

# Importance of Proper Data Collection Methods

## **Why do you need a training?**

Answering surveys can seem like a relatively straight forward process. However, each survey is designed with a specific intent to capture data in different ways. Surveys can assess consumer behaviors, client satisfaction with services, employee attitudes, and the public's values and beliefs. Surveys are basically instruments for measuring events which are used to gather and record information for assessment, decision making, and ultimately understanding.

Data collection instruments vary by *mode of administration* or who is responsible for completing the survey. Most clinical assessments are completed through observations from a trained individual such as mental health clinicians, nurses or medical assistants. Self-report instruments require the participant read and answer the questions on the instrument themselves. The mode of administration is going to be determined by the type of instrument and the type of questions asked or data being collected.

Ultimately, administering a survey to PCDS program participants requires that parent educators be aware of what the purpose of the tool is so they understand how they should administer. This is the purpose of the data collection protocol.

## **Data collection Protocol**

A data collection protocol is a set of instructions and policies that outlines the specific rules to follow when implementing a data collection instrument. Training staff on the specific protocol for the PCDS Outcome Survey will prevent problems in the data before they occur. The following items are reviewed in the protocol.

1. List of measures – A list that documents what data collection instruments will be administered and when.
2. Policy for Survey Implementation – This section outlines the schedule for implementing the baseline and follow-up data collection tools.
3. Tracking procedures – This part specifically outlines how to track and/or document when the follow-up surveys are required.
4. Answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) – A one-page summary of answers to frequently asked questions attached to the training packet.
5. Standardization of Administration – Rules about administering the data collection instrument.
6. Communication – What terminology to use when introducing the data collection instrument to parents and what words to avoid (i.e., tests, exam, assessments).
7. Securing the data – Instructions for transmitting data to County staff while maintaining client confidentiality. Describe how the paper surveys will be delivered to Mario Olivares, PCDS data analyst, in order to secure confidentiality.

### List of Measures

There are two PCDS Outcome Survey variations. The baseline survey is the initial tool administered with new families. There are two baseline surveys, one for children between the ages of 0-8 months and another for children between the ages of 8-60 months. The other variation is the follow-up survey. This tool has two timelines for administration, at 3-months and at 12-months. The use of each timeline for the follow-up is discussed in further detail below.

### Policy for Survey Implementation

This section outlines the schedule for implementing the baseline and follow-up data collection tools. The baseline tool is designed to determine the parent's level of understanding on the subjects mentioned in the survey prior to working with the Parent Educator (PE). In short, the baseline survey should be administered as early in the home visitation process as possible. However, establishing rapport with the parent is paramount to any data collection efforts. Therefore, it is perfectly fine to wait until the second home visit to introduce the baseline survey. The key is to implement the baseline as early as possible and before the PE begins working with the parent and disseminating new information.

The follow-up survey has two timelines, at 3-months and 12-months. The preferred timeline for administering the follow-up is at 12-months, this allows families sufficient time to work with the PE increasing the likelihood of gaining a better understanding of how much the families have learned during their time in PCDS.

The 3-month timeline is intended for instances where the parent informs the PE that they will be exiting the program. It does not have to be exactly at the three months, it can be a few weeks prior or after. The key is to capture the parent's level of understanding before they exit the program.

## Tracking Procedures

This section specifically outlines how to track and/or document when the follow-up surveys are required. Tracking when the follow-up surveys are due falls under the responsibility of the PE's. However, I can create a database that would track when the 3-month and 12-month follow-ups are due for each agency. The PE's would only need to fill in the Client ID, Name and date of baseline survey the 3-month and 12-month due dates then populate automatically based on the baseline survey date. If this is something that your agency would be interested in please let me know.

## Standardization of Administration

The following is a review of the rules for administering the survey.

- In the case of parents that cannot read in any language - The PE must administer the survey. As the interviewer, the PE must always read the questions and transition statements between sections exactly as written and not change the language or provide examples outside of the text in the tool. Interviewers, must also be conscious of not leading the parent towards a specific answer, they must appear neutral at all times and never indicate to the parent be it verbally or through body language whether they feel the answer was right or wrong. When answering likert scale answers the interviewer must read the entire selection before the parent provides an answer to ensure they are providing the best possible answer. If the parent interrupts before the PE has finished reading the answers please remind them that there are more possible response options and you would like them to hear all the options before they select one.
- If the parent is answering the survey and asks the PE for clarification on a word the PE can provide a definition for that word. However, the PE should not rephrase the entire question only the word. If the parent still does not understand what the question is asking then please advise them to mark "Don't Know" as the response option.

- If the parent speaks a language different from the PE and requires assistance with someone reading the survey that is already translated in their native tongue it is acceptable to have an adult family member read the questions out to the parent. However, instruct the adult relative that they cannot rephrase any of the questions and must read the entire survey to the parent, including transition statements and all the response options. **NOTE:** It is not recommended that the child of the parent interpret the survey to the parent. This puts the parent and child in an uncomfortable dynamic that may affect the responses provided in the survey. This is especially true in specific cultures so best not administer the survey if there is no other relative present that can assist.

### Communication

What terminology to use when introducing the data collection instrument to parents and what words to avoid (i.e., tests, exam, assessments). The manner in which the PE introduces the survey to the parent can determine her willingness to participate. Therefore, it is important to avoid using terms that tend to give the impression the survey is judging the parent. First, the survey tool is designed to help the program staff identify areas of service that are going well and areas that perhaps require more focus or a change in strategies. That is the intent behind including the PCDS supervisors in the survey development process. It ensured that the survey focused on the program areas that matter to the families.

Therefore, it is recommend introducing the tool as a survey that will inform the PCDS program which service/program areas are working and which ones need more attention. Be sure to inform them that this is not a test of their abilities. As such, avoid using words like tests, exam or assessment when introducing the survey. These words naturally convey a judgmental message, which may discourage the parent from participating.

However, completing the survey is voluntary. Therefore, if the parent out right refuses to complete the survey, an attempt should be made to explain the importance of the tool but if they still refuse then their wishes should be respected.

### Securing the Data

Instructions for transmitting data to County staff while maintaining client confidentiality. The Youth and Family Services division is using a county FTP process to transmit the survey data to the county securely. This will all county data entry staff to enter the survey data. At present, the process is being finalized and should be ready by December. In the interim, please hold on to your surveys until the end of the month. If on the 30<sup>th</sup> or last day of the month, there are five or more surveys collected please contact Mario Olivares, PCDS Data Analyst, at [Mario.olivares@multco.us](mailto:Mario.olivares@multco.us) and he will arrange a pick time for the surveys. If there are fewer than five surveys please hold on to them until the end of the following month.

If you have any questions, concerns or need for clarification on this handout, the data collection tool or anything else related to the PCDS Outcome Survey process please contact Ronnie Cano, Senior Research and Evaluation Analyst at [veronica.cano@multco.us](mailto:veronica.cano@multco.us) or via phone (503) 988-7428.