Hello, and welcome to Start Communicating Today. I'm super excited to talk with you today all about assessment. Assessment is going to help us get a really clear vision of what our intervention should look like.

Our learning objectives today are that you'll be able to list three assessments that can be used with early learners, and that you'll be able to list these eight foundational skills that we're going to assess. This is really going to be the foundation for what we work on with our children. We're also going to discuss the importance of including an observation. It's one thing to assess these skills and to see can our student or our child do these things. It's another thing to sit back and observe. Whether you're a parent or a professional, sitting back, noting how is the child doing with these skills in the natural environment is going to be very, very important information.

So here's our process. We are going to build rapport with our student. We are going to talk with family and get family involved. So if you're a professional, we want to make sure that we do have the family very involved. And if you are a family member, if you're a parent, you want to make sure that you are involved in the assessment process. It's very, very important. You are the expert on your child. And so we need your input. We're going to do the assessment, and we're going to talk about a couple of different assessments today. And then we're going to make sure we have that observation component as well.

So, "Having access to accurate and appropriate communication assessment measures is paramount because there's information from these assessments is used to make diagnoses, to determine eligibility for services and funding, and most importantly, to identify goals and objectives for our interventions." I love this quote and it's so powerful because if we don't have a robust assessment, we don't know where we're going. We don't know what the scope and sequence is going to be for our intervention or working with our children. We have to know where is our child now, what interventions can we put in place to help support our students? And we want to see them flourish and to see them start communicating now, to start making steps towards having a way to communicate with the world.

So number one, the most important thing that we have to do is to build rapport. We want our children and we want our students to want to spend time with us. And it may sound really simplistic, but sometimes it can be really hard to know how do we do this? Where do we start? So number one, first and foremost is we don't want to demand communication. We want to have items that the student may enjoy. So I have a big old therapy bag that I bring to my clients' homes. And inside of it is an array of different things. I bring different things each week. And when I'm working with a new student, I have a variety of items because I don't know what my child is going to be into period. Or I'm not sure what they're going to be into on that day.

I'll never forget. I was working as an autism facilitator and support specialist down in Austin, Texas. And I would go out to the different schools, it was a 35 school district, and I would go out to the schools and I would help the speech therapists and teachers when they had a new child with autism on their caseload. And we had a student who was not yet talking, and I had my big bag of things that the children may enjoy. And I had this little cat toy and it was the cutest little toy. You would touch its head, and it would walk and it was really, really cool. And so I had all these items and we were just building rapport with our new student. And so I didn't tell him to label cat, I didn't say, what does a cat say? Because we don't want to demand any communication. We just want to be with the child and we want to see what do they like doing? What is fun for them?

And so I went about my job and I hadn't seen that student for maybe two or three weeks. I came back out to that same school and I had my bag and I brought that cat toy because I knew that student really loved it. And that student saw me and that student said cat. And I thought, wow, how cool. The student was excited to see me, the student was excited to

see if I had that cat toy. And I absolutely did. And this was just a way that I built rapport with this child. So we want to have items that we think our students may really love and we want to be playful. We don't want to demand any communication. We don't want to make our children do anything. We just want to be there. We want to be present with them. We want to engage with them. We just want to be there and see what do they love and enjoy. We want to use simple language. We can definitely narrate what they're playing with.

So if I had my little baby Yoda, it's one of my favorite little things on my desk here. I may see if the child wants to play with it. And I might just say Yoda. Wow, baby Yoda, hi Yoda. But I'm not going to demand that the child say anything. I'm not going to ask questions. We just want to be, we want to build rapport and we want to be the giver of fun things and activities. And so we want to remember that we want to be a giver, not a taker. This is a running theme that you will see over this course. We don't want to hold up the toy and say, what is it? Say Yoda, give the toy and then take it back. We don't want to do that to our kids. We're not there to be a taker. We want to be a giver. We're there to have fun, and we're able to say hey, I want to see what you're into, and we want to do more of that. We want this to be fun.

