



## FACT SHEET

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## PROJECT ACCESS

Missouri's educational  
 leader in autism support

# Disturbances of Developmental Rates & Sequences

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While observing a student and making notes in the Project ACCESS Quadrant Form, have you ever been confused about what to write in the associated feature quadrant labeled Disturbances of Developmental Rates & Sequences? You aren't the only observer who has felt they don't have a good grasp of this area. Here are explanations that could help you feel more comfortably knowledgeable in this area.

Here's the Missouri State Plan definition of Disturbances of Developmental Rates and Sequences: *The child may also exhibit delays, arrests, or regressions in physical, social, or learning skills. Areas of precocious skill development may also be present, while other skills may develop at normal or extremely depressed rates. The order of skill acquisition frequently does not follow normal developmental patterns.*

What does the term **developmental** mean? Researchers and early childhood specialists consider the developmental period to be from birth until age 3 to 5. The first key to understanding "developmental rates & sequences" is to thoroughly review the student's early childhood records. You cannot determine developmental issues by observing the student in his classroom. If the parents are willing, have them fill out a parent questionnaire. Project ACCESS has a Parent Questionnaire which can be used in part or whole. Their memories of their child's early behaviors will provide the developmental information you need to write in the Quadrant Form. Bolster your familiarity with the main developmental areas. These are: 1) cognitive/adaptive behavior, 2) speech, 3) language, 4) fine/gross motor, and 5) social/emotional/behavioral. These are the areas to look at for disturbances.

The second key is to remember that the word **disturbances** is not synonymous with "delays". A disturbance can be behavior that is superior or that is subpar. It can be a behavior that is at the wrong time or simply odd. Remember that a disturbance is different from the norm, but not simply wrong or worse.

The third key is understanding what the two terms "rates" and "sequences" mean in this context. Basically, the word **rates** means that skills develop at the normal/typical age. The word **sequences** means that skills develop in the typical *order*. You'll be checking the child's records to determine disturbances across areas, as well as delays, arrests, and/or regressions between or within one or more of the areas. Here are examples.

**Within area:** Within the motor area, two-year-old Jeremy runs up a bookshelf, then runs down again. He runs up to stand on the top back of a rocking chair, rocks gently, then runs down. At lunch time Jeremy cannot grip a spoon or cup his hand to scoop out Spaghettios from his bowl. Within the social/emotional/behavioral area, three-year-old Tommy responds to attempts by others to interact but does not initiate interactions with others. Within cognitive/adaptive area: Nonverbal intelligence scores may be markedly higher than verbal scores yet significantly lower than adaptive abilities. Heather pulls herself up to a standing position in her crib but cannot figure out how to sit back down. Nine-month-old David skipped crawling and began running. Within social/emotional/behavioral: Mood may be labile, e.i., crying may be unexplained or inconsolable; there may be giggling or laughing without identifiable stimuli. [Hint for you: Giggling is the body's way to deal with nervousness.] There may be a lack of appreciation of real dangers such as moving vehicles as well as inappropriate fears. Self-injurious behaviors, such as hair pulling and hitting or biting parts of the body, may be present. Stereotypic and repetitive movements of limbs or the entire body are common.

**Between areas:** Four-year-old Jordan has good speech skills but does not use speech for social communication purposes. Two-year-old Joey reads aloud but cannot follow a verbal directive. Gloria, age 7, is not toilet-trained and cannot answer questions, but can 'read' aloud from a college-level psychology textbook. Jimmy is able to disengage any lock his parents put on the doors at home, but he does not understand that standing in the middle of the street at night with an old steering wheel is dangerous.

**Arrests, delays, regressions:** Development may be normal up to around 18-24 months, when there is an arrest, such as walking or speaking stops. Imitative behavior and/or speech may be delayed in onset followed by rapid acquisition of some skills in these areas. Some cognitive skills may develop at expected times while others are delayed or absent. Some children are unresponsive to their parent and environment from birth, while other children scream continuously, and cannot be consoled by their parent. Autism is present within the developmental period generally before age 3, whereas childhood schizophrenia usually appears after age 8. Persons with autism may repeat favorite phrases but do not experience hallucinations.

The fourth key is to check for behavioral changes in the developmental areas over time and to take into account the biggest concerns of the student's parents. Most parents desperately want their child to talk and to read. If there are serious behaviors present, parents will want help dealing with them.

**In Conclusion:** Each child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is unique. Even so, there are common traits across the spectrum. Getting the best information for the Disturbances of Developmental Rates and Sequences will help your evaluation team determine whether ASD is present, and how best to program for the student. Discover all treasure trove of information for this essential feature of ASD when you evaluate a student. I hope this Fact Sheet is helpful to you.

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