Overview of Instruments

Assessing behavioral and emotional problems is important for developing successful interventions. Conducting behavioral assessments is one of the most common ways to measure problem areas for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Assessment tools, including rating scales and checklists, used to measure behavioral and emotional aspects should be fully understood by users or interpreters as part of the evaluation procedure. Even though various standardized assessments can provide useful information, the following steps should also be undertaken to identify a child’s challenges and to understand his or her needs:

- Review the child’s records and other related information
- Interview various people, including parents and teachers
- Systematically observe the child across settings

Professionals and others who contribute information about the child, such as parents or teachers, must have a mutually agreed-upon understanding of the behaviors or related characteristics that they are rating. The following tools are commonly used as behavioral/emotional assessments.

Research on Emotional and Behavioral Assessment

The behavioral and emotional aspects of children with autism spectrum disorder have distinct features. Behavioral and emotional checklists are often useful to augment ASD screening tools. Interestingly, a recent study found that CBCL subscales have better sensitivity and specificity in identifying children with ASD than the Gilliam Autism Rating Scale (GARS), suggesting that the CBCL is a useful behavioral checklist when screening for autism (Sikora, Hall, Hartley, Gerrard-Morris, & Cagle, 2008). However, another study (Ferdinand, 2008) pointed out that even though the CBCL and the YSR Anxiety Problems scale can predict DSM-IV disorders, the item content of the Anxiety Problems subscale needs to be revised to correspond with DSM-IV. No published studies using BASC-2 for participants with AU are currently available, except for
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doctoral dissertations.

The criterion-validity study for the PDDBI has been implemented by the authors (Cohen et al., 2003), who also conducted factor analyses to confirm construct validity. The results indicated that the PDDBI is both reliable and valid and is useful in providing information not typically available in most instruments used to assess children with PDD (Cohen, et al., 2003).

It is helpful to understand that there are also weaknesses in assessment tools. Hosp and his colleagues (2003) examined the structure of items on commonly used behavior rating scales and found that most scales included negative-action questions and lack-of-action questions, neither of which is useful for assessing positive behaviors and for addressing observable, measurable behaviors.

The emotional / behavioral assessments included in this section of the TARGET document include the following:

- Behavior Assessment System for Children – Second Edition (BASC-2)
- Behavior Rating Profile – Second Edition (BRP-2)
- Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL)
- Connors’ Rating Scales – Third Edition (Connors-3)
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder Behavior Inventory (PDDBI)
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### Misconceptions

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<tr>
<th>Myth</th>
<th>Reality</th>
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<td>Behavioral and emotional assessments are not necessary if a child has already been diagnosed as having autism.</td>
<td>In fact, the presence of autism spectrum disorder increases the likelihood that the individual has behavioral and emotional challenges (Konst &amp; Matson, 2014; Simonoff et al., 2008). It is recommended that behavioral and emotional assessments be used to identify concerns in these areas. No single set of interventions works for all behavioral and emotional problems. Therefore, identifying specific problems in each area in which individuals with autism spectrum disorder might have difficulties is essential to provide appropriate support. In addition, subscales of various assessments may be useful to screen for autism spectrum disorder.</td>
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<td>A behavioral and emotional assessment tool can be the sole source for identifying and measuring problem areas.</td>
<td>When using any type of assessment, professionals should complete the following steps as a part of the assessment procedure: review the child’s record or information; interview various people, including caregivers; and observe the child’s behavior systematically. The last step of the process includes using formal and informal assessments (Barnhill, 2001-2002; Knoff &amp; Batsche, 1991).</td>
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<td>If a discrepancy exists between home and school, the results are probably invalid.</td>
<td>Different people might have different perspectives on the same person with ASD. However, that does not mean the information is invalid. It is likely that the individual with ASD responds differently in various settings because of the level of structure, variety of activities, and supports available. Therefore, strategies to address behavioral and emotional problems must match individual needs in specific settings with specific activities.</td>
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### References

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**Resources and Materials**
