



## Strategies for Making Data Collection Easier

Consistent data collection is a way to monitor small and large progress over time. By monitoring progress in different environments (home, school, etc.) care providers can share information and ideas about instruction. However, collecting data can be challenging in busy classrooms and homes. Below are suggestions for making this critical component of educational programming easier.

**1. Select Strategic Locations and Materials** – Different skills require different strategies for monitoring progress. Keep data collection materials near the setting where the skill is performed as a reminder to collect the data and as a way to make collection easier. For example, have hand washing sheets on clip boards in the bathroom and in the kitchen. This strategy provides multiple locations for documenting the child's progress easily. Goals that involve social skills or behavior can be and should be monitored throughout the day in a variety of environments. Monitoring these types of skills requires planning, creativity, and attention to the child's behavior in different settings. Keep Post-Its™ and golf pencils in your pocket to record when the skills occur. Another technique is to keep tokens or pennies in your left pocket and move one at a time to your right pocket when the behavior occurs.

**2. Involve Other People** – Data collection often requires a significant amount of 1:1 observation. In classrooms, train teaching assistants to collect data. At home, have parents, siblings, and extended family members help observe behaviors and collect data. Children also can help with their data collection. For example, have them keep a data sheet for a specific skill in their desk. When they turn in their homework on time or walk down the hall staying in line, have them mark a line on their data sheet. This strategy lets children see their progress and continuously reminds them of specific skills to work on.

**3. Use the Information** – People often make the mistake of taking data, but never examining the information to make program changes. Make a habit of reviewing the data once a month to see if the program needs to be changed. Changing steps of a chained task, focusing on specific aspects of a behavior, and identifying when a pre-requisite skill should be taught are some benefits of reviewing progress in this manner. Sharing the knowledge gained with other care providers keeps the program consistent across environments and allows people to discuss other ways to improve instruction.

**4. Take Advantage of Technology** – Digital cameras, picture cell phones, and video cameras are excellent ways to collect information for alternative assessments and to share progress between home and school. Pictures or movies can be emailed or put on disc for meetings or to see progress over time. This also is an excellent way to communicate instructional methods. If a teacher is using a specific procedure or a parent is trying a strategy at home, use video to share information about the instruction.

**5. Share Findings and Ideas** - Children benefit from parents and professionals working together. Often times parents see things at home that teacher's do not see in school and vice versa. Quarterly progress reports convey a good deal of information, but more consistent communication can be very helpful. Use a notebook that is sent between home and school to transport sample data sheets, notes, or other information about progress. Additionally, share and implement successful strategies in other settings.

**6. Plan for Data Collection** – Schedule times to collect data. This is a way to remember to monitor progress consistently. For example, work on skills through out the week, but take data on making the bed every Wednesday and brushing teeth every Thursday.

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