

Developmental Observation Topic Plan

How I Explore My Environment

(Exploring the Environment and Learning)



What parents will be observing



- How their children explore their environment (objects, people, places)
- What their children learn about their world through exploration



Environment



For this DOT, it is important to put out a variety of materials that will support different kinds of exploration across the range of ages in your group. Some suggestions are (you would not have to use all of the materials suggested – pick/add some that match the exploration styles of the children and parents in your group):

- A variety of rattles/toy keys, toys that make sounds/music, unbreakable mirrors, stuffed animals, soft books, scarves for playing peek-a-boo, busy box
- Laminated pictures of children and parents taped to the floor for crawlers to explore
- Various textured fabric/carpet samples attached to the bottom and sides of a cardboard box that children can crawl or walk through and explore how the different textures feel with their feet and hands
- Nesting cups, puzzles, shape sorters, jack-in-the box or other “pop-up” toys, wind-up toys, push toys, dress up clothes, various size cans/tubes with clothes pins, blocks, and flashlights
- **Homemade toys to explore (see pictures):** tube box with different size tubes and different size objects to try to fit in the tubes, cardboard box with doors and windows, and/or a sock box with toys sticking out of several of the socks to encourage children to explore





Opening Discussion



A. Hello Song (with names of each child and parent)

Hello (child's name), Hello (parent's name), How are you? How are you?

We're so glad to see you! We're so glad to see you! Come and play! Come and play!



Note to facilitator: As children become familiar with the song, they will begin to show their recognition. You will see them become still. They will start waiting to hear their name, and some will show smiles and other signs of pleasure when they hear it - be sure and point this out to the parents!)

B. Introducing the Topic





1. Providing information on the DOT

Today we are going to talk about how your children explore their environments, which is really important because this is how they learn about their world and how things work in their world. **Babies are born ready to explore!** At first, the world a newborn sees is mainly limited to what you show her. Movement, mobiles, different faces, voices and sounds may fascinate her. Soon she'll begin to wave her arms, grasp, and bat at objects. She will learn to use her senses to explore as she touches, bangs, and taste things! You have probably noticed that as your children explore, they take great delight in making things happen over and over again! For example, when they drop the block off of their high chair, look over the edge and then wait for us to pick it up! As you pick the block up for the umpteenth time, smile and remind yourself that she is starting to learn that she has an effect on her environment – that she can make things happen!! **As they get a little older and start crawling and walking, a whole new world opens up to be explored! It may seem that they want to get into everything – touch it, hold it and manipulate it!** And, your toddler may begin to want to explore some toys and materials by themselves! She'll delight in the things she has already figured out, but also wants to try new things to see what happens! She might hammer the pegs in a pegboard like she has done before and then turn it over to try hammering the pegs the other way! **Toddlers may also begin to explore by imitating what they see you do! They might try experimenting by dressing up in big clothes and shoes, trying to sweep the floor, or putting clothes in the dryer!**



2. Sharing what we already know

Ask parents to share some things they have noticed about how their children explore. Some possible conversations starters are:

-  How does your child explore new toys/materials? Have you seen your child trying to figure out how a jack-in-the-box works, how to put their foot in a sock or shoe or how to make a block fit in a hole?
-  If you have a mobile over your infant's crib, how does your infant explore the mobile?
-  Have you seen your infant looking at their hands – turning them back and forth?
-  Have you seen your children explore by trying to imitate something they have seen you do like cooking, sweeping or reading a book?

3. Summarizing the main points



Exploring the environment is how children learn about their world and how their world works. They also learn how important they are in their world! They can make things happen!



Different children explore in different ways. Children may also explore differently when different types of materials are available, such as toys that are familiar to them versus toys that are new to them.



Our job is to watch and see *how* our children explore and then provide them with opportunities to explore different types of materials. We are also there to help them feel safe as they venture out to explore and learn from their environments.



As you watch your children exploring, ask yourself, “What are they thinking.” They will show you what they are thinking, learning and feeling. Whether your child is brushing her teeth, banging pots, shrieking to get your attention or playing with cars, she is constantly trying to explore and figure out how things work.

C. Describing the Environment

For today's environment we have included a variety of materials so you can observe how your child explores their environment. Some of the materials will be familiar to your child and have been used in past playgroups. There will also be some new materials in the environment that your child may not be familiar with.

This will give you the opportunity to see how they explore new materials and if it is in the same way as they explore familiar materials or different. **Remember that sometimes children will explore different materials in different ways.** Encourage your child to explore objects and toys in different ways.