Family as partners. This is so important. Bailey in 1989, recommends the following. This is an older article, but I really love it because it's chock-full of very pertinent information. We want to include all caregivers. So every family is going to be different. Every family is going to be dynamic and we need to take that into account. Who is in the child's environment? Think about cultural background, economic status, family value systems. We absolutely have to take time to get to know these things about our families. And we want to focus on these naturalistic observations of play and daily routines. How is the child during the day? How is the child when they go to the playground? What are they like when you're at home making lunch? Things like that are important.

Plan for the child's immediate and future placements. We do this. We want to think about what is going to be helpful for our child to communicate now with us and with others in their environment. We have to take all the different people in environments into account. And we want to analyze these skills needed for the child to function across those settings. We want to make sure that we're not just working on things that are going to be important in the home environment, or just going to be important in the school environment. We really want to say, how is this particular skill important and how will the child generalize it outside of this particular teaching setting?

So it gets us to these foundational skills. I really love this idea of thinking about these foundational skills and how these can be so impactful for our children when we're focusing on these. And this is going to be a running theme across the whole course. We talk about assessment, then we'll talk about strategies to work on these things. How do we collect data on this? If you're the type of person, if you're a professional, and you need to goal-set, we're going to talk about it. I was actually just on Facebook and someone was saying like, "Hey, I watched this blog or I watched this workshop, but they didn't talk about how do we actually goal-set for these." Well, that's going to be important, and we're going to talk about how do we goal-set? Because if you're a parent, it's going to be good for you to know, well, what are the goals? Is my provider setting good goals? And if you're the provider, it's going to be great information on how to goal set for these foundational skills.

So these foundational skills are joint attention. That's social engagement, so important for our little ones. Imitation skills. These are these learning how to learn skills. Requesting. So important. Matching. Being able to match. Play. This is how kids learn is through play. So we're going to talk all about it. Our sessions should be fun. Our sessions should be play-based. We can have systematic instruction and it be embedded within play. I'm going to show you how to do that. Following one step directions. So important for our students to be able to do that across environments. Hey, get your shoes. We're leaving. Let's go. These are the things I say to my kids all the time. Labeling. Really important, early learners

skill. And also filling in the blanks. This is going to be the basis that we're building and scaffolding to help our children start communicating now.

All right, so let's get into our assessment tools. We're going to talk about three today, informal screener. I'm going to provide you with an informal screener. It's going to be one of the printables. We're going to go over it. I have a video, I'm going to screen share it and show you exactly how you can use it and what it goes over. We're going to talk about the Early Start Denver Model, which is a popular assessment. And we're also going to talk about the VB MAPP. These might be assessments that are new to you, or that you are going to be utilizing with students at this age. And if you're using something different, that's okay too.

But these are assessments that give us really, really good information. What happens sometimes if we're doing standardized tests, which sometimes we have to, for funding purposes and for the setting that we're working in. But oftentimes what happens is those standardized assessments do not capture our students' skills. And so it might be hard for our children to sit, it might be hard for our children to engage in these assessments or just to engage with others period. And we're going to talk about where do we go and how do we get really good snapshot of our students' skills?

So the informal screener, it can be used as a screener. It can be used if your child is on a wait list for services. I talk to parents all the time. I was just talking to somebody recently and their child is on a wait list. And it's going to be three months before they're seen for autism testing. And so this mom reached out to me. She's here in my State of Ohio and wanted to know how can I help my child now. I don't want to wait three months. What can I do now to give my child a boost in their communication? This can also be used as a supplement to more formal testing. So if you're a professional and you're giving more standardized testing, but you're like, oh my gosh, this student wouldn't sit, I'm not sure what to work on. This doesn't help me plan intervention. This can help.

