

AABT CLINICAL ASSESSMENT SERIES

# Practitioner's Guide to Empirically Based Measures of School Behavior

Edited by  
Mary Lou Kelley, David Reitman,  
and George H. Noell

# **PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE TO EMPIRICALLY BASED MEASURES OF SCHOOL BEHAVIOR**

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SCHOOL BEHAVIOR**

## *AABT CLINICAL ASSESSMENT SERIES*

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# Preface

Children's display of unacceptable behavior in the school setting, school violence, academic underachievement, and school failure represent a cluster of problems that touches all aspects of society. Children with learning and behavior problems are much more likely to be unemployed, exhibit significant emotional and behavior disorders in adulthood, as well as become incarcerated. For example, by adolescence, children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder are more likely to be retained a grade, drop out of school, have contact with the law, or fair worse along a number of dimensions than their unaffected siblings (Barkely, 1998). Identification, assessment, and treatment of children with externalizing behavior problems and learning disabilities is critical to optimizing development and prevention of relatively intractable behavioral and emotional problems in adulthood. For example, poor interpersonal problem solving and social skills excesses and deficits are strongly associated with poor outcome in adolescence and adulthood. The school is where children learn essential academic, social, and impulse control skills that allow them to function effectively in later years. School is where problems in these areas can be most easily identified and addressed.

The purpose of this book is to provide an overview of assessment practices for evaluating children's externalizing behavior problems exhibited in the school environment. Reviews of approximately 100 assessment devices for measuring children's externalizing problems are included. Instruments include structured interviews, rating scales, and observational methods. As rating scales are the primary assessment type supported by statistical studies, they are emphasized in the portion of the book that reviews measures. To complement this necessary emphasis on rating scales, we are including chapters on functional assessment and curriculum-based assessment, both of which emphasize direct assessment of behavior and the environmental contingencies maintaining behavior. These methods are "state of the art" in school psychology and certainly should be familiar to anyone assessing children's behavior in the school setting. Thus, this volume, is an attempt to present a broad, integrative assessment perspective in which evaluation of children's behavior can take many forms depending on the assessment question; however, our emphasis is on answering the ultimate assessment goal, helping children experience competency in the school setting.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of issues relevant to the assessment of children's externalizing behavior problems in the school environment. These issues include purposes of assessment, methods of assessment including multi-informant/multi-method assessment, laws affecting assessment practices, and reimbursement issues. Chapter 2 presents information on diagnostic issues relevant to children's behavior problems in the classroom. This includes discussion of traditional diagnostic classification using the DSM-IV, as well as utilization of functional assessment methods. Functional assessment methods emphasize identifying the function of the behavior with regard to reinforcement contingencies. Chapter 3 expands



upon Chapter 2 by presenting specific methodologies for conducting functional assessments of children's behavior problems in the school setting. Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) entails identifying environmental factors that maintain or suppress an individual's behavior and links assessment findings to treatment. Chapter 3 provides legal, ethical, and clinical rationales for utilizing FBA in the school setting. Chapter 4 describes Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) which is hallmarked as "best practice" for measuring academic skill level. Curriculum-based assessment (CBM), in contrast, measures the student's rate of correct responding on standardized tasks that are representative of the client's curriculum. CBM assesses the client's skill level with regard to the curriculum in which he is placed and can be used to measure reading, mathematics, and written expression skills by behaviorally oriented school psychologists. CBM serves as an alternative to traditional, norm referenced approaches to academic assessment. Norm-referenced assessment, which is characterized by the majority of the assessment instruments reviewed in the latter portion of this volume, leads to assigning a client a position within a normative distribution. For example, most rating scales provide standard scores and percentile rankings which indicate the degree to which the individual differs from the average person in the standardization sample. CBM more closely leads to treatment and assesses the client from within the environment that learning is to take place. Although our focus is on the assessment of externalizing behavior problems, inadequate academic skill relative to the curriculum in which the child is placed is closely associated with displays of negative behavior and therefore is emphasized in the text.

The final portion of the volume provides reviews of measures for assessing children's behavior problems in the school setting. The potential measures for inclusion far exceeds the allotted space. Therefore, the following guidelines were used:

1. The instrument must focus on behavioral or interpersonal problems evidenced in the school environment. In a few cases, we included measures that appeared to have direct relevance to school behavior problems such as measures of aggression.
2. The most comprehensively covered measures are those with the highest degree of reliability and validity supporting the instrument.
3. Norm reference measures of cognitive or academic functioning are not reviewed. Nor are laboratory measures of attention reviewed given their inconsistent relationship to classroom behavior.
4. All measures reviewed must be available in English and have psychometric studies supporting the reliability and validity of the instrument.