D. Suggesting things to try

Try different toys, materials and activities with your children to see how they explore. Here are some suggestions of things that you can try in order to observe how your child is exploring and learning:

Try giving your child toys that make noise and sounds. How does he explore the toy to try to figure out where the noise is coming from as well as how to play with the toy so that it makes the noise again?

Show your child how a pop-up toy works, such as a jack-in-the-box or busy box and then sit back and observe how they explore the toy to try to make it work.

Encourage your child to touch the different textures in the texture box with their hands and feet. Watch their expressions to see what happens. How do they explore the different textures? Are there some that they seem to like better than others? How can you tell? How do they explore to figure out the different textures?

Play peek-a-boo with your child using the scarves. Watch to see how your child reacts when your face disappears and then reappears.

Pretend to have dinner with your child or put the baby to bed. Follow your child's lead so you can see how they have explored and learned from watching you!



Encourage your child to explore objects and toys in different ways.

Touching, banging, shaking, rolling, and turning the objects upside down help children learn about how things work.

Try a toy/material that your child is familiar with and then try an unfamiliar toy/material. Is there any difference in how your child explores?

E. Making Predictions

Now that you know what kinds of materials will be available during the parent-child observation time:

-  Which materials do you think your child will explore?
-  How do you think your child will explore? Do you think they will explore different materials in the same or different ways?



Parent-Child Observation Time



As you interact with each dyad,

- **briefly comment** to parents about what you are observing around how their children are exploring their environments
- **ask parents** if they have tried a familiar and unfamiliar toy/material/activity with their child; talk about what happened
- **remark** on what the child might be learning about his world as he explores
- **see if the parent wants you to try an activity** with their child while they watch to see if the child will explore in a different way with a different person (only do this momentarily and then discuss what happened, shifting your position so the focus is back on the parent and child dyad)



Transitions



A. From Activity to Snack

To carry the focus of How I Explore to snack time, have foods with different textures/tastes (apples, bananas, raisins, crackers) for children to explore. **Ask parents what their children do when they introduce a new food.** How do their children let them know that they like a food or dislike a food?

B. From Snack to Songs & Games

Use bubbles to entice children back to a central area. As children are moving from the snack area to the central area, talk about the bubbles to help children explore (how big or little, you can see through them, how to pop them, let children try blowing bubbles).



Parent-Child Songs & Games



Put out a variety of musical instruments (store bought and homemade) like drums, bells, egg shakers, hand bells, rainmakers and play pianos. Let the children explore the instruments while everyone sings their favorite songs! Be sure to have some wrist bracelets/jingle wraps (or other appropriate materials) for infants and their parents!









Closing Discussion



A. Reviewing Predictions

Talk about what happened as parents observed how their children explored their environments. Did their children surprise them or did they explore in ways that they thought they would? If you have a wide age range, ask how the infants explored in comparison to how the toddlers explored. What was similar? What was different? What do they think their children were learning about their world as they explored different materials (this would be a good time for the facilitators to comment and share some of their observations about the parents and children).

B. Main Points

-  Exploration is such an important part of development! It is how children learn about their world and how it works. They learn that they are important, that they can have an effect on their world and that they can make things happen! As they explore and try to figure things out, they also begin to learn how to problem-solve!
-  Children learn by exploring and trying things over and over again! This is really important because it takes awhile for them to realize that when they push the button on their busy box and Big Bird pops out – they made that happen!
-  When your child is faced with new people, places or things, be sure to let him know that he is safe and that you are right there to help him explore and figure out this new situation!
-  It is important to provide lots of opportunities for your child to explore new things, people and places. As your children grow, they will probably become interested in more and more things as they try to figure out and understand their world and how it works.

C. Carry-over to Home

Based on what you saw today, what could you try at home to see if your child will explore in the same or different ways? Examples:

- Give your child different types of toys/materials to grasp, hold, taste and bang - and see what happens
- Fill a lower kitchen drawer with measuring cups, small pot and spoons, toy fruits and vegetables and see how your child explores items and if they add new items
- Fill a cardboard box with old clothes, purses, shopping bags, hats, and shoes for your child to explore
- Go for a walk and let your child explore the outdoors (crunch leaves, smell flowers, feel tree bark)

D. Good-Bye Song

Be sure and use the same goodbye song each time so that it becomes a familiar routine. Call attention to how children begin to respond not only to their own names, but also how the older children are begin to know one another's names.