I wanted to walk you through the informal communication screener that I have developed. And this is something that you can use as a supplement. So if you are on a wait list and you're waiting for an evaluation. If you have given a child a standardized test and you still want to get more information that perhaps was not captured, this is going to be a nice supplement to those things. If you want something that's going to help you know how you can get started with communication today, start with the screener. So I wanted to run through it with you. We talk about how is your child currently communicating? Are they talking some? Are they pointing to things they want? Using gestures? Are they bringing items to you that they want? Are they bringing you to items that they want? If they want something in the pantry or something in a toy bin that they can't reach, are they bringing you to that and then kind of making verbalizations? Or are they pointing to items?

Let's talk about where they're currently communicating to get a baseline. What is their social engagement like? Is your child sitting by you when you read them a book? If you had board books or a Pete the Cat book, are they sitting with you? Do they sit by you to play with different toys? Do they help you with routines in the house? If it's laundry time, are they in there trying to help? If it's time to bake some cookies, are they trying to help you with that? How does your child let you know that they want something? So this kind of goes back to how are they currently communicating? Are they pulling at you? Are they pointing? Bringing items to you? Are they able to match? So these are kind of where we get to those foundational skills. Are they able to do simple puzzles? Can they match the same items or pictures? Is that something that you've tried with them?

What is their play like? Does your child enjoy playing with toys? Does your child enjoy playing with a variety of toys? Are they going to new toys or do they have their kind of tried and true things that they love and enjoy? There's no wrong

answer here. It's just kind of getting information about where are we starting? Does your child enjoy play activities? So these would be things like going to the playground, jumping on a trampoline, more gross motor, running around, jumping, active type routines. What toys does your child currently enjoy playing with and what play activities do they enjoy? You could write those right in the box. Is your child able to follow one step directions? So if you say, "Hey, get your shoes." Or "Hey, get your blankie. Time for night-night." Do they understand what those things mean? Do they follow those directions or do they need extra help with that?

And then is your child able to label? So can they label different items if they see different items. If you're at the zoo and they see the zebra, can they say zebra? If you're walking around the neighborhood and they see a dog, do they say dog? Are they able to label different actions? If daddy's sleeping or mommy's sleeping, can they say sleeping? Do you hear them say those things? Are they able to fill in the blank for familiar routines or phrases? So ready, set, go. Do they say go when you want to push them on the swing? Are they able to fill in the blank for little songs that you may sing? Twinkle, twinkle little ... Can they fill in star? And it doesn't mean that they're saying the words perfectly, but do they know that a word goes in there and do they attempt to say a word?

And then imitation, another really important foundational skill. Is your child able to imitate different actions that you do? So sometimes children in play may imitate, oh, I'm the mommy or daddy, and I'm making food now. And I have my kitchen and I'm stirring. Are they doing things like that? Are they able to imitate actions with objects? So we're going to talk about that in the course, but does your child do those things automatically just at baseline? And is your child imitating any sounds or words? So if you say a word, do they say it after you? How is that for them right now?

And then the last portion is spontaneous communication. Is your child spontaneously communicating? And if they are saying some things on their own, write those in the box there.

And then other notes, this would just be other things that might be important for you to note at this time. Is your child having trouble with any kind of self-care routines? Are they having trouble transitioning to a babysitter's home? Are they having trouble telling you when they're upset about something? Are they having trouble engaging with peers or their own siblings? And so those notes will be important here too. So I created this informal screener to be a supplement if you're on a wait list, if you want to get communication started today, or if you're a professional and you've given a standardized test and it hasn't captured all of these items, or if the child was ... It was hard to test their skill set on that day, these are other things to think about. And it goes back to the basis of our whole course, which is looking at these foundational skills to heart with communication.

All right, so that was the informal screener, which I hope is a really great resource for you and helps guide you, whether you're a parent or professional on how do we get started with communication. It will be very, very helpful. Those are the foundational skills that are going to help your children start communicating now. So that is something that you're going to get as part of the course, that principal screener. So if you're on a wait list, if you're waiting for services, you could do this screener now and get started with the strategies we're going to talk about. And you could always share that screener with the speech therapist, with the interventionists, whoever comes to test your child. All right, some formal measures that are really, really helpful.

