

M-CHAT-R/F Documentation Cheat Sheet

Reviewed by the BastionGPT Clinical Advisory Board · August 2026 · Reproduces no items, probes, or scoring keys

The M-CHAT-R/F is a two-stage toddler autism screen: a 20-item parent questionnaire (bands 0-2 low, 3-7 medium, 8-20 high likelihood), then a structured Follow-Up interview that resolves medium scores (2 or more items still failed = positive; 0 or 1 = negative). The Follow-Up is part of the instrument: without it, validation false positives ran six times higher. A positive screen triggers two simultaneous referral tracks and is never a diagnosis; a negative screen never ends surveillance.

Instrument + version current form, full name, /F included

Do: chart M-CHAT-R/F from the authors' current (March 2025) form; 20-item total only; subsets and legacy 23-item rules are retired.

Pitfall: legacy critical-item scoring, or a stale reposted PDF with old wording.

Respondent + language who answered, in what, how

Do: record respondent and relationship, language version, interpreter, self vs oral completion; reconcile blanks with the caregiver before scoring.

Pitfall: "M-CHAT completed," or staff silently correcting the parent's answers.

First-stage total + band x/20 and the band, always kept

Do: chart the total and band (0-2 / 3-7 / 8-20) with age in months; the total stays even after the Follow-Up.

Pitfall: a band with no total, or a total that vanishes once the interview is done.

Follow-Up status + score the second stage is the screen

Do: for medium totals: completed (items remaining failed), bypassed (high band), pending, or declined, with the administrator named.

Pitfall: a medium score with no Follow-Up field; an informal chat charted as the structured interview.

Final classification one of five statuses

Do: close with: negative on questionnaire / negative after Follow-Up / positive after Follow-Up / positive on high score / incomplete pending Follow-Up.

Pitfall: "M-CHAT positive, score 5": first-stage-only positives ran six times the false positives.

Two-track referral + clocks diagnosis and EI, simultaneously

Do: for positives: diagnostic evaluation + early intervention on the same day (no diagnosis needed; 7-day referral, 45-day IFSP clocks), audiology for communication concerns, interim plan while waitlists run.

Pitfall: the diagnostic waitlist as the only documented action.

Rescreen + refusal negative is not clearance

Do: chart the 24-month rescreen after early screens, surveillance regardless of result, and informed refusal (explained, declined, reason, revisit date) with the classification unchanged.

Pitfall: a negative closing a live concern, or "parent refused" standing alone.

Before the note is signed

- ☐ Current form used; full name with /F charted
- ☐ Respondent, language, and administration recorded
- ☐ First-stage total and band kept in the record
- ☐ Follow-Up status and its own score charted
- ☐ Final classification one of the five statuses
- ☐ Positive screens: two-track referral, dated, plus audiology
- ☐ Rescreen or refusal plan documented; screen never a diagnosis

Drafting with AI

Give it the facts: age, respondent and language, first-stage total and band, Follow-Up status with its score, observations, referrals with dates, rescreen plan.

"Draft M-CHAT-R/F documentation: 24-month visit, authorized Spanish form, father respondent, initial 4/20 medium, Follow-Up by nurse with interpreter, 2 items remain, screen positive, Part C and diagnostic referrals today, audiology, six-week follow-up."

Never paste patient-identifying information into consumer AI tools. BastionGPT is HIPAA-compliant with a signed BAA on every plan.

Two stages, both charted
questionnaire total + Follow-Up score

3-7 needs the interview
without it: 6x the false positives

Positive = 2 tracks
diagnostic + early intervention, same day

Negative is not clearance
rescreen at 24 months; concern overrides

M-CHAT-R/F Documentation Template

Copy or print for your practice · Adapt fields to your organization's, payer's and jurisdiction's documentation requirements. Contains no questionnaire content.

Setting: _____ Patient (initials): _____ Date: _____ Clinician: _____

Age (months) + form language + respondent: _____ Initial total /20 + band: _____

Administration

Self-completed or oral · interpreter · blank or ambiguous items reconciled with caregiver · deviations

Follow-Up interview

Status: completed / bypassed (high band) / pending / declined · administered by · items remaining failed

Final classification

Negative on questionnaire · negative after Follow-Up · positive after Follow-Up · positive on high score · incomplete pending Follow-Up

Clinical context

Parent concerns · observations in the room · regression · hearing and language · other screening results

Referrals (two tracks, dated)

Diagnostic evaluation (waitlist noted) · early intervention / Part C (7-day referral; 45-day evaluation clock) · audiology

Interim and rescreen plan

Support while diagnosis pends · 24-month rescreen after early screens · surveillance continues · return-sooner criteria

Counseling and refusals

Screen-not-diagnosis explained · family questions · informed refusal: recommended, explained, declined, reason, revisit date

Clinician (name and credentials): _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____