

Engaging Families and Promoting Parent-Child Relationships: Observation Tool

There are innumerable activities that programs and services working with families of young children may use to carry out the principles of engaging families and promoting the parent-child relationship; these activities range in intensity and therefore can be considered as a continuum of activities, from light touch to high intensity engagement. On this Observation Tool, activities are organized under the principle they advance, on a continuum from light intensity, or engagement, to high intensity/engagement. The continuum does not convey one end is good and the other is bad, instead the continuum is designed to reinforce the idea that the intensity of work with families varies across service type, program model, and contact with families. Therefore observing activities in the light or medium intensity section of the continuum may be reflective of contact with families of the program you are observing.

Instructions: *The Observation Tool is populated with activities and strategies that facilitate family engagement and promote parent child interactions; these activities/strategies can be identified through observation at a variety of programs and services (e.g. early learning, child care, libraries, museums, home visiting and more). A completed Observation Tool offers an understanding of program functioning in the areas of engaging families and supporting the parent-child relationship. This Tool can be used to observe the program you work with or other programs, to support your knowledge of family engagement and promoting parent-child relationships in action.*

Place a check next to the item as you observe it, the write in section below each column is to document additional evidence observed of the activity/strategy. Additionally, a write-in area is provided to document observations of activities that appear to meet the principle and strategy yet are not a clear option the list.

Principle	Activities/Strategies for Observation		
1. Focus on strengths	<p>___ Staff comment on positive attitudes and aspects of the family</p> <p>___ Staff receive training on principles of strength-based approach to family engagement and the parent-child relationship</p> <p>___ Printed materials/signage show parents and children engaged in activities, with language referencing positive impact of parent role</p>	<p>___ Staff note the parent's efforts to use a piece of equipment, engage with their child or other aspects of positive parent-child interactions</p>	<p>___ Parent/family report tools used to gather family input on strengths</p> <p>___ Staff use motivational interviewing techniques with families</p> <p>___ Integrate information about family strengths in to planning and activities</p> <p>___ Staff use specific parental strengths as example of parent supporting child's development and exploration</p>
Evidence of Activity			
Other Activity Observed			

Principle	Activities/Strategies for Observation		
2. Provide families with encouragement and education	<p>___ Educational materials are available for parents in common areas</p> <p>___ Educational materials are matched to the activities/regions/exhibits and located in close proximity to the content</p> <p>___ Staff encourage families to engage with activities/toys/exhibits</p> <p>___ Staff observe parent-child interaction and use observation to grow understanding</p>	<p>___ Staff match parent education resources to the needs of parents and share education materials directly</p> <p>___ Staff participate in conversations with families to share parent education information</p> <p>___ Offer information and referrals to supportive services in regards to family issues</p> <p>___ Staff observe parent and child and suggest activity based on stage of development and demonstrated interest</p>	<p>___ Parent/family interviews/report tools used to gather information about areas of education desired</p> <p>___ Program model includes staff techniques for engaging families in interacting with their child (scaffolding, labeling, facilitating interaction) and monitors implementation of the techniques</p> <p>___ Program model includes staff techniques for tailoring and discussing parenting, child development or educational topics and monitors implementation of the techniques</p>
Evidence of Activity			
Other Activity Observed			

Principle	Activities/Strategies for Observation		
3. Provide a safe and welcoming environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Space that is inviting to families is easily accessible and available/large enough for multiple families ___ Physical spaces encourage families to explore with their child and demonstrate a safe physical environment for the child ___ Training provided to staff on the design and importance of the physical space ___ Interactive elements arranged in ways to allow accessibility for both parent and child to use, together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Children’s book or toy lending program is available ___ Family resource library available ___ Extended hours/care during evening and weekends ___ Physical space and environment monitored for safety, family engagement criteria and support for parent-child interaction ___ Materials and activities are changed on a routine schedule, responsive to family input and observation of parent-child interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Offer adult classes on site ___ Seminars and support groups available to families ___ Child care is available during conferences, adult classes, meetings ___ Home visits offered to develop understanding of family’s home environment and parent-child relationship ___ Staff are active, engaged presence to support use of materials/ environment by the parent with child(ren)
Evidence of Activity			
Other Activity Observed			

Principle	Activities/Strategies for Observation		
4. Focus on building the parent's capacity	<p>___ Activities built for parent and child to interact together</p> <p>___ Staff trained in understanding the role of the parent in the child's life</p> <p>___ Printed materials highlight the role of the parent/family as primary in the child's life</p> <p>___ Printed materials/signage offer examples of parent role in activities with child</p>	<p>___ Staff implement strategies to engage a parent with their child (eg point out child's enjoyment)</p> <p>___ Staff trained in facilitating the parent-child interaction</p> <p>___ Staff implement principles that demonstrate the staff are external to the interaction</p> <p>___ Staff voice child development information in relation to action of parent/impact of parent's engagement with child</p>	<p>___ Staff observe parent-child interaction and modify activities to meet the developmental stage of the parent and child</p> <p>___ Activities planned are based on knowledge of the parent and child and tailored to their needs</p> <p>___ Surveys on the areas of support and interest are completed by parents and used to guide the planning</p> <p>___ Staff recognize and label the behaviors of the parent, within interactions with their child, to grow parent's knowledge</p>
Evidence of Activity			
Other Activity Observed			

