



Leading Focused Conversations with Families to Help Complete the DRDP (2015)

The ongoing conversations that we have with family members during our typical interactions with them are rich opportunities for learning about their child. Notes of what the family shares during these conversations should be captured and included as documentation in the child's portfolio, home visiting notes, or other system of organizing information about the child. These kinds of general conversations should occur whenever we have contact with the family. Additionally, it may be useful to lead these conversations in a particularly focused manner during the two times a year when the DRDP (2015) is completed. Having conversations with families is an important part of completing the DRDP (2015) for all assessors, but it may be particularly important for practitioners such as home visitors who may not have frequent opportunities to observe the child participating in a variety of routines and activities. When combined with your observations, the perspectives of families help you gain a more complete picture of a child across settings, activities, and interacting with a variety of people. Research findings suggest that parents' observations are reliable and valid sources of information and should be considered an essential component of a comprehensive assessment process, including completing the DRDP (2015).

Leading a focused conversation with a family is particularly important to obtain information on measures that you have not had the opportunity to observe. During these conversations, *focusing on routines and activities* provides a very useful context for asking a family about their child's everyday learning opportunities and skills. For example, if you have not had the opportunity to directly observe the child interacting with peers (SED4: Relationships and Social Interactions with Peers), the family can share observations of when their child spends time with other children (e.g., at play dates, birthday parties, at the playground).

Be sure that the families that you work with are familiar with the DRDP (2015) right from the start. Early in the service delivery relationship, let the families know that you will be completing the DRDP (2015) two times a year and talk with them about how they can participate in the process. Here are some points you might share:

- The DRDP (2015) is based on ongoing observations of a child in typical, everyday routines and activities with familiar people.
- There are many benefits to the DRDP (2015) – it provides service providers with up-to-date information that helps them plan learning activities and the information helps families know more about their child's development and ways that they can support their child's learning.
- Having conversations with family members so they can share observations and information about their child is an important part of completing the DRDP (2015).

Leading Focused Conversations

The four steps below will guide you in planning and leading focused conversations with families to help complete the DRDP (2015). If this is the first DRDP (2015) assessment that you will be completing with a particular child, be sure that you have spent enough time getting to know the child by observing the child's skills during typical routines/activities and by having conversations with the family.

Step 1: Take an initial pass at completing the DRDP (2015)

- Gather together the materials that you will need:
 - The DRDP (2015) Manual;
 - The "Worksheet for Leading Focused Conversations with Families to Help Complete the DRDP (2015)"; and
 - Your documentation, which might include your observation notes, home visiting notes, portfolios, information gathered from conversations with family members and other providers, observations that you made to inform other authentic assessment tools, etc.
 - Optional: Rating Record

- Using the assembled materials take an initial pass at completing the DRDP (2015). As you do:
 - For the measures you are confident you can rate based on your current observations and other documentation:
 - Assign a rating; you might jot this rating on the *Worksheet for Leading Focused Conversations with Families to Help Complete the DRDP (2015)* or on the *Rating Record*.
 - For the measures that you need additional information/documentation to rate:
 - Identify those measures for which you want to make additional observations or have further conversations with the family (or others) to gather more information.

Step 2: Identify family or routines and activities

- In the previous step, you identified the measures for which you need more information. Now, using your knowledge about the child and family, think of routines or activities that they participate in that would be likely opportunities for observing skills related to those measures. For example, if you need information about measures related to the Social and Emotional Development domain you might focus on what happens when the child interacts with others at the park or playground, or when friends visit.
- List which of these routines/activities you want to arrange to observe.
- Plan a focused conversation to have with the family. List some general questions you will use to ask the family about those routines or activities. For example, "Please tell me what Max does when friends come to visit who have a child around his age." You can jot down these questions in the appropriate column on the *Worksheet for Leading Focused Conversations with Families to Help Complete the DRDP (2015)*.

