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A system of assessment for adaptive behavior, social skills, behavioral function, medication side-effects, and psychiatric disorders

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Abstract

A reliable and valid assessment is necessary for the effective delivery of services to those with mental retardation (MR). With constraints placed on financial and human resources, assessment must be comprehensive, yet cost-effective. We describe a method of assessment that operates within these constraints using informant-based measures that assess adaptive and maladaptive behavior, psychiatric disorders, behavior function, and medication side-effects.

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1. Introduction

Assessment is a critical component of providing effective services to individuals with mental retardation (MR). By conducting a thorough assessment, communication between professionals is facilitated and treatment decisions are made that can greatly impact the quality of life experienced by those with autism and other developmental disorders. It has been our experience that an assessment battery which includes information related to adaptive functioning, behavior problems and/or psychiatric disorders, and medication side-effects often provides the necessary information to arrive at a valid diagnosis and develop a

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Table 1

A system of assessment for adaptive and maladaptive behavior, psychiatric disorders, and medication side-effects

Measuring adaptive and maladaptive behavior
Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales (VABS)
Aberrant Behavior Checklist (ABC)
Social Performance Survey Schedule (SPSS) (mild/moderate MR)
Matson Evaluation of Social Skills for Individuals with sEvere Retardation (MESSIER)
Screening Tool of fEeding Problems (STEP)
Screening for psychiatric disorders
Assessment of Dual Diagnosis (ADD) (mild/moderate MR)
Diagnostic Assessment for the Severely Handicapped (DASH-II) (Severe and Profound MR)
Conducting a functional assessment
Questions About Behavioral Function (QABF)
Measuring medication side-effects
Dyskinesia Identification System Condensed User Scale (DISCUS)
Matson Evaluation of Drug Side-Effects (MEDS)
Scale for the Evaluation and Identification of seiZures, Epilepsy, and anticonvulsant Side-effects (form B) (SEIZES-B)

thorough treatment plan (see [Table 1](#)). This information may be gathered through various methods, yet researchers have found that rating scales administered to caregivers can be used in a cost-effective manner (saving time and financial resources) while also providing a reliable and valid means of assessment. In this article, we describe a system of assessment that has proven useful for evaluating individuals with varying levels of MR.

2. Measuring adaptive and maladaptive behavior

By definition ([APA, 1994](#)), individuals with MR experience deficits in adaptive behavior. The Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales (VABS; [Sparrow, Balla, & Cichetti, 1984](#)) consists of five domains (Communication, Daily Living Skills, Socialization, Motor Skills, and Maladaptive Behavior) that provide a useful means of assessment for adaptive behavior. We have found that in addition to providing information that can be compared to peers of similar demographic characteristics, the VABS also provides information useful for determining skill level for training.

In addition to an adaptive behavior assessment such as the VABS, it is necessary to follow-up with a more thorough assessment of social functioning. Depending upon the level of intellectual disability, we use the Social Performance Survey Schedule (SPSS; [Matson, Helsel, Bellack, & Senatore, 1983](#)) or the Matson Evaluation of Social Skills for the Severely Retarded (Matson Evaluation of Social Skills in Individuals with sEvere Retardation—MESSIER) ([Matson, 1995](#)). As the name implies, the MESSIER is indicated for those in the severe to profound range of intellectual disability. On the other hand, the SPSS was developed for use

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