

COS Applied Practice Case Study: Alison (60 Months)

Alison (60 Months): Assessments and Special Education Observations

At 5 years old (60 months), Alison will be transitioning into full-day kindergarten in August. She has been attending a local center-based child care facility 4 half-days a week since she was 3 years old, when her mother, Tami, went back to work. Alison also attends her local inclusive half-day preschool on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

Alison has a medical history of infantile spasms and left-side hemiplegia. She began to demonstrate evidence of seizures at 6 months, but since age 1 they have been under control with medication. In addition to the seizures affecting her motor control on the left side, Alison has some cognitive delays. She has been receiving physical therapy through early intervention since she was 1 year old and early childhood special education consultation services since she began preschool at age 3.

In preparation for Alison's transition out of preschool special education, Louise, her teacher, and Jackie, her early childhood special educator, have completed the Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System for Infants and Children (AEPS), a developmental assessment appropriate up to age 6. The items include observable developmental skills in six domains: fine motor, gross motor, adaptive, cognitive, social-communication, and social. Amy, Alison's physical therapist, also contributed to the assessment by completing

the fine and gross motor sections. Observations of Alison in the preschool classroom by Jackie and at child care by Louise, as well as interviews with her primary caregivers, contributed to a comprehensive understanding of Alison's strengths and needs reflected through the scoring of the AEPS. Alison's mother, Tami, has filled out the Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional (ASQ:SE) to contribute her families' perspective of Alison's behavior development.

The AEPS ties together assessment, goal development, intervention, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation.¹ It enables Alison's individualized education program (IEP) team to consider her developmental progress in the context of her preschool curriculum and her specific IEP goals. A unique feature of the AEPS is the opportunity to indicate whether the specific skill is acquired with modifications, adaptations, or assistance. This allows Alison's IEP team to concentrate on the areas she is successful in, even if these areas need to be addressed by her IEP.

Alison's AEPS results (Table 1) indicate that her strengths lie in the social-communication and social domains. She "consistently meets criterion" at an age-expected level in these two domains without assistance or adaptations except for those items that require remembering her address and phone number. Alison is well liked in her preschool and child care settings and has age-expected language skills that help her navigate group and

¹ Bricker, Diane D. *AEPS assessment, evaluation, and programming system for infants and children*. Baltimore, Md: Paul H. Brookes Pub. Co, 2002. Print.

individual social situations. Adults and children alike consider her a leader in the classroom.

In the gross motor and adaptive domains, Alison has a mix of age-expected and immediate foundational skills. She is mostly successful in the gross motor area, able to run, jump, and skip without help as her peers can. She continues to work on her ball skills and bike-riding with the physical therapist. With some modifications, Alison is demonstrating age-expected behaviors for all eating and toileting and most dressing skills. Alison continues to need full assistance to tie her shoes and manage the zippers on her coat.

Table 1. AEPS Domain Scores

AEPS Domain	Area Percent Score
Fine motor	53
Gross motor	87
Adaptive	91
Cognitive	56
Social-communication	100
Social	91

Alison demonstrates some foundational skills and immediate foundational skills in the cognitive and fine motor areas. She continues to require adult assistance and is inconsistent with most fine motor skills, as she struggles with early writing tasks. Observations in all settings (including reports from Tami, her mother) indicate Alison is not motivated to work on these tasks. Although Alison's scores in the "play" section of the cognitive domain reflect her strong skills in imaginary play-acting and storytelling, the rest of her skills fall below what is age expected. Alison has limited interest in

emergent literacy or math tasks and has been observed to have poor visual memory and conceptual categorization skills.

In the beginning of the assessment process, Tami had filled out the 60 Month/5 Year Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional (ASQ:SE) to contribute her family's perspective of and any concerns about Alison's behavioral development. The ASQ:SE is a parent-completed child monitoring report for social-emotional behaviors. It addresses many functional routines of the day (mealtimes, dressing, playing) in a variety of settings (at home, shopping, new environments) and the child's behavior. Parents indicate whether their child demonstrates positive or negative behaviors "most of the time," "sometimes," or "rarely or never." They are also asked whether they consider the behavior a "concern." Alison's ASQ:SE score was a 10, well below the cutoff score of 70 which for her age indicates a possible referral for behavioral services. This score is consistent with the indication that her mother and family have no concerns about her functional behaviors.