Principle	Activities/Strategies for Observation		
5. Acknowledge the perspective of the parent/family	<p>___ Staff ask parents what they are interested in, why they were drawn to the program, if there is anything they can support them in finding</p> <p>___ Staff engage parent in sharing what they observe of their child's interests</p> <p>___ Staff observe families to learn signs of parent perspective, what they are drawn to or hesitant about</p>	<p>___ Surveys on expectations of the program/service are routinely used with parents/families</p> <p>___ Staff comment on parent-child interaction and ask parent if they have observed this action/skill/interest in their child before</p> <p>___ Staff trained in self-awareness concepts including acknowledging parent/family experience is different from own</p>	<p>___ Surveys on program experience completed by families (Annually, Twice a year)</p> <p>___ Parent/families serve in an advisory capacity regarding program operations</p> <p>___ Information gathered from family surveys is fed in to programmatic changes (eg policy change, printed materials, staff training, activities and services)</p> <p>___ Staff trained in awareness of one's own biases and prejudices about families and regulating these in relation to interactions with families</p>
Evidence of Activity			
Other Activity Observed			

Principle	Activities/Strategies for Observation		
6. Establish a trusting relationship	<p>___ Staff trained in strategies to approach child, family and/or their home with respect</p> <p>___ Principles of relationship-based approach (eg staff and parent are equal partners, goal is for ongoing relationships with parents/families) are woven in to program model and staff are trained in this approach</p> <p>___ Program mission includes the parent/family as a central piece of the relationship</p>	<p>___ Staff are respectful in their approach to families (eye contact, approach family, do not leave family waiting or ignored)</p> <p>___ Staff allow families to talk with few interruptions and use encouraging facial expressions and body language</p> <p>___ Staff ask families about their observations of their child and/or their thoughts on the parent-child interactions</p>	<p>___ Staff ask encouraging questions but do not correct or offer solutions</p> <p>___ Staff are consistent in commitments to families (appointments, visits, availability)</p> <p>___ Staff use knowledge of parent/family to drive how they approach the family and inform the services offered</p>
Evidence of Activity			
Other Activity Observed			

Principle	Activities/Strategies for Observation		
7. Be active and intentional in working toward reducing disparities experienced by families	<p>___ Analyze costs of participation compared to family/community</p> <p>___ Materials are available in an accessible literacy level</p> <p>___ Materials are translated in to languages represented in community</p> <p>___ Annual data on population served gathered</p>	<p>___ Consider use of programs that scholarship participation: how are these made available to families, do they meet the needs of families</p> <p>___ Physical space supports families in engaging with equipment/materials and their child without having to 'ask permission' of a professional</p> <p>___ Annual data on population served, community and potential target population gathered</p> <p>___ Data on access (eg transportation, financial, socio-cultural considerations) gathered for population served and community</p>	<p>___ Survey and interview families/community around issues of power and privilege related to program/service</p> <p>___ Analysis of use of program/services/site (annually) includes comparison of those served, community of location and/or the potential target population/areas of young children</p> <p>___ Integrate information about community and nonparticipants in to planning and activities</p>
Evidence of Activity			
Other Activity Observed			

Principle	Activities/Strategies for Observation		
8. Allow the parent to lead	<p>___ Materials/equipment and instructions on use are easily accessible to families</p> <p>___ Printed materials/signage and equipment focus on parent and child interacting together, allow for engagement without requiring staff support</p>	<p>___ Staff observe the parent and child/family prior to engaging in activity and follow the family's lead to engage them</p> <p>___ Staff ask parent permission before introducing a toy/activity, allowing parent to lead with the item</p>	<p>___ Staff use motivational interviewing techniques with families (eg comment and question specific aspects of parent-child interactions)</p> <p>___ Program/service plans are mutually agreed upon with the staff and family, focused on items family views as helpful</p> <p>___ Staff observe for parent responsiveness to child and attunement with child's cues and label these parental skills</p>
Evidence of Activity			
Other Activity Observed			

Principle	Activities/Strategies for Observation		
9. Embrace differences across parents and families and be culturally sensitive and attuned	<p>___ Program accesses and reviews information about community and population of families served, to be served</p> <p>___ Staff trained in principles of approaching families that include consideration of past experiences, temperament and personality, beliefs and family/cultural values</p> <p>___ Printed materials acknowledge diversity of culture, race, ethnicity, language, religion and sexual orientation</p> <p>___ Program values include embracing role of culture in driving parenting practices</p>	<p>___ Parent/family report tools used to gather information about families</p> <p>___ Physical spaces reflect diversity of culture, race, ethnicity, language, religion and sexual orientation (eg family spaces for toileting in both gender washrooms, private lactation rooms)</p> <p>___ Staff open to learning about the diversity of families and demonstrate an acknowledge that this diversity influences interaction with children</p> <p>___ Staff trained in strategies to understand and embrace role of culture in parenting practices</p>	<p>___ Program/services are modified/tailored to the diversity of the family, including history, beliefs, values, culture, race/ethnicity, language, religion, and sexual orientation</p> <p>___ Program is monitored for adherence to these principles of culturally sensitivity and attunement, along with responsiveness to family history, beliefs and values</p> <p>___ Staff trained in awareness of one's own biases and prejudices about families and regulating these in relation to interactions with families</p>
Evidence of Activity			
Other Activity Observed			