One is called the Early Start Denver Model, really an evidence-based assessment and curriculum here. So the ESDM is what they call it for short, is embedded in this ESDM curriculum checklist. It's a really, really great book. They have a couple of different resources. It's something that's very, very widely used for children at this age level. So some of the domains that are included are receptive communication, how children are understanding communication. Expressive

communication, how they're expressively using their communication. This idea of joint attention, which is we're in this activity together, and we're doing it together. Imitation skills. I do something. You do something. Social skills, how they're interacting. Play skills, which we talked about that being a foundational skill. Cognitive skills, fine motor, gross motor and self-care. Really, really important in a very robust assessment.

So this is specifically for children in the age range of 1 to 5, and it's not meant to be used for children who are older than 60 months. It gives you great information. So whether you're somebody who's on the giving end, is going to be getting that assessment, or whether you're the parents or you're going to be getting that assessment, it gives you wonderful, comprehensive information.

Another assessment that's widely used is the VB MAPP, Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment, and Placement Program. I really love this assessment. It really helps you understand where our student is at and where we want them to. It's very specific info. Created by Dr. Sundberg, who's a PhD and a BCBA-D, and it's based on Skinner's analysis of verbal behavior. It's criterion referenced. And really the purpose is to determine a child's skills and barriers in order to design an individual program that best fits the child. So we won't talk about all the different pieces and parts of the VB MAPP today, but it really does have this really nice skills assessment, which we'll talk about. It also has a barriers assessment, which looks at some of the children's behavioral barriers. Why is the child not learning? There's a transition assessment and a [inaudible 00:21:28] assessment. It looks at self-care. So it's very, very comprehensive and very, very helpful.

Here are some of the items that it looks at it, and it really helps us get this scope and sequence of like, okay, what is intervention going to look like now? It does use some of these verbal behavior type terms. And you do need to have some knowledge with that. So it's more complicated than I'm going to tell you today, but I want to simplify it. So it doesn't seem overwhelming. So they use the word, mand, to talk about requesting. How's your child requesting? They use the word, tact, to talk about labeling. Is your child able to label? Listener responding, is your student able to receptively identify things, follow directions? How's their matching? Echoic, we could say verbal imitation for that. Plays skills, it looks at their social. Intraverbal means filling in the blank, answering questions. How were their group skills? I really like the VB MAPP because it does look at group skills, which a lot of assessments don't look at, but that goes back to this observation piece too. Motor imitation, social behavior and play, linguistic structure, and even gets into some early academics.

So what to know, you really do have to have a working knowledge of verbal behavior. So understanding some of these verbal operant terms like mand and tact and echoic and things like that, intraverbal. That is important, knowledge of basic behavior analysis, prompting, linguistic structure. So this definitely can be given by professionals and it can be given by parents as well. And so just understanding what some of these words mean is helpful. Now, if you're on the giving end of the VB MAPP, knowing about those terms is important. If you're somebody who's just going to be taking in this assessment and reading it to help derive goals, or you're going to be reading it because your child has been given the VB MAPP, the person that is going over the results should give you this information. And so what's really nice about it. It comes online or you can get the book. I have the book because I'm kind of old school that way, but there's a very nice manual that talks about all these different things. What is a mand? What is a tact?

I have given the assessment when a student's new to my caseload, I have given it before a student's annual IEP, during their three-year testing. And what's good to know is that there's three different levels. And you may hear this, people use these terms and this is what they mean. A level 1 learner means their skill sets are in 0 to 18 months. A level 2 learner is 18 to 30 months. And a level 3 learner is 30 to 48 months. That's how the test goes up in months. And this is what the skills assessment looks like. Just so you can see what it looks like.

So it has the different sections. You can see the words, manding, requesting, tacting, labeling, play, social, imitation, echoic. And what's nice is you can give it the first time and use the blue and then use it another time. And you can see the growth and you can see clearly on this student's VB MAPP that they have some areas of need with social skills. And we would plan for that, we would work on that in intervention.