Overall, observations of Alison in multiple settings from multiple individuals and performance data indicate consistent age-expected results for social relationships and language use with adults and children, gross motor skills, self-care skills, and an understanding of safety. Although an imaginative and creative child, Alison will continue to need assistance with immediate foundational skills and foundational skills in letter and number recognition and early writing tasks. These results will be discussed at her transition IEP meeting to determine whether she requires additional special education services.

Alison (60 Months): Parent Observations

Tami reflected on Alison's health all during her early childhood.

"When Alison was diagnosed with infantile spasms and began receiving the ACTH shots, it was a very difficult time for our family. The medication affected her blood pressure, and she was hospitalized several times. Then, when the seizures were under control, we realized her left arm wasn't working. We started receiving physical therapy through early intervention, and there have been Botox treatments and some alternative methods to improve her range of motion. There have been some brief periods of improvement, but she really cannot use that arm as more than a helper. Alison has had more seizures only once or twice, usually after a growth spurt, and was hospitalized each time and then released with a change in medication. She has done well, considering, but it is something that is always in the back of our minds. The risk is always there that she could have more seizures.

Luckily, we have a very supportive family and community to help us.

Alison has two much older siblings, a sister and a brother, and I am so grateful that they are willing to spend so much time with her. No one can get Alison to use her left arm like her big brother, Shane, and she really looks up to her teenage sister, Sarah, who has contributed to Alison's sunny disposition and social skills. She is a

"girly girl" like her sister and loves to go shopping with us for new clothes or have her nails done."

While going through the health plan interview with the school nurse and the developmental psychologist and completing the Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social Emotional (ASQ:SE) developmental screening, Tami was pleased to share how many things are going well for Alison.

"She loves her preschool class and child care, and she has several little friends who she plays with on weekends. She is sad if she is not well enough to go out or we have other responsibilities. But sometimes I worry it is more about the social aspect of her activities for Alison than about learning. She will do just about anything to get out of focused reading or number tasks."

Tami is concerned that Alison is still not completely independent at home.

"Because she was so ill, and she is so much younger, I guess we spoil her. I have watched her delegate tasks to her little group of friends in play so that she is almost the "supervisor" and they are running around doing things for her that she cannot manage without her arm or are too difficult for her! She does the same thing with all of us, too! This seems to work well for her now, but as there are there more expectations for her, I worry she will be frustrated. There are functional tasks she is motivated to do, like bathing and grooming, but then there are others, such as independently managing her clothing fasteners or riding a bike, that she avoids whenever possible.

Alison is almost completely independent when dressing. She likes to be included in choosing what she will wear and how to style her hair, and she even learned her colors by matching her sister's nail polish bottles! She still needs some help with zippers, but she has mastered buttons and snaps with one hand, and she asks for help when she needs it. She helps me with putting away the laundry and cleaning the bathroom sometimes, although her cleaning skills are much better if she is dressed like Cinderella!

I know that Alison is good at following directions at child care and preschool. In fact, her teachers have shared that she is a real leader in getting others to do what they should be doing, but she also is good at avoiding tabletop tasks. Once Alison was supposed to be painting for a group project, and her teacher reported that she was so busy asking about the other children's paintings and making suggestions that she never started her own! Alison often seems distressed at what she is able to produce with writing, drawing, or painting tools and will not show an adult what she has finished. We try to work with her on her letters and numbers, but she often struggles with what they look like and the order.

Alison is able to remember routines and schedules if they are familiar, but her memory for shapes and symbols is limited.

Alison has little interest in books, but she loves telling and listening to stories. Everyone enjoys her unique

take on traditional stories; she often adds creative elements that are not in any book. She has always loved being read to, but she is only interested in the pictures in the books themselves. I can't even get her to pick out the letter "A" at the beginning of her name some days. She is the first to volunteer to play a "role" when the children are acting out a story, but she will never volunteer to read words for the class or put the weather symbol on the calendar.

Some of Alison's favorite activities are role-playing and imagination games with members of her family and her classmates. She loves to dress up in all sorts of costumes and pretends to be anything from a princess to the firefighters down the street. She has an excellent imagination, usually making up her own "scripts" and situations. She even likes to play in the block corner if she can help create an imaginary town, office, or school. Alison loves to swim, and we go to the pool weekly. Not only does the water help her to move her left arm, she is confident and fast in the water. We are thinking of having her become part of the swim team next year. I have also noticed her concentration is better after some time in the pool."

