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A Universal Checklist for Identifying Infants and Toddlers Eligible for Early Intervention

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This *TRACE Practice Guide* includes a description of the development and use of a universal checklist for identifying infants and toddlers that may be eligible for early intervention. The checklist was jointly developed by the Tracking, Referral, and Assessment Center for Excellence (*TRACE*) at the Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) in collaboration with and input from the University of Wisconsin Waisman Center (Madison) and the *TRACE* Project Officer (Dunst, Trivette, Gramiak, & Hill, 2007). The checklist was specifically developed to facilitate and streamline the identification of potentially eligible children without the need to administer screening or developmental tests and was designed to be used by primary referral sources to make referrals to early intervention.

Primary Referral Sources

Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C early intervention programs and Part B (619) preschool special education programs are required to develop methods and procedures for promoting referrals of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with identified disabilities or developmental delays by primary referral sources. Primary referral sources include, but are not limited to, physicians and other health care providers, hospitals, information and referral programs, child care programs and family child care providers, public health departments and centers, social services agencies, developmental evaluation centers, and other early childhood professional and practitioners (Dunst, Trivette, Appl, & Bagnato, 2004). As required by IDEA, states must develop eligibility criteria that primary referral sources and early intervention eligibility specialists can use to determine if referral to and enrollment in early intervention is warranted (Muller & Markowitz, 2004; Shackelford,

2006). The universal checklist is designed to be a simple tool for eligibility determination and is considered part of a comprehensive system of child find, referral, early identification, and eligibility determination (Dunst & Trivette, 2004) to ensure that all children in need of early intervention are located, identified, enrolled in, and receive the services and support needed for promoting their learning and development.

Development of the Universal Checklist

A multistep process was used to develop the universal checklist. A draft checklist was prepared by *TRACE* staff who reviewed the content against IDEA eligibility criteria to ensure that the largest majority of conditions was included or represented. The checklist was then reviewed by *TRACE* staff, AAP staff, and the *TRACE* Project Officer to improve the description, wording, and content. This revised checklist was then reviewed by a larger group of AAP staff whose feedback was used to make additional changes.

The *TRACE*, AAP, and OSEP staff were then joined by several Waisman Center staff (Linda Tuchman-Ginsberg and Christine Breunig) who provided additional input, feedback, and suggestions that were used to make further changes to the checklist. The “fourth generation”

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checklist was then evaluated by 69 pediatricians whose feedback and recommendations were used to make final changes (Dunst et al., 2007). This version of the checklist is included in the Appendix.

Universal Checklist

The universal checklist contains three sections. The first section includes the instructions for completing the checklist, which emphasizes the fact that it can be used by any primary referral source for determining if a child has a condition or concern that may make him or her eligible for early intervention. The second section includes space for recording child and parent/caregiver information useful for contacting the family of a child who had one or more checklist conditions and is referred to early intervention.

Conditions and Concerns

The third section of the checklist includes lists of conditions or concerns that *may* make a child eligible for early intervention. (A customized version of the checklist includes State-specific conditions and concerns—see e.g., www.waisman.wisc.edu/birthto3/eichecklist.pdf). The conditions and concerns are organized into four categories: identified conditions, developmental delays, at-risk conditions, and other concerns. Each category includes conditions that would most likely make a child eligible for early intervention depending on a State's eligibility definition. Each section includes space for recording *Other* conditions or concerns that can be used by a primary referral source to enter an eligibility condition not included on the checklist. For any one child, one or more conditions can be checked or recorded for determining if a referral is warranted.

Customizing the Universal Checklist

The *Universal Checklist* needs to be first customized to include those conditions and concerns that are part of a State's eligibility definition. A PDF version of the checklist with form fields is included in the Appendix. It can be customized following the directions included in the Appendix. The document is designed to be modified using the most recent version of the free Adobe® Reader® software. To download and install Adobe Reader 8, or to update an earlier version of the program, go to <http://www.adobe.com/products/reader/>. Begin by opening the *Early Intervention Referral Checklist* in Adobe Reader 8.

1. Click on the *Highlight Fields* icon (in the upper right corner) to reveal the editable fields in the document. Click in the first field at the top of the page (above the title) and type the name of the State or program that will be distributing

the *Early Intervention Referral Checklist* to primary referral sources.

