

Effective Practices Assessment Tool (EPAT) for Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

The Effective Practices Assessment Tool (EPAT) was developed from a review of the literature on critical practices necessary for effective programming for young children with ASD. Establishing these practices in an early childhood classroom is important to allow children to make steady progress toward successful involvement in general education environments. The tool allows teams to rate the current level of implementation of critical practices and re-evaluate progress over time. Examples are provided for three anchor levels.

Building/Team: _____ **District:** _____ **Date:** _____

AREA 1: Critical Program Components	Current Status/Progress					Priority Level 1 – 5 1=low, 5=high
	In Place		Partially In Place		Not in Place	
	5-----4-----3-----2-----1					

CRITICAL COMPONENTS	□ 5 Each student receives at least 25 high quality learning opportunities (including entire stimulus, response, consequence sequence) per hour. Students are actively engaged in productive activities at least 80% of the time.	□ 4	□ 3 Each student receives approximately 15 learning opportunities (including entire stimulus, response, consequence sequence) per hour. Students are actively engaged in productive activities at least 70% of the time.	□ 2	□ 1 Each student receives less than 5 learning opportunities (including entire stimulus, response, consequence sequence) per hour on average. Students are actively engaged in productive activities less than 50% of the time.	Priority: □ 1 □ 2 □ 3 □ 4 □ 5
1. Students are actively engaged with many learning opportunities throughout the day						
CRITICAL COMPONENTS	□ 5 Instructional practices, curricula and behavioral support strategies used are evidence-based and data is collected to document effectiveness. Staff knows and implements evidence based practices in the classroom.	□ 4	□ 3 Some instructional practices, curricula and behavioral support strategies that are implemented have research evidence supporting them. Data is not consistently collected to document effectiveness of practices.	□ 2	□ 1 Instructional practices, curricula and behavioral support strategies used are common practice without clear evidence-based support, and are rarely evaluated for effectiveness.	Priority: □ 1 □ 2 □ 3 □ 4 □ 5
2. Focus on evidence based practice and collecting data to document effectiveness						

CRITICAL COMPONENTS 3. Emphasis on preparing students for general education environments and community involvement with peers	☐ 5 Selected goals prepare students for typical school and community activities with peers; kindergarten preparation is the focus for all students; classroom staff visit typical preschool and general education environments at least once per year.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Staff set kindergarten as a priority for some students; goals and activities are moderately successful at preparing some students for the general education environment and integration with peers.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Minimal focus on activities that will prepare students for general education school environments upon leaving the early childhood setting.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
CRITICAL COMPONENTS 4. Promotion of independence	☐ 5 Staff consistently support students to move toward independence during school activities and routines (e.g., walking in the hallway) and self-care (e.g., putting on shoes, toileting) by using strategies that reduce the need for prompts such as visual supports and prompt fading. Independence data is collected regularly.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Independence is promoted for some students or some of the time, but staff does not consistently implement supports that will allow all students to increase independence during classroom activities. Independence data may be taken occasionally.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Students are assisted to complete most tasks with minimal plans to reduce adult support and prompts. Note: This does not mean taking away visual supports or augmentative communication systems that are effective. Independence data is not collected.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
CRITICAL COMPONENTS 5. Inclusion opportunities are provided to all students	☐ 5 Students are taught in an inclusion setting for all or most of their early childhood program with sufficient support from adults to successfully participate in learning activities and interact with peers.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Students are taught in an inclusion setting for some of their early childhood program with a moderate amount of support from adults to participate in learning activities and interact with peers.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Students are taught in a segregated program with no opportunities to interact with typical peers.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CRITICAL COMPONENTS	☐ 5	☐ 4	☐ 3	☐ 2	☐ 1	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
	A systematic transition planning process begins at least 5 months before the transition, and includes a visit to the new classroom and/or meetings with the new classroom staff. Transition information and supports are provided to the new team (e.g. visual supports, behavior support needs) in sufficient detail for implementation. Parents are invited to be actively involved in the transition process.		A systematic transition planning process begins a couple months before the transition, and includes meetings with the new classroom staff. Transition information and supports are provided to the new team (e.g. visual supports, behavior support needs) but may not include details about implementation. Parents are somewhat involved in the transition process.		The transition planning process occurs shortly before the transition, and rarely includes a transition planning meeting with the new team. Transition information and supports are rarely provided. Parents may not be encouraged to become actively involved in the transition process.	