Tami reported that Alison has many friends, girls and boys, and her social circle includes children from her preschool class, child care, and the neighborhood.

"She is working on riding an adapted bicycle with her physical therapist, motivated by wanting to ride with the neighborhood children. She is not the

fastest or the strongest child on the playground, but she is the most determined. She will not let her inability to move her left arm keep her from participating."

As Alison transitions into kindergarten next year, Tami is most concerned about her understanding of letters and number concepts and her lack of interest in games or puzzles. One thing that the whole family, including Alison's grandparents, likes to do is play card games after Sunday dinner.

"I would like Alison to try to play with us, but she still needs help to recognize the numbers and shapes. I am hoping she is just a 'late bloomer' and she will improve these skills in her new full-day kindergarten class."

Alison (60 Months): Observations from Preschool and Child Care

The teacher and classroom aide in Alison's preschool have participated in her IEP and work with her physical therapist and consultant early childhood special educator (ECSE) to adapt routines and activities. The child care staff members do not receive as much guidance, but they are consistent about asking Tami their questions, and she gives them ideas to help Alison that have been successful at preschool.

Louise, Alison's preschool teacher, is most concerned about Alison's cognitive skills.

"Alison's social skills are her strength! All the children are friends with her and willing to help her. Sometimes too willing! Alison arrives happy every morning and greets all the adults and children before deciding where she wants to play for the day. She knows the schedule and follows the rules, and she is the first to volunteer to lead a song or act out a story. Her sunny personality and creative changes really add to our group activities. But sometimes I wonder if Alison changes songs or stories because she cannot remember the actual words, because when the other children remind her, she seems confused. Even with adaptations to writing tools, she continues to struggle with tasks like writing her name or even identifying specific letters or shapes. The most I have been able to get her to do is to match three simple shapes in a puzzle, and they must be very different. If I ask the children to

categorize toys or items by size, she just watches and does not participate.

When allowed to choose an activity, you can find Alison in the dress-up corner with several other children pretending to be a teacher or a veterinarian or a police officer. She is often the leader and the other children, even the shy ones, willingly follow her storyline. It is amazing to watch her use her language skills in her kind, reasonable way, and we rarely see any type of disagreements if Alison is involved. Another place you can find her is in the block corner creating castles or towns or even schools. Sometimes she struggles when she needs both hands to balance a tower or bridge, but I have watched her ask other children for help and they are always ready to assist."

Louise laughs,

"It is difficult to refuse Alison when she asks for help! She is determined, and the results are always worthwhile.

Alison's physical therapist, Amy, has helped us to adapt tasks that she cannot do on her own. We have started to use a stamp with her name on it so she can mark her papers on her own, and this has reduced her frustration. Learning how to use her left hand as a helper, Alison uses small clips to hold her papers in place, manages to eat independently using utensils, and even brushes her teeth on her own after a snack. I know that her mother has shared some of these strategies with her

child care providers so she can be independent there as well."

Esperanza, Alison's primary care provider, said:

"Alison is one of most enjoyable children we have ever cared for here at the center! She is always smiling, and if another child cries or falls down, she is the first one there to comfort them. We have a close group of children in our class, and we see Alison as a leader. She is friends with everyone.

She does seem to have difficulty with her memory and identifying shapes, letters, and numbers. This year we have been doing more with letter sounds and shapes, and Alison does not like these activities. I know that she has an ECSE who consults with her preschool class, and I wish we could talk with her. I have questions I would like to ask about how I could help Alison remember what the letters look like. I have a book I made for her with all the letters in it, but she needs help to pick out the letter we are talking about. There is a shy child in the class who has excellent letter skills, and sometimes I put them together. Alison helps the child with his social skills, and he helps Alison with the letters. This seems to be working well for now, but I worry what will happen when she starts kindergarten in the fall. Her shape and letter identification skills are significantly behind the other children's.

On the playground, she is completely independent, except for riding a bicycle. Alison is motivated though, and her mother has asked the physical therapist to come in and help her work on riding an adapted bike. We have seen Amy several times, and I have asked about some other ideas we can use here to make things easier for Alison. The other children are always willing to help her, and she is good about asking for help when she needs it. I have no concerns about how Alison will fare in kindergarten using her language skills or participating in the routine."