

Guidance Paper for using The Environmental Risk Assessment (ERA) instrument

The FIT Program is not expecting early intervention staff to implement this tool all at once. In fact, we highly recommend staggering the use of the tool over the coming months, perhaps using it right now with CAPTA families and then move on to all families. We also recognize that any new evaluation tool needs practice and skill development in becoming familiar and adept in using the tool.

1. Purpose of the ERA tool:

To create a standard format for determining eligibility under the Environmentally-At-Risk category for early intervention services in the FIT Program.

2. Is the ERA tool required?

It is required to use the ERA tool, especially with CAPTA referrals, but is not required yet.

3. When will it be required?

Effective July 1, 2010 The FIT program will require the ERA tool to be used to determine eligibility under environmental risk. All FIT agencies will receive a copy of the new regulations once they are issued.

The ERA tool will be recommended for use with all families when risk factors are present, even if the child is eligible under another category – as the information gathered can be used to develop family outcomes in the IFSP.

You will need to follow the current eligibility requirements under Environmental Risk:

“the presence of physical, social and/or economic factors in the environment which pose a substantial threat to development; with supporting information from one or more agencies having knowledge of the child and family.”

4. Who is qualified to use the ERA tool

A qualified Service Coordinator

A Developmental Specialist II or III

Please remember we highly recommend that all staff receive training/technical assistance before using the ERA tool with families.

5. If we use the ERA tool and find the child eligible, do we still have to conduct a multidisciplinary evaluation?

Yes, the ERA tool is in addition to the evaluation requirements as stated in FIT regulations.

6. If we use the ERA tool and find the child eligible, do we still need 2 agencies to determine eligibility?

The ERA tool will be sufficient to determine eligibility, however supporting Documentation can be an important factor to providing services.

7. How does staff handle the referral from CPS, confidentiality, and how we work together?

FIT early interventionists need to be clear with families that their programs are not part of CYFD/CPS, yet all staff members are mandated reporters, assuring the safety of all children (not just those referred by CPS). The information shared in the ERA tool is confidential, but will be shared with the FIT evaluation team, and IFSP members who may be providing services. The information gathered in the ERA tool will only be shared with other agencies if the family signs a release of information specific to this tool. Remember that courts can subpoena any document in a family's file at any time.

Suggestions on how the tool can be used right now:

- Eligibility for Environmental Risk category
- Developing IFSP family outcomes
- On-going assessment – using the tool over time
- Using the tool during supervision, as a basis for understanding what staff members are hearing from families; (supervision can be one-on-one, group, or peer supervision)
- Staff development & training i.e. reviewing the ERA protocol, risk & resiliency, developmental family outcomes, Routines Based Interview, family map, gene-grams etc.
- IPDP goal/or staff development plan for program

Considerations for documentation:

- A summary of the ERA tool can be included as part of the family background section of the child's evaluation report, however there is no need to document specifics from the ERA tool. The ERA tool items may also be referenced in the section of the child's evaluation report where eligibility is addressed.
- A copy of the ERA tool should be filed in the child's record, but is NOT attached to the IFSP or the evaluation report when the child is transitioning to another community program.
- Due to the confidential nature of information in the tool it is not recommended to share the tool with other agencies, unless the family signs a specific release of information.

Sample for evaluation report: “(name of child) meets the New Mexico Part C definition of a child who is eligible to receive early intervention services under the environmental risk category, according to the NM Family Infant Toddler Program Environmental Risk Assessment Tool.”

Questions that came up during the ERA tool conference calls:

1. Do you share the tool and score with the family?

It is recommended that you talk with the family about the CPS referral, and let them know that they may be eligible for FIT services under the Environmental Risk category. You may share the tool and score after you have established some type of rapport with family members.

2. How do you define “recent” substance abuse in # 6?

Substance abuse is defined in the DSM IV as recurrent use resulting in failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, home; recurrent substance use in which it is physically hazardous; substance use which results in recurrent legal problems. “Recent” can be defined as having a substance abuse problem within the past 6 months.

3. Do multiple placements in # 12 refer to childcare or only foster care?

It only refers to foster care, not childcare.

4. Must the tool be used prior to services or can it be used later on?

No, It will be required to use the tool to determine eligibility under the Environmental Risk category, before the IFSP is developed. However, the FIT program is recommending using the tool with all families if risk factors are present, even if the child is eligible under another category – as the information gathered can be used to develop family outcomes in the IFSP.

References from ERA call

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