AREA 2: Organizational Supports	Current Status/Progress					Priority Level 1 – 5 1=low, 5=high
	In Place 5-----4-----3-----2-----1		Partially In Place		Not in Place	
SCHEDULE AND ORGANIZATION 7. Classroom schedule is developed to maximally promote engagement and increased learning opportunities	☐ 5 The classroom schedule includes many age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate activities that promote learning opportunities and student engagement as evidenced by engagement data. The schedule has multiple goals incorporated in activities, and balances seated activities with movement. New activities are consistently incorporated within the schedule to promote learning and engagement.	☐ 4	☐ 3 The classroom schedule includes some activities that promote learning opportunities and student engagement as evidenced by engagement data. The schedule sometimes has multiple goals incorporated in activities, and balances seated activities with movement. New learning activities may be incorporated into the schedule occasionally.	☐ 2	☐ 1 A standard preschool schedule is used without considering creative ways to increase learning opportunities and engagement. Classroom activities usually have only one goal. Students may have periods of free time with minimal productive learning and engagement.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

<i>BEHAVIORAL AND VISUAL SUPPORTS</i> 8. Classroom environment is structured to prevent problem behaviors and support learning	☐ 5 Areas of the room are clearly delineated (e.g. enclosed play spaces that promote social interaction, work areas without too many distractions) and schedules and communication systems are easy to access. Effective environmental systems are used to support students (e.g., chairs provided at circle for students who need assistance sitting).	☐ 4	☐ 3 Some areas of the classroom are delineated clearly; some spaces are still problematic and less functional for student learning. Staff may use logical environmental barriers to support students to remain in areas, but students often need physical management by adults to remain in required locations.	☐ 2	☐ 1 The classroom is a wide open space without clear boundaries, or disorganization makes it hard to differentiate between areas; problem areas are not modified (e.g., covering areas that are distracting).	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
<i>BEHAVIORAL AND VISUAL SUPPORTS</i> 9. A variety of visual supports are used to promote communication and reduce problem behaviors	☐ 5 Students are provided with a variety of visual supports (e.g. stop signs, wait signs, picture labels for areas, choice making cues) in a majority of daily activities and staff actively teaches the visual supports to assist children with learning and behavior.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Some visual supports are used to assist students but may not be used consistently or other visuals may be more effective. Students may need to be prompted to use visual supports most of the time.	☐ 2	☐ 1 A few visuals are placed around the classroom but children do not attend to them and staff rarely reference them or teach them.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
<i>BEHAVIORAL AND VISUAL SUPPORTS</i> 10. Appropriate behaviors are regularly reinforced	☐ 5 Students are verbally acknowledged and regularly provided with reinforcers to reward appropriate behavior; the ratio of positive to negative feedback is at least 4 positives to 1 corrective.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Students are sometimes verbally acknowledged and provided with reinforcers to reward appropriate behavior; appropriate behaviors may be quietly ignored.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Students are acknowledged for appropriate behaviors inconsistently and correction of problem behavior occurs more frequently than praise for appropriate behavior.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