2. Review the two-column checklist of “Identified Conditions” in the first box of the table. If some of the conditions are not included in your State's eligibility criteria for early intervention services, drag the cursor across the condition to highlight it and press the *Delete* button to remove it from the list. For any identified conditions that are part of your State's eligibility criteria but are not included in the list, simply type each into the list where it should go alphabetically. Add a checkbox in front of each added criterion by *copying* the checkbox and space from the “Other” line and *pasting* it where required
3. Repeat Step 2 to customize the “Developmental Delays,” “At-Risk Conditions,” and “Other Concerns” sections.
4. Click in the field below the table (bottom of page) and type in the name of your early intervention program, contact information, and the address to which completed checklists should be submitted.
5. Save your customized *Early Intervention Referral Checklist* by clicking on *File* in the upper left of the menu at the top of the screen. Choose *Save As* from the drop-down menu and enter the name of the destination folder and the name you want to give your file, then press *Save*.

We suggest that the *Other* check box in each section be left on the checklists so a primary referral source can add a condition or concern he or she believes warrants a referral to early intervention. The customized version of the checklist should include, to the extent possible, all the conditions and concerns that should precipitate a referral to early intervention.

Guidelines for Using the Universal Checklist

Primary referral sources should be provided the checklist together with information about the services, supports, and resources available from your program (Dunst, 2006c). The latter typically includes a program brochure or fact sheet (see e.g., Dunst, 2006c). This should be accomplished face-to-face using practices for improving outreach efforts (Dunst, 2006a) and providing feedback to primary referral sources in a timely and succinct manner (Dunst, 2006b).

The reader is referred to Trivette and Dunst (2006) for a description of the evidence-based characteristics of practices for changing and improving primary referral source referrals to early intervention. The practices

include distribution of the checklist to primary referral sources; a brief, focused explanation of how to use the checklist; follow-up contacts to answer any questions or to provide additional information; and immediately acknowledging a referral and providing an explanation of what steps will be taken to ascertain eligibility. So important is feedback to primary referral sources that if it is not done, there is a likelihood that primary referral sources will stop making referrals (Dunst & Gorman, 2006a; Dunst & Gorman, 2006b).

Findings from the study evaluating the usefulness of the checklist found that tailoring the checklist to include conditions and concerns that warrant a referral was extremely important if the checklist was going to be used by primary referral sources (Dunst et al., 2007). The checklist, therefore, needs to include only those conditions and concerns that would have a high probability of making a child eligible for early intervention. Primary referral sources, and particularly physicians, have made clear that they do not want to make referrals only to find out that a child is not eligible for early intervention.

Conclusion

The *Universal Checklist* described in this *TRACE Practice Guide* was intentionally developed to be a simple way of helping primary referral sources easily identify infants and toddlers who may be eligible for early intervention. The checklist includes both conditions that would automatically make a child eligible without the need for administering any kind of developmental scale or test, as well as conditions and concerns that may make a child eligible for early intervention based on a multidisciplinary evaluation.

Two lessons learned developing and field-testing the *Universal Checklist* are worth noting because they are likely to influence whether a primary referral source will use the checklist and make a referral for early intervention. The first lesson learned is the fact that the primary referral sources clearly indicated that they would use the checklist if and only if it included conditions and concerns that had a high probability of making a child eligible if a referral was made for early intervention. This is the reason customizing and tailoring the checklist to a State's eligibility definition is so important.

The second lesson learned is that the checklist serves an educational function. It has often been the case that primary referral sources did not know that some of the checklist conditions and concerns might make a child eligible for early intervention. As a result, the checklist can increase primary referral sources' awareness of the reasons a child should be referred for early intervention.

As previously noted, the *Universal Checklist* is intended to be used as part of a comprehensive approach to

child find. The checklist, therefore, should be used with other *TRACE* tools and practice guides to promote referrals for early intervention.

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Appendix

Customizing the Universal Checklist

The *Early Intervention Referral Checklist* included in this Appendix can be customized to include identifying information about the early childhood intervention program and for using the checklist to promote referrals to early intervention. The document should be opened in and customized using the free Adobe® Reader® 8, available online at <http://www.adobe.com/products/reader>. We recommend that you do not try to customize the document using Adobe Acrobat Professional software. Begin by opening the *Early Intervention Referral Checklist* in Adobe Reader 8.

1. Click on the *Highlight Fields* icon (in the upper right corner) to reveal the editable fields in the document. Click in the first field at the top of the page (above the title) and type the name of the State or program that will be distributing the *Early Intervention Referral Checklist* to primary referral sources.
2. Review the two-column checklist of “Identified Conditions” in the first box of the table. If some of the conditions are not included in your State’s eligibility criteria for early intervention services, drag the cursor across the condition to highlight it and press the *Delete* button to remove it from the list. For any identified conditions that are part of your State’s eligibility criteria but are not included in the

list, simply type each into the list where it should go alphabetically. Add a checkbox in front of each added criterion by *copying* the checkbox and space from the “Other” line and *pasting* it where required

3. Repeat Step 2 to customize the “Developmental Delays,” “At-Risk Conditions,” and “Other Concerns” sections.
4. Click in the field below the table (bottom of page) and type in the name of your early intervention program, contact information, and the address to which completed checklists should be submitted.
5. Save your customized *Early Intervention Referral Checklist* by clicking on *File* in the upper left of the menu at the top of the screen. Choose *Save As* from the drop-down menu and enter the name of the destination folder and the name you want to give your file, then press *Save*.

