-D as a sample of steps to follow when conducting assessments. This does not constitute a client relationship and these steps should be individualized based on the unique needs of each learner.

- o   Does the learner label function (what do you do with a ----)?
- o   Does the learner label item given function (which one do you ----)?
- o   Does the learner label class (what is a ---)?
- o   Does the learner label class given item (which one is a ---)?
- o   Does the learner label pronouns (is this a he/she)?
- o   Does the learner label prepositions (where is the ---)?
- o   Does the learner label community helpers?
- o   Does the learner label pictures of actions?
- o   Does the learner label ongoing actions?
- **Receptive and expressive identification of body parts**
  - o   Does the learner identify body parts on self? (touch your ---)?
  - o   Does the learner identify body parts on others (touch my ---)?
  - o   Does the learner label body parts on self/others/pictures (what is it)?
- **Receptive and expressive identification of emotions**
  - o   Does the learner identify emotions (where is ---)?
  - o   Does the learner label emotions pictures, and real people (how does feel)?
  - o   Does the learner imitate emotions (show me ---)?
- **Receptive and expressive identification of adjectives**
  - o   Does the learner identify adjectives receptively (which one is ---)?
  - o   Does the learner identify adjectives expressively (is this one --- or ----)?
- **Personal questions**
  - o   Does the learner answer basic personal questions – name, age, phone number, etc?
- **Fill in feature, function, class, associations**
  - o   Does the learner fill in feature give item (a monkey has ----)?
  - o   Does the learner fill in item given feature (what has a tail?)?
  - o   Does the learner fill in function given item (what do you with scissors)?
  - o   Does the learner fill in item given function (you cut with?)?
  - o   Does the learner fill in class given item (a coat is)?
  - o   Does the learner fill in item given class (tell me some clothing)?
  - o   Does the learner fill in an associated item (ball goes with)?
- **Answering basic WH questions**
  - o   Does the learner answer What questions?
  - o   Does the learner answer Where questions?
  - o   Does the learner answer When questions?
  - o   Does the learner answer Who questions?
  - o   Does the learner answer Why questions?
  - o   Does the learner answer When questions?
- **Mand training**
  - o   Does the learner request information about missing items?
  - o   Does the learner request information using WH questions?
  - o   Does the learner request information using prepositions?

- o   Does the learner request information using adjectives?
- **Writing**
  - o   Does the learner color in a boundary?
  - o   Does the learner imitate lines, shapes, basic pictures?
  - o   Does the learner imitate letters, numbers?
  - o   Does the learner write lines, shapes, letters, numbers?
- **Reading**
  - o   Does the learner identify letters?
  - o   Does the learner identify letter sounds (which one says ---) (what does ---say)?
  - o   Does the learner identify letter blends?
  - o   Does the learner segment words?
  - o   Does the learner blend words?
  - o   Does the learner match word to picture?
  - o   Does the learner match words?
  - o   Does the learner receptively identify words?
  - o   Does the learner expressively identify words?
- **Math**
  - o   Does the learner identify numbers 1-20?
  - o   Does the learner count to 1-20?
  - o   Does the learner count objects 1-20?
  - o   Does the learner match object to number and number to object?
  - o   Does the learner identify same/different?
  - o   Does the learner identify more/less?
- **Conversation**
  - o   Does the learner tell you about an item (Tell me about the horse/It is brown and has a mane)
  - o   Does the learner engage in 3 exchanges conversation
- **Play**
  - o   Does the learner engage in pretend play with objects?
  - o   Does the learner engage in pretend play without objects?
  - o   Does the learner initiate play?
  - o   Does the learner respond to peers?
- **Barriers to Learning**
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Other Assessment Resources

The items below suggest other resources you might use during initial and ongoing assessment.

1. For a learner that is very unresponsive to people and doesn't interact:
   a. RDI book and research ideas for increasing social games and interactions
   b. Make Play Rock books
   c. Pairing and Play programs from Effectively Developing Play and Leisure Skills webinar
2. For a learner that is more advanced, you will need to assess their deficits compared to peers. Resources:
   a. Teach Me Language
   b. Social Skills books (e.g., Skill Streaming, PEERs, ASSP, Reaching out Joining In)
   c. No Glamour Problem solving materials from Linguisystems
   d. You want to look at what their peers are doing and think "how can we teach my learner to do that"
3. Derived Relational Responding is not a focus in this packet but should be assessed from the beginning with learners. This is most easily accomplished with TARPA and/or PEAK but make sure you are assessing the learner's derived responding abilities (producing untrained responses and responding to different contextual cues). Click this link to access a webinar from Dr. Siri Ming on RFT.
4. Early Start Denver Model is not a focus in this packet either but should be used for younger learners, especially if they are demonstrating little to no skills. Click on this link to access the Early Intervention webinar that includes more information about ESDM.
5. SCERTS and emotional regulation in general is not a focus in this packet but should be assessed from the beginning with learners. Click the links below for resources relating to this area:
   a. Emotional ABCs
   b. SCERTS
   c. Connect-PSHE
   d. AIM
   e. Teaching Motor Coordination and Emotional Regulation Webinar

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6. The Inventory of Good Learner Repertoires (IGLR) is not explicitly a focus in the stages above but should also be assessed for learners who are engaging in higher rates of challenging behavior and/or have barriers to learning present that need to be addressed.
7. This table also has a list of the resources we use for initial and ongoing assessment