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## Seven Tips for Surviving Your Child's Developmental Assessment

The developmental assessment process is changing. For many parents, this is a welcomed relief. A new assessment guide has been published by ZERO TO THREE that encourages more parent collaboration. *New Visions for the Developmental Assessment of Infants and Young Children* promotes evaluating children on their capabilities, not deficits, and understanding how children manage life in relation to their family, community and culture.

A developmental assessment is a process designed to deepen understanding of a child's competencies and resources, and of the caregiving and learning environments most likely to help a child make fullest use of his or her developmental potential, according to New Visions.

Barbara Popper is a parent who has been through the process with her son and has joined with another parent and a team of professionals to develop New Visions. She offers these tips for parents preparing for the developmental assessment of their child:

1. Be the parent. Your expertise is being the parent and knowing your child better than anyone else. Your gut feelings and personal observations count. Be the parent and make use of other team members' expertise as it applies.
2. You don't need to learn all the technical terms. These can be defined for you. Explaining in your terms what is going on with your child is fine and will be understood by everyone.

3. Don't be afraid to disagree. If professionals see your child differently than you, ask for more discussion. Accepting an assessment that you feel does not accurately portray your child will be of no use to you.
4. Designate an ally to bring to meetings. If it begins to feel overwhelming, bring a friend or family member with you for support. The support person can help take notes, keep track of information and review the discussion with you later.
5. Understand that your level of involvement may vary. How involved you will be in each stage of the process may depend on your child's needs and other life circumstances. Your decision to become more or less involved should be accepted and you should make it clear that you are to be alerted if something changes.
6. Make sure your needs are met. Spending time on a process that misses what you are concerned about delays your ability to help your child. Make your needs clear, even if this means finding others with whom to work.
7. Find support for yourself. Take care of yourself and your family.
8. Share your knowledge with others. Parents who are in the process of trying to learn what you have already discovered need your help. Share what you have learned with those who need it most.

In addition to these tips, *New Visions* recommends the following to ensure a more accurate assessment:

Young children should never be separated during the assessment from their parents or caregivers. Children should not be expected to perform tests well when they are anxious about being separated from their parents.

Young children should never be assessed by a strange examiner. Children should not be challenged to take tests in the presence of someone they may have just met minutes earlier.

Formal tests or tools should not be the cornerstone of the assessment of an infant or young child. Most standardized tests are not designed to bring out the unique abilities of children with atypical or challenging developmental patterns. Misleading scores from these tests can lead to inappropriate services. Structured tests should be only one piece of an integrated approach.

Assessments limited to areas that are easily measurable should not be considered complete. Measures of motor or cognitive skills are not an accurate picture of the child's total developmental capabilities. A complete assessment should reflect a parent's experience with a

child and include independent observations of a child's interaction with the parent.

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