



Topic:

Reliability and validity of the *Zero to Three Diagnostic Classification System* for identifying social-emotional disorder in infants and toddlers

Research tells us:

Available data on the *DC: 0-3* diagnostic classification system raises questions about the use of the assessment procedure for clinical or intervention purposes. The reliability, validity, and accuracy of the assessment procedure has yet to be adequately determined.

Acting on the evidence:

Better designed and implemented studies are needed before the *DC: 0-3* should be used for identifying early social-emotional disorders. Until these studies are conducted, the use of the *DC: 0-3* for assessment and intervention purposes should occur with caution.



Identifying Social-Emotional Difficulties in Infancy

Practitioners and parents increasingly recognize the importance of the early social and emotional development of infants and toddlers. Mental health clinicians now claim that it is “never too early” to identify emotional difficulties and to intervene to prevent further problems.

Recent years have seen an increase in attempts to develop assessment tools and diagnostic procedures for identifying social-emotional disorders during the first three years of life. The *Zero to Three Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood* is one such assessment procedure. This classification system is an approach to diagnosing early mental health problems and for identifying social emotional disorders.

Researchers at the Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development headed by Carl J. Dunst, Ph.D., recently reviewed available evidence on the reliability and validity of the *DC: 0-3*. Their review included 13 studies of more than 2,000 young children. Findings showed that most studies were poorly conducted, and that what evidence is available, points to the fact that the procedure is not very accurate in terms of identifying infant and early childhood social-emotional disorders or difficulties. Two thirds of the studies did not even determine if clinicians agreed on a diagnosis, and findings showed that the classification system fared poorly in terms of differentiating between typically and atypically developing children.

Take another look:

Read or download the complete research synthesis in the *Bridges* section of www.researchtopractice.info:

Dunst, C. J., Storck, A., & Snyder, D. (2006). Reliability and validity of the *DC: 0-3* diagnostic classification system. *Bridges*, 4(6).

Exciting print, web-based and multimedia materials of interest to parents and early childhood practitioners are available from the Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development, on the Web at www.researchtopractice.info.