



Early Social Indicator (ESI) Scoring Definitions

Scoring procedures are designed to record the degree to which the child demonstrates social behaviors with his/her peers and/or adults. Each key skill element that is used by a child is tallied. Key skill elements for the ESI vary across three dimensions: Verbal/Nonverbal, Target (peer, adult, or Nondirected), and Positive/Negative. The table below summarizes these key skill elements.

| ESI Key Skill Elements | | | |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Number | Target | Positive/Negative | Verbal/NonVerbal |
| 1 | Adult | Positive | Verbal |
| 2 | Adult | Positive | NonVerbal |
| 3 | Peer | Positive | Verbal |
| 4 | Peer | Positive | NonVerbal |
| 5 | NonDirected | Positive | Verbal |
| 6 | NonDirected | Positive | NonVerbal |
| 7 | Any Target | Negative | Verbal/Nonverbal |

Each key skill element is coded separately as it occurs. All key skills are coded using a frequency count. Each instance of a behavior is counted and recorded with a tally mark.

"Partner" in these definitions refers to the adult playing with the children during the ESI assessment.

"Assessor" refers to the person in charge of the assessment and recording of the child's behavior. The assessor may also be the partner.

"Recorder" is the person who records the child's behaviors on the Recording Sheet. This person may also be the assessor and adult play partner. A "Reliability Recorder" is someone who double checks scoring to ensure continued reliability of recording. This person is usually not the assessor or partner.

"Episode" in these definitions refers to an incidence of a behavior. An episode is counted with a tally.

Each key skill element is scored separately as it occurs in a situation. All elements are scored using a frequency count. Each instance of an element is counted and recorded with a tally mark in the appropriate cell on the recording sheet. Recording sheets have different sections for each element for each minute of the assessment. Elements can be summed into a Total Social score.

Definitions of Social Key Elements

Social Behaviors

Social behaviors occur when a child attempts to convey a message to a partner requiring one or more behaviors. Social behaviors may last as long as a single behavior (an initiation to play), or as long as an episode/exchange of social behaviors involving several turns (an initiation that is responded to by a peer, that is responded to by the target child). Social responding is considered ended after 3 seconds of no responding. For example, an episode begins when a child initiates or responds to an initiation presented by another. The episode ends after a pause of at least three seconds (count to yourself, "one thousand one..."). Thus, each social behavior or each episode separated by at least a 3-second pause is counted as one event.

Often children will be observed to engage in social behavior with a play partner, the adult, peer, or both in the testing situation. For example, the child being assessed may invite the adult to play with a specific toy. Children also may interact with a play partner about events or persons outside the testing situation. For example, when another person happens to come into the testing room, the child may comment about the person while also pointing at him/her.

Children also may not engage in any direct social behavior and instead maintain a high level of engagement with the materials and toys. Termed parallel play, these play behaviors are not counted as social behavior (e.g., the child reaches into the house to move a figure from one room to another, the child puts an animal figure on top of the blocks).

Nonverbal Social Behavior (with/to Adult, Peer, or Nondirected)

Nonverbal social behaviors are gesture-based attempts to communicate. Examples include smiling at, giving or showing object, rejecting an object by pushing it away, reaching toward, or touching a partner or object the partner is holding, pointing toward an object or person (may or may not be used to establish joint attention), nodding or shaking head to indicate "yes" or "no", shrugging shoulders. Nonverbal social behaviors are recorded according to the person they are directed to: the adult play partner; the peer play partner; or as undirected; in cases in which it is not clear exactly to whom they are directed, or if they are directed to both partners.

Nonverbal social behaviors *do not* include play behaviors such as reaching for a toy lying on the ground, physical movements independent from social communication, physical movements showing excitement or pleasure that are not in direct communication with the partner (e.g., waving arms when watching a ball roll away or ignoring directions).

Verbal Social Behavior (with/to Adult, Peer, or Nondirected)

Verbal social behaviors are vocal (or sign language) attempts to communicate using non-words, single word, or multiple word utterances. False starts or stutters are counted as one verbalization. For example, "I think this is . . . this looks like a dog" counts as one verbalization. An episode is ended when there is a pause of at least three seconds without vocalizations (count to yourself, "one thousand one..."). Again, crying is considered acceptable, but is not recorded.

Like nonverbal, verbal social behaviors are recorded as directed either to the adult or peer, or as nondirected, when it is impossible to tell to whom the social behavior is directed.

Some additional examples of verbal social behaviors are animal sounds, e.g., "moo," when looking at a cow, transportation/motor sounds like "vroom," when pushing a tractor, blows to ask for more bubbles, sequentially naming objects, such as "block, red, phone, girl" (tally for each word), a vocalization in which only one word is understandable, or imitation (could be sounds, non-sense words, or sensible words), or standard sign language coded as appropriate for single words.

Verbal behavior that should *not* be scored as social behavior include involuntary noises such as hiccups or coughing or sneezing.

Positive versus Negative Social Behaviors

Social behaviors are recorded as either positive or negative. Social behaviors are positive when they are greetings, offers to play, requests, etc. Social behaviors are recorded as negative when they involve aggression, hitting, kicking, threatening, grabbing away another's toy, or other negative behavior.

Crying for children this age is considered to be an acceptable form of social-communication. However, it is *not* recorded as social behavior for the ESI.