# Virtual Kit: Becoming an Evidence-Based Practitioner in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education

**Kit QT**

The challenge of becoming an evidence-based practitioner in our field requires both an understanding of the term as it applies to early intervention and early childhood special education (EI/ECSE) as well as a methodology for identifying and evaluating the evidence that supports a given practice.  The evidence supporting many of our current practices is well established but for some practices the evidence base is still emerging.  The process of becoming an evidence-based practitioner will be ongoing, probably for as long as we continue to work in this field.  This virtual kit is intended to encourage and support the continuing process of understanding, identifying, and implementing effective practices for working with young children with disabilities and their families.

No Child Left Behind (2002) defines evidence-based practice (EBP) as “the use of practices, interventions, and treatments which have been proven, through data-based research, to be effective in improving outcomes for individuals when the practice is implemented with fidelity.”   IDEA (2004) uses “scientifically based research” in its terminology, emphasizing its importance but not providing us with a definition.

In the field of early intervention/early childhood special education, different descriptions have been espoused by 2 highly respected research groups with a somewhat broader definition of EBP:

Practices that are informed by research, in which the characteristics and consequences of environmental variables are empirically established, and the relationship directly informs what a practitioner can do to produce a desired outcome.

…The measurement of, and the relationship between, the characteristics and consequences of an intervention and practice can be established in a number of ways, and can produce different levels or degrees of empirical credibility.  …(T)ypes of relationships between the characteristics and consequences of an intervention or practice constitute a hierarchy, in which the credibility of the evidence becomes increasingly stronger when the highest conditions in the hierarchy are met.

Our framework constitutes an alternative to those in which different research methodologies are pitted against one another and puts different qualitative and quantitative research designs on an equal footing.  We content that multiple sources of evidence from studies using different research methodologies and designs can produce converging evidence about effective practices…The credibility of findings is determined not by research designs per se, but by the extent to which empirical relationships are established in ways that are scientifically defensible and that directly inform practice. (Dunst, Trivette, & Cutspec, 2002, p. 3)

And alternately:

… a way of empowering professionals and families to integrate various sources of knowledge to make informed decisions that directly benefit young children and families. …a decision-making process that integrates the best available research evidence with family & professional wisdom & values. (Buysse & Wesley, 2006)

To date, Buysse & Wesley (2006) have produced what may be considered the most comprehensive review of the state of EBP specific to the field of early childhood. In their book, they discuss the debate over appropriate research methodologies for early childhood interventions, reviewing various levels-of-evidence approaches as well as the alternative framework proposed above by Dunst, et al, 2002.  They describe the benefits and risks in adopting an evidence-based approach to early childhood practices.

Recognizing that the empirical basis of support is still emerging for many of our existing practices, and children, in some instances, should not have to wait for research to catch up with practice, Winton (2006) proposes a 5-step process adopted from the field of medicine for evaluating an intervention for which the evidence base is lacking (or unproven for the individual or circumstances under consideration):

1. Pose an answerable question.
2. Find the best available evidence.
3. Appraise evidence quality & relevance.
4. Integrate the research evidence with professional and family wisdom & values.
5. Evaluate effectiveness of steps 1-4.

In their review of the scholarly work around evidence-based practice, Buysse & Wesley (2006) caution that early childhood practices are complex and “not easily reduced to a set of guidelines or standardized ways of behaving and being”  (p. 242) or “the 5-step process used in medicine” (p. 243).  They propose a community of practice approach to creating partnerships between institutes of higher education and community-based early childhood programs for the purpose of developing a culture in which “evidence is valued and used as part of a decision-making process” (p. 240).

#### Show me now! (I need this tomorrow.)

These websites will help you find an evidence-based practice, or the evidence base for your practices.  Keep checking: the sites are growing proportionate to the evolving research.

* [Center for Early Literacy Learning CELL reviews](http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org/productscr.php)
* [Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior](http://www.challengingbehavior.org/do/resources.htm)
* [Find What Works](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/findwhatworks.aspx)
* [National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders](http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/evidence-based-practices)
* [National Implementation Research Network](http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/)
* [Promising Practices Network (PPN)](http://www.promisingpractices.net/)
* [Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development](http://www.puckett.org/researchtrainingcenter.php)

#### What does this look like in practice? (I have a little more time to read about this.)

* [Being an Evidence-Based Practitioner](http://www.challengingbehavior.org/do/resources/tacsei_resources_all.htm)
* [Evidence-Based Practice: Different Ways of Knowing, Evidence-based Practice](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/resources/early-developments-vol-11-no-1)

#### What does the ECRC have on this topic?

All the resources referenced in this document, other than web-based resources, can be borrowed from the ECRC.  For additional resources related to the topic go to the [KITS Early Child Resource Center](http://opac.libraryworld.com/opac/home)and click on ECRC catalogue, or call (620) 421-6550 ext. 1638 for personal assistance.

#### How can I find training materials on this topic?

* [Comprehensive information](http://www.ecs.org/?s=Becoming+an+Evidence-Based+Practitioner+in+Early+Intervention%2FEarly+Childhood+Special+Education)

#### What if I still need help?

Contact KITS to request assistance. Please check the contact section of the KITS website.

#### If you thought this kit was helpful, you might also like ….

[ECTA Center](http://ectacenter.org/topics/evbased/evbased.asp)

[DEC Recommended Practices](http://www.dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices)

[Recommended Practice: Being an Evidence-Based Practitioner](http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/resources/documents/rph_practitioner.pdf)

#### References:

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2004). Evidence-based practice in communication disorders: In communication disorders: An introduction (Technical Report). Rockville, MD: Author.

Buysse, V., & Wesley, P. W. (Eds.)  (2006) Evidence-based practice in the early childhood field.  Washington, DC:  ZERO TO THREE Press.

Buysse, V., & Winton, P. (2007) [Evidence-Based Practice: Different Ways of Knowing, Evidence-based Practice](http://fpg.unc.edu/resources/early-developments-vol-11-no-1), 11(1), 4-5. Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M., & Cutspec, P. A. (2002). Toward an operational definition of evidence-based practice. Centerscope: Evidence-based approaches in early childhood development, 1(1).

Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Pub. L. 108-446, 20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq. (2004)

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, Sec.9109 (37). (2002)

Sandall, S., Hemmeter, M., Smith, B., & McLean, M. (2005). DEC recommended practices: A comprehensive guide for practical application in early intervention/early childhood special education.  Longmont, CO: Sopris West Educational Services.

Smith, B. J., Strain, P. S., Snyder, P., Sandall, S. R.,McLean, M. E., Boudy-Ramsey, A., et al. (2002). DEC recommended practices: A review of 9 years of EI/ECSE research literature.  Journal of Early Intervention, 25, 108-119.

Winton, P. (2006).  The evidence-based practice movement and its effect on knowledge utilization.  In V. Buysse & P. Wesley (Eds.), Evidence-based practice in the early childhood field, 71-115.  Washington, DC: Zero to Three.