We suggest that the *Other* check box in each section be left on the checklists so a primary referral source can add a condition or concern he or she believes warrants a referral to early intervention. The customized version of the checklist should include, to the extent possible, all the conditions and concerns that should precipitate a referral to early intervention.

1 → [Title Field]

2 → [Identified Conditions Section]

3 → [At-Risk Conditions Section]

4 → [Bottom Text Field]

Early Intervention Referral Checklist	
<p>This checklist is used to determine if an infant or toddler, birth to 3 years of age, has a condition or concern that may make the child eligible for early intervention. The checklist can be used by a professional (physician, nurse, social worker, child welfare worker, and so on) or any other practitioner to make a referral for early intervention. If you are concerned that a child has one or more of the conditions listed, you should consider referring the child to an early intervention program.</p> <p>Child's Name _____ Date of Birth _____ Age _____ Parent/Caregiver Name _____ Telephone Number _____ Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____</p>	
<p>This checklist includes many but not all of the conditions or concerns that may make a child eligible for early intervention. If a child has any condition or concern that has a high probability of being associated with a developmental delay or poor behavioral outcome, the child should be referred for early intervention services.</p>	
Identified Conditions	<input type="checkbox"/> Chromosomal anomaly (e.g., Trisomy 13, 18, 21) <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic disease <input type="checkbox"/> CNS disorder (e.g., cerebral palsy) <input type="checkbox"/> Congenital disorder/anomaly (e.g., anencephaly) <input type="checkbox"/> Cranial disease (e.g., microcephaly) <input type="checkbox"/> Degenerative disorder (e.g., muscular dystrophy) <input type="checkbox"/> Hearing impairment/deaf <input type="checkbox"/> Metabolic disorder (e.g., phenylketonuria) <input type="checkbox"/> Musculoskeletal disorder (e.g., spina bifida) <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please describe) _____
Developmental Delays	<input type="checkbox"/> Pervasive developmental disorder (e.g., autism) <input type="checkbox"/> Physical abnormality/abnormal movement <input type="checkbox"/> Seizure disorder (e.g., epilepsy) <input type="checkbox"/> Speech impairment <input type="checkbox"/> Visual impairment/blind <input type="checkbox"/> Other (e.g., Prader-Willi syndrome, Cornelia deLange syndrome)
At-Risk Conditions	<input type="checkbox"/> Birth-related complication <input type="checkbox"/> Child abuse negatively affecting child development <input type="checkbox"/> Child neglect negatively affecting child development <input type="checkbox"/> Cleft palate/lip <input type="checkbox"/> Family risk factors (e.g., extreme poverty, teenage parent) <input type="checkbox"/> Fetal alcohol syndrome <input type="checkbox"/> Limb defect/anomaly <input type="checkbox"/> Newborn intraventricular hemorrhaging <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please describe) _____
Other Concerns	<input type="checkbox"/> Pregnancy-related complication <input type="checkbox"/> Prematurity (< 25 weeks gestation) <input type="checkbox"/> Prenatal drug exposure <input type="checkbox"/> Prenatal infection (e.g., toxoplasmosis, rubella) <input type="checkbox"/> Very low birth weight (< 1500g)
Other Concerns	<input type="checkbox"/> Behavioral problem/disorder <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic illness <input type="checkbox"/> Club foot <input type="checkbox"/> Failure to thrive <input type="checkbox"/> Feeding/eating difficulty <input type="checkbox"/> Fetal growth retardation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please describe) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Fragile X syndrome <input type="checkbox"/> Parental concern (e.g., child missing milestones) <input type="checkbox"/> Shaken baby syndrome	

Early Intervention Referral Checklist

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Child's Name _____ Date of Birth _____ Age _____

Parent/Caregiver Name _____ Telephone Number _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

This checklist includes many but not all of the conditions or concerns that may make a child eligible for early intervention. If a child has any condition or concern that has a ***high probability of being associated with a developmental delay or poor behavioral outcome***, the child should be referred for early intervention services.

<i>Identified Conditions</i>	<hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 100px;"/>
<i>Developmental Delays</i>	<hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 50px;"/>
<i>At-Risk Conditions</i>	<hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 100px;"/>
<i>Other Concerns</i>	<hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 50px;"/>