<i>BEHAVIORAL AND VISUAL SUPPORTS</i> 11. Inappropriate behaviors are quickly addressed in a systematic manner.	☐ 5 The staff makes decisions about systematically responding to inappropriate behavior at team meetings and all staff agrees to respond in the same manner; the plan is followed consistently until the team develops a new plan.	☐ 4	☐ 3 A plan may be in place to address problem behaviors, but may not be followed consistently by all staff or is preceded by too much verbal prompting; staff occasionally discusses behavior in front of students or makes decisions during behavioral episodes.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Problem behaviors are addressed in the moment with little advance planning; staff does not respond to behavior in the same way; problem behaviors often escalate due to lack of consistency.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
<i>BEHAVIORAL AND VISUAL SUPPORTS</i> 12. Proactive strategies are used to reduce problem behaviors and teach appropriate alternative behaviors.	☐ 5 Proactive strategies are planned and implemented to prevent problem behavior (e.g., visual cues, pre-corrects, environmental changes) and appropriate alternative behaviors are taught (e.g. wait, ask for help, or making choices).	☐ 4	☐ 3 Some proactive strategies are used to reduce problem behaviors, but may not be used consistently or by all staff.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Problem behaviors are not addressed, or are addressed with negative consequences (e.g. reprimands) and prevention of problem behavior is rarely considered.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
<i>BEHAVIORAL AND VISUAL SUPPORTS</i> 13. Expectations are clear and consistent for students and staff	☐ 5 Expectations for students are defined, written, clearly posted, and taught regularly to students and staff. All staff follow expectations consistently. Expectations are shared with parents.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Expectations may be defined, but may not be posted or taught to all staff and students. Staff may know the expectations but do not follow them consistently. Expectations are not always shared with parents.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Expectations are not explicitly defined for staff or students.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

AREA 3: Instructional Supports	Current Status/Progress					Priority Level 1 – 5 1=low, 5=high
	In Place 5-----4-----3-----2-----1	Partially In Place	Not in Place			
GROUP INSTRUCTION 14. Differentiated instruction is designed to meet the needs of different learners	☐ 5 Within classroom instruction, different requests and prompting levels are used for different students to meet their diverse needs and strengths (e.g. some students point to pictures to respond, while other students provide verbal responses); rates of instructional requests are fairly equivalent for all students.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Some differentiation of instruction occurs during classroom instruction, but is not consistently planned and is not specifically targeted to meet the diverse learning needs of different learners; rates of instructional requests may be higher for some students compared to others.	☐ 2	☐ 1 All students are expected to learn the same content and are presented with the same materials; efforts are not directed toward differentiating instructional requests or goals within activities to meet the needs of different learners.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
GROUP INSTRUCTION 15. Small group instruction is scheduled and implemented to maximize instructional opportunities	☐ 5 Small group activities are regularly scheduled each week and provide many learning opportunities for each student; student groupings are thoughtfully implemented; and adults clearly understand the goals of each activity and ensure each child is meaningfully engaged.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Some opportunities for small group instruction occur, but may be irregular; the goals of each activity are sometimes defined; and learning opportunities are not consistently provided to all students.	☐ 2	☐ 1 No or few scheduled opportunities for small group instruction are provided; teaching primarily occurs in a whole-class format or unstructured activities; goals of activities are not defined or adults are unclear about goals.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
GROUP INSTRUCTION 16. Clear goals, identified from a number of domains are actively targeted within classroom activities	☐ 5 Classroom activities are planned so that multiple goals are taught within activities including social domains, communication, pre-literacy, academic skills, motor skills; written goal cards are used in many classroom activities.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Some classroom activities regularly address a more than one goal, but all staff may not be aware of these goals, or the goals are not consistently addressed.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Classroom activities do not regularly target a variety of goals (e.g., sensory table is primarily focused on sensory play, art activities primarily focus on fine motor skills).	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