Principle	Activities/Strategies for Observation		
10. Engage in a two way partnership with families	<p>___ Staff trained in principles of staff-family relationship as basis for supporting the child’s growth and development</p> <p>___ Program approach includes outline of intersection of staff and family roles and how these rely upon one another</p>	<p>___ Staff engage parent/family in exploring about the child, their likes/dislikes, aspects of the child’s temperament and personality and strategies the parent uses</p> <p>___ Staff ask parent their preference, or interest, before introducing a toy/activity</p>	<p>___ Family Partnership Agreements/Family Goal Sheets created with family and used to drive service delivery</p> <p>___ Parent conference and/or home visits offered to develop relationship with family</p> <p>___ Staff draw parent’s attention to their child’s activities and development, relate to the impact of the parent interactions</p>
Evidence of Activity			
Other Activity Observed			

Principle	Activities/Strategies for Observation		
11. Participate in conversations with the family	<p>___ Staff allow a two way dialogue with families (eg do not lecture)</p> <p>___ Physical environment allows for conversation (noise level, space for adults)</p> <p>___ Staff get on the same level with parents</p> <p>___ Staff respond to feelings and experiences of parents with empathy</p>	<p>___ Staff trained in and implement active listening techniques (summarize, ask questions, integrate parent's content in to responses)</p> <p>___ Staff hold dedicated time to meet with families and do not hurry families through conversations</p> <p>___ Staff observe for parent communication both verbal and nonverbal</p> <p>___ Staff empathize with the feelings and experiences of parents by validating what they hear and not judging or denying the feelings/experience</p>	<p>___ Staff use motivational interviewing techniques with families (including focusing on parent responsiveness to child and reading child's cues)</p> <p>___ Parent/family surveys gather input on family experience of conversations and availability of staff</p> <p>___ Staff observe parent-child interaction, cues, and verbal and nonverbal communication and appropriately respond with focus on strengthening the parent-child relationship</p>
Evidence of Activity			
Other Activity Observed			

Principle	Activities/Strategies for Observation		
12. Be consistent in actions and words and be forthright with families	<p>___ Printed materials cover program and family participation information and expectations</p> <p>___ Staff are well informed of programmatic and family expectations</p> <p>___ Staff are trained in implementing activities consistent with program and family expectations (eg observing child, observing parent-child interactions, suggesting activities, adding new elements)</p>	<p>___ Staff words and actions align with the programmatic approach</p> <p>___ Staff are consistent across words and actions</p> <p>___ Staff answer questions of families and share appropriate additional information, or engage another staff member to meet the needs of the family</p> <p>___ Staff are seen implementing activities (eg observing child, observing p-ch interactions, suggesting and adding, commenting and discussing development)</p>	<p>___ Program model monitors implementation of program approach and family experience</p> <p>___ Surveys on program experience completed by families (Annually, Twice a year)</p> <p>___ Staff use parent-child interaction as window to verbally interpret development stage/task, relating to the parent's actions and impact on the child</p>
Evidence of Activity			
Other Activity Observed			

Principle	Activities/Strategies for Observation		
13. Acknowledge and address barriers to engaging	___ Offer open house activities where families do not need to be enrolled to join in ___ Survey broad community on participation in program/services	___ Create action plan responsive to engagement barriers that emerge through survey process ___ Observations of staff supporting parent- child interactions are used to improve staff capacity	___ Use family mentor model where new families receive outreach and support from current participants ___ Engage families (participants/non participants) in focus groups to discuss barriers and inform plans to address
Evidence of Activity			
Other Activity Observed			

Principle	Activities/Strategies for Observation		
14. Engage families in shared planning and decision making	<p>___ Comment box/online comment box available at all times throughout year</p> <p>___ Program values and mission around parent-child engagement/interaction are built with community members and program participants informing the core concepts and priority areas</p>	<p>___ Focus groups/informational meetings are open to family/community participation on a variety of topics related to programming throughout the year</p> <p>___ Family Partnership Agreements/Family Goal Sheets created with family and used to drive service delivery</p> <p>___ Parents and community review and inform the parent-child interaction strategies (printed materials, activities, staff training, physical space/design)</p>	<p>___ Parent conference and/or home visits offered to develop relationship with family</p> <p>___ Parent/family advisory committee a standing body that guides programming (Twice per year, quarterly, monthly)</p>
Evidence of Activity			
Other Activity Observed			