So we've talked about the screener. We've talked about the Early Start Denver Model. We've talked about the VB MAPP. The most important part to make sure that we include as observation. This is considered one component of a gold standard assessment. We want to make sure that we're seeing the child how they naturally are. It allows us to see the communication form and function. How is the student currently communicating? Are they using some verbalizations? Are they using gestures? Are they pointing? Are they bringing people to things that they want? And also the function. So why is the student communicating? Is the student communicating because they want certain items? Is the student communicating because they're commenting about their environment? Is the student communicating through play?

We want to say, how is the student communicating? Are they responding when you call their name? Are they responding when you're playing with them? Are they doing activities where there's joint attention, where you're doing an activity together, and it's a shared activity? I get such great information from students when I observe. So I see a lot of students from my private practice in their home. And so it's great for me to see how are they communicating with a sibling? How are they communicating that they want something, that they're hungry, that they're protesting? Like, hey mom, I don't want to do that activity. I don't want to say bye bye, I don't want to clean up right now. How do they let you know those things?

And then observation is as easy as just writing it down or having your computer app, opening up a Google Form and keeping it there. A lot of the parents that I work with, I talk a lot with obviously what I'm in the home and doing a session, but we work on certain skills like, hey, this week, I want you to make a note of any spontaneous communication or any new words that they say. And so a lot of my parents will have just a little planner, a little book where they're jotting things down. And then when I come back, we're talking about that. And we're talking about how much growth the child has had and how they're communicating on their own. So it doesn't have to be something very complicated. Don't overwhelm yourself. It can be something as easy as you writing it down in a book or a piece of paper.

Observe the student when possible, and I know there's some limitations for this based on your environment if you're the professional. Observe the student when possible in a variety of environments and with a variety of people. I'm lucky enough that I usually see a student in their home environment for my private practice. And so I can see them in a lot of different environments. I can see them interacting with mom, usually interacting with dad. A lot of people are still working from home right now so everybody's kind of home. So I get to see all that. Siblings, extended family, if their neighborhood has a playground, we might go there. In the school environment too, I try to see the student in different settings. Like something [inaudible 00:28:11] like a school, like maybe a structured class activity like morning meeting, where there's a routine and functional activities they're doing versus something that might be unstructured, like a snack time or lunchtime, or centers where the students choose where they want to go. You can get a lot of great information that way.

When I've been working with just preschool aged students going into center time, especially when students have a choice of the center that they want to do. Wow. That's a lot of information. Can the student choose the center that they want to do? Can the student play with the items that are in that center? Does the student always choose the same center? So sometimes centers, when they're set up, they're different pods in the room and they might have different themes. Like this is the art center. This is the writing center. This is the play food center, the kitchen. And then when

there's enough people there, nobody else can go to that center. So there's a lot of little rules that happen in preschool. And depending on how the teacher sets that up, does the student understand that? It's a lot. It's a lot to know. I'm always amazed when I go into preschool classrooms and see how sophisticated the engagement is. How is our student doing with that? And how can this observation help support them in that environment, which is so important?

So to summarize what we talked about today, a robust assessment is vital for our students. So if we are giving a standardized assessment, and if that standardized assessment is not giving us great information, because our student is not yet speaking, our student is not yet able to engage with structured tasks. We need to think about how can we get information on those foundational skills? Can we use this informal screener as a start, as looking at, how is the student imitating? How is the student communicating right now? Where are their strengths? Where can we help to support them so that they can find their voice and start communicating today? We talked about the Early Start Denver Model, because that is a very popular assessment that has a lot of research behind it. And we also talked about the VB MAPP. Really, really great assessments that a lot of people are using to get that information that we may not get on a standardized test.

So making sure that we have an idea of where is this student now, and where they're having difficulty, making sure that we're going to help support our student in those different areas in therapy. So for this module, the printable is the informal screener. You will get that. Love sharing that with you. And our next module is going to be all about goal development, all about goal setting. How do we set goals for these different foundational areas? I'll see you in the next module.