GROUP INSTRUCTION: CIRCLE TIME 17. Circle time is engaging with clear goals and numerous group and individual learning opportunities	☐ 5 Circle time has clearly identifiable goals; students have numerous opportunities to engage with teacher through group and individual responses that are followed by feedback; the size of the group is conducive to learning and management of student behavior; new routines and activities are regularly integrated into circle time.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Circle time is structured with some planned goals; students are given some opportunities to actively respond although specific feedback is not consistently provided; group size may be large; activities are generally the same for long periods of time.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Circle time is routine with few targeted goals for students; students are typically passive participants (e.g., students listen to a story being read to them, or listen to songs), few opportunities are given for students to respond or ask questions either as a group or individually with feedback; size of the group may be large.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
GROUP INSTRUCTION: SNACK 18. Snack is set up with specific communication and social goals with numerous group and individual learning opportunities	☐ 5 Snack has clear goals that are directly addressed. Students have numerous opportunities for group and individual responding, requesting and social engagement. Snack time is utilized as a time to increase natural social opportunities and engagement with peers.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Snack is set up with some group and individual goals focused on communication and social interaction; some opportunities are given for students to engage with adults and peers through responding and asking questions. Snack time communication and social interactions may be heavily prompted with little opportunity for natural interaction.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Snack is primarily a time to eat and little instruction takes place such as prompting for communication or social interaction with adults or peers.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTION 19. Individual goals are targeted and taught with regular data collection to inform decision making	☐ 5 Individual goals are identified and available in a specified location (program book, data sheets on a clipboard) for students requiring intensive instruction; these students receive daily opportunities for 1:1 or 1:2 instruction and data collection occurs approximately each day; generalization data are also collected.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Individual data sheets are available with critical goals identified for those students requiring more intensive instruction, but intensive instruction may not be provided consistently enough to produce changes in learning.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Intensive teaching is rarely provided for students who need it; regular data collection does not occur to show whether the student is making gains on individual targets.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTION 20. Evidence-based instructional strategies are used for teaching	☐ 5 Staff regularly uses evidence-based instructional strategies to teach skills such as prompting, shaping, reinforcement, task analysis, and generalization. Instructional requests are consistently followed by either: a) reinforcement for a correct response, or b) prompts to achieve successful responding.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Staff inconsistently use evidence-based instruction to teach skills, or use them with only moderate effectiveness (e.g. over-prompting, inconsistent reinforcement).	☐ 2	☐ 1 Staff do not use evidence-based instructional strategies (e.g. applied behavior analysis) to teach new skills.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
PLAY 21. A wide range of age-appropriate play activities are offered	☐ 5 Age-appropriate activities and materials (e.g., books, pretend play materials, puzzles, dress-up, games) are offered and accessible; play materials are representative of those found in typical preschool classrooms and efforts are directed toward exposure to a variety of play activities and toys to expand play.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Some play activities are age-appropriate; materials are not routinely changed or expanded to ensure that students have exposure to new play activities (e.g., rotating dramatic play area, introducing new toys or activities).	☐ 2	☐ 1 Play activities are not age appropriate; efforts are not directed toward diversifying and expanding play opportunities with new materials and play activities.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
PLAY 22. Supports are used to ensure active and meaningful engagement in play activities	☐ 5 Play time is structured for students who require it, with adult and peer support to ensure that learning and meaningful engagement occurs for all students; when appropriate, play schedules, scripts, and peer training are offered to encourage appropriate play; pre-teaching of foundational play skills is addressed in individual or small group instruction to promote success during play time.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Play activities are regularly supervised by adults but some supervising adults are unclear of specific goals, and may not effectively use teaching strategies such as prompting and modeling to encourage functional and dramatic play.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Some children are not actively engaged in meaningful play during scheduled play time; play skills for these students are not consistently modeled and expanded through peer and adult supports.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

COMMUNICATION 23. Communication opportunities that target a range of communication skills are actively planned and taught throughout the day	☐ 5 Staff consistently plan and implement communication opportunities by using motivating materials, communicative temptations, and making preferred items visible, but inaccessible. Staff regularly promotes manding/requesting, labeling, teach yes/no, and choice-making opportunities.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Some staff encourage communication (e.g., speech-therapist, teacher), but efforts are not systematic across people and activities; communication opportunities may only happen at specified times such as during snack/lunch, or tend to focus in only one function (requesting), rather than opportunities to learn a range of communication skills.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Students are often provided with items without encouraging communication (e.g. snacks); activities are not actively planned to ensure that communication opportunities are maximized.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
COMMUNICATION 24. Every student has a functional communication system that is supported across environments	☐ 5 Students have functional communication systems to make their wants and needs known; systems (may include verbal, pictures, signs, or an augmentative device). Systems target broad communication needs, including: requests for items, requests for support (help), making internal states known (illness), and social interactions (greetings) across environments and partners.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Functional communication systems are available for some, but not all students; only some communication need areas are addressed (requesting for items but not help); systems are not consistently used across all environments with all communication partners.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Most students do not have functional communication systems; systems are rarely used consistently across environments and partners.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
COMMUNICATION 25. Students are taught to initiate requests (mand) throughout the day	☐ 5 Students are taught to request items and activities across a variety of domains such as food items, toys, social activities (play, tickles), sensory activities (swing, trampoline), and play items (play-doh). Requests are systematically targeted throughout the day in a variety of environments with data collection and analysis to determine progress.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Requests are targeted in a few activities with support from adults but systematic efforts are not taken to expand the child's repertoire of requests. Requests tend to be from one or a few domains (e.g., foods and sensory activities).	☐ 2	☐ 1 Initiating requests is not specifically targeted, or is targeted in only one activity (e.g., child uses Picture Exchange Communication System only during snack time to request food items).	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

