

Data Collection Method Brief

Collecting Data from Children Ages 9-13

APPENDIX A: OBSERVATIONAL METHODS

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<http://www.lpfch.org/informed/facts/etr.html>

Observational Methods

How have observational methods been used for collecting information from children?

Researchers and practitioners use observations to collect information on children's health behaviors or temperament, for behavioral monitoring or assessment, and to measure program effects.^{1,2,3} Research suggests that it can be used successfully with children as young as 2 years of age. Investigators using observations conduct them in a laboratory or clinical setting or in a naturalistic setting (e.g., at home or in school). Some researchers or practitioners who are involved with health-related programs may use observations to assess program fidelity. In these cases the observers typically focus on the individual implementing the program, not the children receiving it.

What are important considerations when using observational methods with children?

- ✓ Observations are valuable for collecting data on children's behaviors (e.g., social interactions, health practices).
- ✓ This method requires observers to be trained before they collect data.
- ✓ Videotaping observations may create an artificial situation and affect the behavior being observed.
- ✓ The settings in which the observations take place may influence data interpretations—laboratory settings are more controlled, but the findings cannot always be generalized to settings outside the laboratory. Observations in naturalistic settings are less controlled, but may be more subject to observer bias (i.e., perceptions of the observer in a particular situation).
- ✓ Observations can be completed by parents or by other observers, but they are likely to view behavior from different perspectives.
- ✓ Observations are among the most costly forms of data collection.

What are the advantages of using this approach?

- Ease of use
- Data quality

What the Research Says...

- ✓ Existing systems (e.g., Behavioral Style Observation System) are available that are objective, short, and easy to administer.¹
- ✓ Using standardized observation measures greatly increases the reliability and validity of the observational data.³
- ✓ Observations allow for the comparison of a child's behavior to other children in similar and different settings.³

What are the drawbacks of this approach?

- Preparation
- Cost

What the Research Says...

- ✓ Parenting stress affects the data quality of parent observer ratings--as the level of parenting stress increases, the accuracy of parents' perceptions of their children's behavior decreases.¹
- ✓ There is considerable variation in children's behavior by situation, making it difficult to generalize across situations.³
- ✓ Observations are labor intensive.¹
- ✓ Observations cannot adequately capture children's thoughts, feelings and subjective experiences.

References

1. Karp, J., Serbin, L. A., Stack, D. M., & Schwartzman, A. E. (2004). An Observational Measure of Children's Behavioural Style: Evidence Supporting a Multi-Method Approach to Studying Temperament. *Infant and Child Development*, 13(2), 135-158.
2. Mauthner, M. (1997). Methodological aspects of collecting data from children: Lessons from three research projects. *Children & Society*, 11(1), 16-28.
3. McConaughy, S. H. (2005). Direct observational assessment during test sessions and child clinical interviews. *School Psychology Review*, 34(4), 490-506.