

THE CRITICAL QUESTIONS

WITHOUT THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS WE CANNOT DISTINGUISH DISORDER FROM “SOMETHING ELSE.”

Parent Interview

Evaluator must personally interview parent to allow for reframing of questions, follow-up and clarification to collect the essential data. Parent interview best done before evaluator sees student so can know about language acquisitional history and what to expect re dialect/language/vocabulary/prior experiences/etc.

1. **Language/dialect acquisitional history?**
 - a. Includes exposure over time to languages and dialects
 - b. Often includes immigration patterns and acculturation
 - c. If sequential bilingual important question is how was development of L1 (or D1) before introduction of L2 (or D2)
 - d. Percent of day in the different languages
 - e. Check whether the family speaks an indigenous language
2. **Parent's highest education level?**
 - a. For both parents and biological parent if applicable and known
 - b. Strong indicator of likely academic achievement
 - c. Education and SES strongly linked which gives some indication of quality of education, exposure to books and vocabulary, etc.
3. **Family history of speech-language problems? Family history of academic problems?**
 - a. Many disorders have a genetic predisposition
 - b. Careful: We have many false positive identifications of disability in NYC
4. **Significant changes in the family structure?**
 - a. Difficult to focus or do well in school when family structure is in flux
 - b. Divorce, remarriage, living in shelters, death or serious illness, etc.
5. **How do student's communication skills compare to peers or siblings at same age?**
 - a. According to the research, the *most critical* “Critical Question”
 - b. Spend time on this question. Make sure comparisons are with typical peers/siblings and not precocious ones
6. **Were child's language skills in the evaluation representative or typical for him?**
 - a. Does student speak more at home or in school
 - b. Confirm with parent and teacher your findings to raise authenticity of your results
7. **Is child clumsy?**
 - a. Dr. Lisa Goffman's research on SLI is finding these students are also clumsy, i.e., low average motor skills
8. **10 examples of best communications and where it breaks down.**
 - a. When making the appointment, ask the caregiver to write down 10 instances of the student's best communications from when you make the appointment and when you see the student.

- b. Parents provide examples in various settings, over time, and in authentic settings.
- c. Often these examples are the best data I have for my differential diagnosis.

Other important information needed to assess and evaluate a student in a disability evaluation:

- Developmental milestones especially gross motor and speech/language
- Significant medical history
- Parent concerns
- Reliability of informant
- Prior SPED services
- Prior education
- Hearing status (Do not assume normal hearing “because X responded to environmental and speech sounds” unless you find an absence of a speech or language delay/disorder)

TEACHER INTERVIEW

Best time for this interview is *after* evaluator sees student

- 1. Student’s grade level in reading and math?**
- 2. What supports does student need and benefit from?**
- 3. Student strengths and weaknesses?**
- 4. Can review a portfolio or notebook with teacher to see progress?**
- 5. How do student’s language skills compare to peers with similar backgrounds and language acquisitional histories?**
- 6. Does the teacher agree with evaluator’s findings?** (Very important because teacher knows this student much better than the evaluator who sees him once or a couple of times)
- 7. During teacher interview, evaluator looks for clues as to whether student is getting adequate instruction and whether teacher likes the student and thinks about differentiated learning.**