SOCIAL-COMMUNICATION	☐ 5	☐ 4	☐ 3	☐ 2	☐ 1	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
	Students are supported to initiate social interactions with both peers and adults throughout the day; verbal, gestural and visual prompts are used to help students share interests with others (e.g., “look what I have”), and initiate social interactions (e.g., “can I play?” “what do you have?” “your turn”). Non-verbal and limited verbal students are supported to initiate.		Initiations of social interactions are sometimes targeted, but not consistently; students with limited verbal skills have fewer opportunities to initiate; initiations toward peers are targeted less frequently than initiations toward adults.		Initiations of social interactions by students are inconsistent or are not directly targeted. Few to no opportunities to initiate to peers. Non-verbal and limited verbal students rarely have opportunities to initiate.	
26. Children are taught to initiate social interactions						

AREA 4: People Supports	Current Status/Progress					Priority Level 1 – 5 1=low, 5=high
	In Place 5-----4-----3-----2-----1	Partially In Place	Not in Place			
TEAM	☐ 5	☐ 4	☐ 3	☐ 2	☐ 1	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
27. Team meetings occur on a regular basis and are run effectively and efficiently with an agenda and action plan	Staff meetings are set as a priority and key staff members attend. Meetings are run efficiently and effectively with an agenda and action items developed each time; action items are followed up on at each meeting.		Staff meets on a semi-regular basis but all key staff members (e.g., administrators, ancillary staff) are not regularly in attendance. A standard meeting format is sometimes used, but action plans may not be consistently created or followed.		Classroom staff primarily discusses issues informally without all team members; meetings that do occur tend to involve casual discussion that may go off-topic, and rarely result in an action plan.	
SERVICE DELIVERY & CONSISTENCY	☐ 5	☐ 4	☐ 3	☐ 2	☐ 1	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
28. Staff are consistent in their work with students	Staff discusses plans in team meetings to ensure consistency of responding in learning tasks and when responding to behavior. A system is in place to check that all staff follows team plans for ensuring consistency.		Staff coordinates responses to behavior at some times and with some children.		Each staff member responds to behavior without coordination with other staff; goals and teaching approach are not coordinated across staff.	

SERVICE DELIVERY & CONSISTENCY 29. Ancillary team members spend time directly supporting the classroom	☐ 5 Ancillary staff assist in the classroom at key times of the day; ancillary staff addresses individual goals in activities within the classroom and model teaching and instructional techniques for classroom staff (e.g. speech therapist models speech activities in classroom for staff).	☐ 4	☐ 3 Ancillary staff spends only some of their time in the classroom or if they spend most of their time in the classroom they are not well-integrated into the schedule and classroom themes, activities, and goals.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Ancillary staff rarely spend time interacting and assisting in the classroom and mostly provide services to students outside the classroom.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT 30. Families are actively supported to be involved in their child's educational program	☐ 5 Families are invited to volunteer in the classroom; families give input regarding preferences for goals, strategies, and communication systems; resources are provided to families as needed; families receive regular communication that provides both positive feedback and relevant information regarding their child's progress in school.	☐ 4	☐ 3 Families attend IEP meetings and receive some communication from the classroom team. They may participate in some additional goal setting and planning related to behaviors and learning performance.	☐ 2	☐ 1 Families may attend IEP meetings but receive minimal communication from the classroom team supporting their child.	Priority: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
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