

# DECA Tips:

## Ensure the most reliable, valid, and accurate results

The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) is a valuable resource to support the healthy social and emotional development of young children (infants, toddlers, preschoolers). The tips provided in this document are offered to help you optimize its use and ensure that the results provide the most reliable, valid, and accurate data. In addition to these tips, we encourage you to visit our website to see a full list of frequently asked questions and responses.

[General FAQs](#)

[FAQs specific to the DECA for Infants/Toddlers](#)

[FAQs specific to the DECA for Preschoolers](#)

- Be intentional with your observations of children's social and emotional skills. Doing this helps you get to know children better and to not only study behavior concerns and needs, but to guide your lens to focus on positive and emerging social and emotional skills. Accurate, objective, and complete observations can also increase understanding and attunement, while reducing bias.
- Ratings should be based on direct observations, considering only behaviors seen/heard over the past four weeks spent with the children.
- Avoid comparing children. The ratings should reflect how frequently the child exhibited the behaviors, not how frequently the child exhibited the behaviors compared to others in the classroom/caregiving space.
- Familiarize yourself with the DECA questions. The more you know about the assessment, the easier your intentional observation will be and the more accurately you will be able to complete your rating.
- Try not to overthink or overanalyze. Ask yourself simple questions like, "What can the child do on their own?" or "How often do they do it?" Remember that

there are no right answers. Every rater should answer the questions based on their individual interpretation of them.

- Stick to the facts. Raters should base their rating on the last four weeks spent with the child; it should not be an interpretation or what they have heard about the child from someone else. Remember that intentional observations and accurate ratings should be unbiased and based only on what the rater observed in the last four weeks.
- It's important to thoughtfully plan your rating times. Program/school leaders are encouraged to identify a time for teachers/caregivers to complete ratings, such as during or in lieu of a staff meeting. Raters need to be free from distractions and have time to answer each of the DECA questions in one sitting. Leaders should consider offering 2-4 protected time periods within the same week, so that teachers/caregivers can complete a few DECAs at a time, as opposed to completing all DECAs in one sitting.
- Place your response (i.e., Never, Rarely, Occasionally, Frequently, Very Frequently) at the beginning of each DECA question to create a statement. This will help ensure that you answer the questions as intended. For example, "In the past four weeks, the child *rarely* handled their frustration well," or "In the past four weeks, the child *very frequently* smiled and showed interest in what others are doing."
- Finally, the rater should be able to answer every DECA question. If you do not feel that you have had enough exposure to the child to do so, then the rating should be postponed until you do.

## Learn more

[CenterForResilientChildren.org](https://CenterForResilientChildren.org)

## Contact us

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