

SIS[®]: Frequently Asked Questions

WHO is Ascend and WHAT is Ascend's role?

Ascend Management Innovations (Ascend) is headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee. Ascend has national experience conducting special assessments for many different types of programs and services. Ascend is one of the only vendors in the country with expertise in the implementation of the statewide, standardized assessment, the Supports Intensity Scale[®] (SIS[®]). Ascend is designated by the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) as a Quality Improvement Organization-like (QIO-like) entity. A QIO-like entity is an organization that the federal government authorizes to conduct independent, quality-focused reviews and that has strong advocacy/consumer emphasis in all operations. You can learn more about Ascend at www.ascendami.com.

WHAT is the SIS[®]?

 The SIS[®] was published by the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) in 2004. It is designed to measure a person's support needs. While most other assessments identify tasks that a person can and can't do, **the SIS[®] measures the type and intensity of assistance that an individual needs to successfully complete tasks of everyday life like other same-aged adults in the community.** The SIS[®] measures activities across all areas of adult life, including: home living, community living, lifelong learning, employment, health and safety, social activities, and protection and advocacy. Activities are rated according to frequency, amount, and type of support in accordance with AAIDD rating key guidelines. The SIS[®] was designed to:

- Assess support needs of individuals ages 16 to 72.
- Determine the type and intensity of support needed.
- Monitor individual progress and evaluate outcomes over time.
- Focus on the individual's supports needs rather than on skill deficits.
- Provide validated knowledge about the individual to develop individualized, person-centered plans.
- Fill an important niche not covered by other measurement scales.

This SIS[®] assessment provides valuable information to all stakeholders. It is useful for individuals because it **gathers good information about each person's unique support needs** which can be very helpful in developing individualized, person-centered support plans. Assessment information can also be helpful to providers, counties, and the state for planning purposes, because the data gathered can help identify underserved groups or needs in particular areas as well as where resources should be focused.

WHO can participate in the SIS[®]?

Participants, also referred to as *respondents*, must include at least two people who have known an individual being assessed for at least 3 months. Respondents can be the individual, family members, friends, direct support or other staff from residential or day service providers or Supports Coordinators (SCs). The respondent must be able to describe, in a very detailed way, the day-to-day supports the individual needs to successfully accomplish each task. For this reason, the respondent must have known the individual very well through *direct* experience. The SIS[®] meeting will be scheduled as one meeting with all respondents in attendance.

SHOULD the individual participate in the SIS[®]?

Individuals are absolutely invited to participate. However, it is not required. The decision about whether or not the individual participates in the SIS[®] interview is entirely up to each individual, family and his/her support team according to what works best for them. In order for an individual to be a self-respondent as determined by AAIDD criteria, he or she must be able to accurately and reliably describe his or her support needs across a variety of everyday, adult activities.

WHO will be conducting the interview?

Ascend's assessment teams include highly trained and qualified assessors. All of our assessors meet AAIDD training criteria and have at least 3 years of experience working with individuals who have intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD). Our assessors are independent, impartial, and conflict free. What that means is that our assessors do not have a stake in the outcome of any one particular assessment. To ensure this, we do not allow an assessor to interview any individual with whom they have had a provider, professional, or personal relationship in the past 365 days.

HOW will the information be used?

As our assessors complete each interview, they will fill out the SIS[®] interview form and will also take notes. It is important for you to know that all information that we learn from these interviews will be kept confidential. The assessment is one of the tools used to help in developing the individualized support plan (ISP). For this reason, it is ODP's expectation that SCs attend the SIS[®] meeting as an observer, even if they do not know the individual well enough to participate as a respondent. A copy of the finalized report will be available through your SC.

WHY is a universal assessment being conducted?

A universal assessment is required by CMS, the federal agency that approves and helps with funding of waiver services. It also:

- Provides information to be used in the ISP planning process and a place to begin the conversation.
- Provides person-centered and specific information to facilitate service plan discussions.
- Focuses on level of support needed by a person, not deficits in skills.
- Advances planning for future service and capacity needs and a guide for future state and local planning.
- Assists as one of many useful tools to help in developing ISP. The ISP is developed by the planning team, using all available information, including the SIS[®].

WHEN will interviews begin?

Your SC will be able to provide you with information as to when you may expect a SIS[®] interview.

HOW will I be contacted?

An Ascend representative will contact your SC to confirm basic information, identify respondents, and the interview locations. During our initial call, we will also ask if there are any special accommodations that should be taken into consideration during the interview. This would be a good time to let Ascend know of cultural preferences, speech/language or hearing difficulties or the assistance of a language interpreter, if needed.

WHAT will happen on the day of the interview?

The assessor will explain how the interview works. During the interview, the assessor will ask you questions like:

“What type of support does Jane need to successfully get dressed each day?”

“How frequently does Jane need this type of support?”

“On a typical day when support is needed, how much time should be devoted?”

Your job is simply to answer these types of questions as well as you can. The assessor may ask extra questions to be sure that we clearly understand the individual's support needs and that they are captured in accordance with AAIDD scoring protocol. The interview can be expected to take 1.5 to 2 hours to complete.

WHERE will interviews take place?

The assessment meeting should take place wherever the individual and other respondents choose. This can include (but is not limited to) the individual's home, his or her day service provider, or the home of a family member or friend. It would be best if the interview could take place in a room that is quiet, private, comfortable and appropriate to meet the individual's needs.

HOW can I give Ascend and ODP feedback about my experiences?

At the end of the interview, our assessor will give respondents a satisfaction survey to complete. This survey is an important opportunity for individuals, family members and other participants to give us valuable feedback and help us ensure that interviews are conducted respectfully and that respondents have a good experience as information is shared. In addition, ODP has made available the Customer Care Line that can be reached at 888-565-9435.

HOW will quality be ensured?

Quality is very important to us. Ascend uses several different methods to ensure that we are conducting respectful assessments that meet our highest quality standards.

First, all assessors must participate in a very thorough training conducted by an AAIDD approved SIS[®] trainer. The AAIDD trainers are experts in the SIS[®] tool and will teach assessors how to conduct and score assessments. Additional training related to IDD guidelines, standards and expectations is also provided through Ascend. Assessors must pass extensive training to ensure that they are skilled at conducting valid SIS[®] interviews.

Once trained, assessors are observed quarterly by an AAIDD trainer to ensure there has been no procedural drift in the administration of the assessment. In addition, every SIS[®] assessment is monitored for quality. Ascend has a full team of clinical reviewers whose job is to monitor the quality of each and every SIS[®] assessment as well as review each satisfaction survey and provide quality feedback.

WHERE can I get more information?



If you have questions or concerns about Ascend or our assessment staff, contact us toll free at 1-877-431-1388. If you would like information about the SIS[®] instrument (how it was developed and what it measures), a good place to start is to look at the information posted on the SIS[®] website at www.aidd.org/sis. If you have questions about how the SIS[®] will be used in your state, please contact your SC.