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# Five Minute Speech Sample in developmental research: A review



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### ABSTRACT

The Five Minute Speech Sample (FMSS) originated in the adult psychiatry literature, and is mostly used for assessing caregivers' expressed emotion (EE) regarding a relative with mental illness. In recent years the FMSS has been increasingly employed in research with parents and young children. This review focuses on the FMSS procedure from a developmental perspective. We open with a historical overview of the origins of the FMSS and the EE coding system, followed by a summary of FMSS-EE developmental research. Next, adaptations of the FMSS-EE rating schemes and new FMSS coding systems that tap other aspects of the quality of parents' speech samples are outlined. Recent promising adaptations of the FMSS procedure that involve a series of follow-up questions or go beyond asking parents to speak about their child are also presented. In closing, conceptual and methodological considerations that are important for future advances in FMSS developmental research are identified, and specific recommendations to address these considerations are proposed.

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*Abbreviations:* FMSS, Five Minute Speech Sample; EE, Expressed Emotion; CFI, Camberwell Family Interview; EOI, Emotional Overinvolvement; PFMSS, Preschool Five Minutes Speech Sample; AFMSS, Autism-Specific Five Minute Speech Sample; FAARS, The Family Affective Attitude Rating Scales; PACE, Psychosocial Assessment of Childhood Experiences; TMSS, Three Minute Speech Sample.

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## Introduction

Developing valid, efficient, and cost effective methods for assessing the emotional climate of the parent–child relationship is an important goal for developmental research. This review focuses on one such promising method, namely the Five Minute Speech Sample (FMSS; [Gottschalk & Gleser, 1969](#)). In this research procedure, a caregiver is asked to speak for five uninterrupted minutes about a relative. The FMSS originated in adult psychiatry and is most frequently used to assess expressed emotion (EE; [Brown, Birley, & Wing, 1972](#); [Magaña-Amato, 1993](#); [Magaña et al., 1986](#)), namely caregivers' statements of criticism and emotional overinvolvement toward their mentally ill adult relative. Although brief, FMSS-EE has proven to be highly effective in indexing the quality of caregiver–relative relationships and predicting the relative's adaptation ([Magaña et al., 1986](#); [Yan, Hammen, Cohen, Daley, & Henry, 2004](#)).

Over the past three decades developmental research adopted the FMSS procedure. While generally successful in capturing the emotional climate of parent–child relationships and predicting the child's socio-emotional adaptation (e.g., [McCarty, Lau, Valeri, & Weisz, 2004](#); [Peris & Baker, 2000](#)), the transition from the context of the caregiver–adult patient relationships to the parent–child relationships raised conceptual questions and methodological challenges (e.g., [Baker, Heller, & Henker, 2000](#); [Daley, Sonuga-Barke, & Thompson, 2003](#); [Wamboldt, O'Connor, Wamboldt, Gavin, & Klinnert, 2000](#)). These, in turn, have led to adaptations of the original EE coding system as well as the development of new FMSS coding systems. The latter capture additional aspects of parental speech about the child beyond expressed emotions of criticism and overinvolvement, and presumably reflect additional aspects of the parent–child relationship, such as positive relational schemas ([Bullock & Dishion, 2007](#)) and flexible information processing about the child ([Sher-Censor, Grey, & Yates, 2013](#)). The goals of the current review are to summarize this body of work, evaluate its findings, and in doing so, provide a developmental perspective on the meaning of parents' FMSS regarding their child and the varied relational constructs that are assessed through the FMSS.

The review is divided into five sections. First, the origins of the FMSS procedure and the EE model in adult psychiatry literature are outlined. This is important, as some of the historical conceptualizations of the FMSS and the EE coding are helpful for understanding the findings of current developmental research. The next section reviews FMSS-EE developmental studies and presents the psychometric properties of the EE rating constructs, namely EE-Criticism and EE-Emotional Overinvolvement (EOI), and key findings. Several scholars have questioned the applicability of EOI to the context of parent–child relationships (e.g., [Gravener et al., 2012](#); [McCarty et al., 2004](#)). Thus, the discussion of EOI also addresses these concerns. The third part of the review focuses on adaptations that were made in developmental research to the original FMSS-EE coding, as well as novel FMSS coding systems, which evaluate additional aspects of parental speech beyond EE. The psychometric characteristics of each of these rating schemes and their underlying theoretical models are emphasized. The fourth section summarizes recent adaptations to the FMSS. These include adding semi-structured questions to the FMSS and employing the FMSS in relational contexts other than parent–child relationships, such as teacher–student relationships. Finally, the fifth part highlights challenges for future FMSS developmental research, and concludes with recommendations for research and clinical applications of the FMSS procedure.

## History of the FMSS procedure and the EE model

### *The FMSS*

The FMSS procedure was developed by the psychoanalyst and researcher Louis Gottschalk and his colleagues ([Gottschalk & Gleser, 1969](#); [Gottschalk, Gleser, Daniels, & Block, 1958](#)). The researchers argued that asking respondents to talk for five uninterrupted minutes about important life experiences can maximize their “tendency toward projection of intrapsychic qualities, response sets, and attitudes” ([Gottschalk & Gleser, 1969](#), p. ix), “...so that the speaker will be more likely to present evidence of his internal psychological states rather than a reaction to cues from the interviewer” ([Gottschalk & Gleser, 1969](#), p. 9).

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