All reviews describe the purpose of the instrument, the population for which it was intended, a description of the instrument and administration, scoring guidelines, psychometric properties of the instrument, and general strengths and limitations. Information for obtaining the instrument is provided as well. The volume ends with a glossary of all major terms used in the volume including those used in this preface.

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# Introduction

*Mary Lou Kelley*

## BACKGROUND

The prevalence of children who manifest behavioral and academic problems in the school setting represent a vast source of referral for mental health and school professionals as well as medical personnel. The assessment and treatment of children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), for example, has received tremendous media attention with continued confusion as to what constitutes the diagnosis and how it is best treated. The use of well-normed instruments that assess the presence of symptoms and associated problems across environments and caretakers is clearly the recommended practice (Barkley, 1998; Robin, 1998). The American Academy of Pediatrics has recognized ADHD as a chronic and prevalent condition that must be assessed using standardized instruments that document that the child meets the DSM-IV and associated problems (AAP, 2000). Likewise Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder are commonly evidenced in school-aged children and the behaviors often are manifested in the classroom setting. Complicating the clinical manifestation of externalizing behavior problems in the school setting, is the common presence of academic skill or performance deficits that must be addressed in the assessment and treatment of children.

The purpose of this book is to provide clinicians and researchers with a compendium of instruments for assessing childrens' and adolescents' externalizing or attentional problems in the school setting. Although the primary focus is on the evaluation of problems manifested in the school setting, many instruments reviewed are multi-informant and intended for the comprehensive assessment of children across settings. The instruments reviewed here primarily assessed children's externalizing behavior problems in the school setting. However, we included some measures that may be related to externalizing behavior such as measures of social skills and self-concept. All measures reviewed have psychometric support and are standardized. We did not include measures of academic or cognitive functioning. Although we made an attempt to obtain all norm based instruments related to the assessment of children's school related behavior problems, sometimes we simply could not get the author or publisher to reply



or could not locate the author of the measure. We may have overlooked some measures. Thus, this compilation is comprehensive but not exhaustive.

The contemporary assessment of children's behavior problems has moved away from emphasis on interview and questionnaire data. Instead, the emphasis is on functional assessment of children within the classroom setting. Functional assessment refers to identifying the function of the behavior with regard to reinforcement contingencies. Given the importance of this approach, Dr. George Noell, a leader in the field, has written a chapter on functional assessment methods. He also wrote a chapter on curriculum based assessment which refers to the students' rate of correct responding on standardized tasks that are representative of the clients' curriculum. This chapter was included given the attention this approach to academic assessment is emphasized in the School Psychology literature as best practice. It serves as an alternative to, or augmentation of, norm based academic testing. The chapter was included given the frequency of academic skill deficit in children with externalizing behavior problems displayed in the school setting.

## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is organized into two sections. The first section presents four chapters on the assessment of children. Following measures are reviewed which are presented in alphabetical order. Measures are summarized in a grid preceding the reviews. The grid presents the title of the measure, general purpose, population for its intended use, respondents (i.e., teacher, parent, student), administration time, norms, and strengths and limitations. Finally, a glossary of terms used throughout the book is presented.

## FORMAT OF INSTRUMENT DESCRIPTIONS

All instruments are reviewed in a standard format. The reviews were completed by a variety of individuals with training in measurement. Many times reviews were completed collaboratively with one of the editors and a doctoral student in clinical or school psychology. After presenting the title and reviewer, each instrument was reviewed using the following format.

### Purpose

The author's intended purpose is presented.

### Population

The age range and gender of students for whom the measure is appropriate.

### Description

This section presents a brief overview of the measure including the structure, scales, item type, and response format (e.g., 5 point Likert-type scale). When appropriate, all versions of the scale are described, such as inclusion of a parent and teacher version of the instrument or variations of the instrument for different aged students.

**Administration**

This section gives the approximate time to complete the measure as well as intended respondent.

**Scoring**

This section provides a description of the scoring procedures including availability of computerized scoring.

**Psychometric Properties**

**Norms.** Described the standardization sample and available norms.

**Reliability.** Describes studies on the instrument's internal consistency, inter-rater, and test-retest reliability.

**Validity.** Describes studies on validity (e.g., construct, convergent, predictive, discriminant, and factorial).

**Clinical Utility**

Rates our estimates of the clinical utility of the instrument from High to Limited. Ratings indicate whether the instrument is frequently used in clinical settings and/or would be appropriate and easily used in clinical work. These ratings are subjective only and based on the reviewer's perceptions of clinical utility.

**Authors**

The authors of the instrument.

**Publication Year**

Lists the publication year if available.

**Source**

Identifies how the measure can be obtained. When the measure is published by a large publishing house, the address, telephone/fax number, and email address are listed.

**Fee**

Specifies whether or not there is a fee for obtaining the measure.

