

# Family Assessment Device (FAD)



The FAD measures dynamic characteristics of families. Respondents are asked to rate how well each of 60 statements describes their own family. Higher scores indicate worse levels of family functioning. The score for your family is compared with the population from the development study. If the result for your family is a particularly high you may want to consider further evaluation by a qualified professional. We recommend you complete the questionnaire every 3 months.

## Focus on Family Functioning

The FAD focuses on six areas, plus General Functioning, and all definitions are derived from the McMaster Model of Family Functioning.<sup>2</sup>

### 1) Problem Solving

Problem solving refers to a family's ability to resolve problems to a level that maintains effective family functioning. A family problem is an issue that threatens family harmony and which the family has difficulty solving.

A typical family may have some minor unresolved problems; however, such problems should not be of a degree or duration that causes major disruption in the family. The family is able to resolve the majority of problems by: discussing the issues in an open and clear manner; identifying the main components of the problem; communicating the problem issues in a timely manner; weighing up alternatives; making a decision; and making sure the decision is carried out. The most effective families will also be able to evaluate and learn from the way in which they solved the problem.

## At a glance

The Family Assessment Device has been widely used in both research and clinical practice.

Researchers have used it in three areas:

- screening to identify families experiencing problems
- identifying specific areas in which families are experiencing problems
- assessing change following treatment

### Found in

MyFampal Parent

### Source

Epstein, Baldwin, Bishop (1983)<sup>1</sup>

### Abbreviation

FAD

### Category

Know your family

For all ages

Answered by parent (or any family member aged 12+ years)

### Structure & Focus

60 questions

Problem solving; communication; family roles; emotional responsiveness; emotional involvement; behavior control; general functioning

### Frequency

Every 3 months

### Credibility

★★★★



## 2) Communication

Communication refers to exchanges of information within a family. McMaster proposes that effective communication within a family uses a *clear* message and is targeted *directly* to the family member concerned. McMaster defines four styles of family communication: (1) Clear and direct; (2) Clear and indirect; (3) Masked and direct; (4) Masked and indirect.

A typical family routinely uses clear and direct communication, although there may be some brief occasions of beating around the bush (masking), not clearly stating a point of view (indirect), or having trouble clearly hearing each other (masking or indirect).

## 3) Family Roles

Roles are the repetitive patterns of behavior used by family members to fulfil family functions. McMaster identifies five necessary family functions: (1) provision of resources; (2) nurturing and support; (3) contentment with adult sexual relationship; (4) personal development; and (5) maintenance and management of the family system. McMaster also considers the family's pattern of allocating roles (role allocation) and the ways in which the family ensures functions are completed (role accountability).

Typical families do not always maintain complete accountability, nor are tasks regimented to such a degree that there is no give-and-take; some tasks are not carried out or there may be a delay in completing the task. These occasional lapses, however, do not lead to family conflict.

## 4) Emotional Responsiveness

When considering emotional (or affective) responsiveness, the FAD is concerned with whether or not the family is able to respond with a full spectrum of feelings experienced in emotional life, and whether or not the emotion experienced is consistent or appropriate with the trigger or situation.

Typical families may have one or more family members who have difficulty experiencing a particular emotion. There may also be times when members respond inappropriately. Neither instance is necessarily indicative of disruptive family functioning.

## 5) Emotional Involvement

Emotional (or affective) involvement is the extent to which the family shows interest in the value of particular activities of individual family members. McMaster identifies six types of involvement: (1) lack of involvement; (2) involvement without feelings; (3) narcissistic involvement; (4) empathetic involvement; (5) over-involvement; and (6) symbiotic involvement.

Typical families occasionally stray away from empathetic involvement. These instances are not continual and usually concern individual family members, not the whole family. Note that symbiotic involvement is seen only in disturbed relationships in which there is difficulty differentiating one person from another.

## 6) Behavior Control

This dimension helps families assess how the family behaves in response to three specific areas: (1) physically dangerous situations; (2) situations involving expressing and meeting needs and drives; and (3) social situations either within or outside the family. Families develop *standards* of acceptable behavior in each area and establish a degree of *latitude* (flexibility) in adhering to the standards they set.

McMaster defines four styles of behavior control based on variations of the standard and the latitude: (1) rigid; (2) flexible; (3) Laissez-faire; and (4) chaotic.

Typical families are clear about rules of behavior in general while being indecisive, unclear or lacking in agreement in a few minor areas. Inconsistencies are not a major cause for conflict. Note that behavior control does not apply solely to children, and partners should be able to describe behavioral expectations of each other.

## General Functioning

General functioning is characterized as the best single indicator of average family functioning. General functioning can be used as a stand-alone measurement.



## Strengths and limitations

This simple summary of the pros and cons of the FAD is adapted from a summary published by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.<sup>3</sup>

### Pros:

- The FAD is based on the McMaster Model of Family Functioning, a multi-dimensional model derived from clinical experience.
- The FAD's 6 domains (problem solving, communication, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, and behavior control) and the general functioning domain provide a comprehensive picture of family functioning in multiple areas.
- The FAD is a multi-informant assessment designed to be completed by all family members over age 12. This provides insight into multiple perspectives on family functioning.
- The FAD can be used to screen for families with problematic functioning; the FAD can also be used to identify specific areas of problematic family functioning and to assess changes.

### Cons:

- The FAD's value is limited by the lack of a manual, adequate standardization, and instructions for interpreting multiple family member perspectives.
- Historically, the FAD has been used primarily with white, middle-class families. Additional research with diverse racial/ethnic and socio-economic groups is needed to establish value with these populations.
- While the FAD has been translated into 14 languages, these translations have varying levels of reliability and validity and warrant further study.
- The FAD scales are associated with one another. Thus, families with problematic functioning in one area are likely to experience problems in other areas as well.

## Comparator information

The FAD was developed using a sample of 503 individuals from the general U.S. population as well as various clinical populations. An individual family score for each of the dimensions covered by the FAD is compared with the responses distributed within this population.

## References

1 Epstein NB, Baldwin LM, Bishop DS. The McMaster family assessment device\*. *J Marital Fam Ther* 1983; **9**: 171-180.

2 Ryan CE, Epstein NB, Keitner GI, Miller IW, Bishop DS, editors. Evaluating and treating families: the McMaster approach. New York: Routledge, 2005 [https://books.google.com/books?id=4-P-fdnmUpoC&dq=evaluating+and+treating+families&lr=&source=gbs\\_navlinks\\_s](https://books.google.com/books?id=4-P-fdnmUpoC&dq=evaluating+and+treating+families&lr=&source=gbs_navlinks_s).

3 Family Assessment Device | National Child Traumatic Stress Network - Child Trauma Home. 2013; published online Sept 19. <http://www.nctsn.org/content/family-assessment-device> (accessed Sept 25, 2015).

For more information

[www.myfampal.com](http://www.myfampal.com)

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