Step 3: Lead a focused conversation

- Remind the family about the things you've previously shared about the DRDP (2015). Describe, in family-friendly language, the general domains or measures you want to focus on (avoid merely reading the exact wording of the measures). For example, if you want to focus the conversation on measures within the Social and Emotional Development domain, you might say, "Let's talk about how Max typically interacts with people."
- Ask the family to describe what their child does when involved in one of the family or child's everyday routines or activities. For example, related to the self-feeding measure of the Physical Development and Health domain you might ask "Please tell me what Max does during a mealtime." As the family describes what Max does, use follow-up questions as needed to get more specific information.

Examples of General Follow-up Questions

- You said that he [does this], tell me more about what that looks like.
- What changes have you observed in mealtime over the past month or so?
- What parts of mealtime does he need help with?
- What have you been doing to help him?
- Does he use any special equipment or other things during mealtime? If so, what does he use?
- How does he let you know what he wants and doesn't want during mealtime?

If the general kinds of follow-up questions listed above don't help you get the information you need, you can try more focused questions such as the following.

Examples of More Focused Follow-up Questions

In some cases, you might ask more focused questions that will help you understand the child's highest level of mastery on specific measures, e.g., "Tell me what he's like when he plays with other children his age?" However, avoid asking close-ended questions based on comparing two descriptors or examples. For example for ATL-REG 4: Self-Control of Feelings and Behaviors, avoid asking questions that simply repeat a descriptor verbatim, such as "When Max is upset, does he seek out an adult for comfort or does he calm himself?" Rather, ask more open-ended questions, such as, "All children get upset from time to time - what happens when Max gets upset over something?"

You might use "wondering questions" to help identify the highest level of mastery. For example, you might ask a family member, "During our last visit, I saw Max pick up his toy phone. I was wondering, when he plays with the phone, what does he usually do with it?" After the family member answers, you might follow with more specific follow-up questions, such as "Does he ever pretend to talk on it?"

If you are able to narrow down your choices of the child's highest level of mastery to two adjacent descriptors, then you might ask the family, "Does he do it more like [this] or [that]?" Reviewing the examples from the two adjacent descriptors may help you come up with wording for the "this" and "that." For example, for PD-HLTH 2: Gross Locomotor Movement Skills, if you're thinking that the child's highest level of mastery is either Responding Earlier or Responding Later, based on your review of the examples from these two descriptors you might ask, "When Max sees something interesting, does he look at it and does he also reach for it?"

- Repeat these kinds of conversations with other routines or activities you have identified until you have enough information to confidently rate the measures in question.
- You might lead focused conversations while watching a video of the child participating in a routine or activity (the video might be taken by either you or the family). You and the family can share what you each observe and talk about whether this video clip is consistent with what the family sees at other times.
- If the family says they are not sure about what a child does during a particular routine or activity, think about other ways to ask the questions to help clarify the specific information you want to know. If they still say they are not sure, ask if they can watch for specific skills during routines or activities; you might plan strategies with the family for how and when they might focus their observations. Make sure the family understands the need for authentic observations, rather than setting up artificial situations. For some families you might ask if it would be useful to write down the questions you're hoping to answer. You can revisit the conversation at the next home visit.
- After every conversation, summarize with the family what you've talked about and how the information helped inform your ability to complete the DRDP (2015). For example, "Thanks for letting me know more about how Max interacts with others. I learned more about what he does when he gets upset, and how he acts around children his age. This really helps me understand his development better and will help us track his progress on the DRDP."

Step 4: Take another pass at completing the DRDP (2015)

- Take another pass at completing the DRDP (2015), using new observations that you have made and information that you gathered from additional conversations with the family.
- As you complete the measures that were in question, also double-check the measures for which you assigned earlier ratings. Keep in mind that talking about routines and activities with families often leads them to share information about not only skills that appear in one measure but skills that might appear in other measures. For example, by asking what Max does during mealtime, the family might describe what Max does related to self-feeding and also how he interacts with others during mealtime.
- If there are still measures that you still cannot confidently rate, repeat the steps above until you can confidently complete all of the measures on the DRDP (2015).