

Developmental Observation Topic Plan

Why I Need You: Understanding How Your Presence Helps Me Feel Secure & Helps Me Explore and Learn

(Experiencing, Expressing, and Regulating Emotions)



What parents will be observing



How children use their parents or other familiar caregivers for security



Environment



Put out a generally interesting environment using objects and activities that parents and children have enjoyed during past sessions. Be sure to include a range of objects and activities appropriate to the range of ages in your group.

Because parents will be observing for indicators of how their children turn to them for security, you need to plan an environment that will highlight how children come to or look at their parents for reassurance in the presence of unfamiliar adults or in unfamiliar situations.

- put out a balance of familiar and new materials; arrange the materials so that children can choose between familiar and new
- at some point during parent-child play, ask parents to interact with one another's children, but to observe how their own child responds to other adults



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.*



Opening Discussion



B. Introducing the Topic

1. Providing information on the DOT

- Today we are going to talk about how young children draw a sense of security from their parents or other familiar caregivers.
- Using familiar caregivers as a "secure base" begins very early, as children begin to rely on one or a few adults for comfort and emotional support. They have strong preferences for their familiar, consistent caregivers.
- They draw their sense of security from these few individuals, and they reach out to the familiar adult when approached by someone who is unfamiliar; they may become quite anxious when they are separated from these few caregivers.
- As children get older, sometime after the first birthday, they begin to explore adults outside of their immediate circle, and also to explore new situations in which they begin to move away from their caregivers. But they remain very aware of the presence of the caregiver, coming to them periodically to get recharged or for comfort if something unexpected happens, and looking to them for a sign that it is okay to try some new activity. They are less willing to venture out when they do not have the source of this reassurance nearby, but may still be reassured by a wave, or coming frequently to the caregiver to show him/her what she is doing.
- Gradually, children will come to the caregiver for help, when needed, but become much more independent in what they will try and how far away they will go. They may be curious about a new adult, or even talk to a new adult as long as the caregiver is in sight.
- Having this "secure base," knowing that it is available, is very important in the child's willingness to reach out and explore new people and things.



2. Sharing what we already know



Ask parents to think about some times when their child really sticks by them, and about those times when s/he gets most upset when the parent leaves.




- What is happening at those times?
- Does it depend on whether you are in a familiar vs. unfamiliar place, or with familiar vs. unfamiliar people?



Ask parents to think about when their child is play at some distance but looks over to see if they are still there.

- What's happening at those times?
- Why is s/he looking over?

3. Summarizing the main points




-  One of the primary tasks of early childhood is to establish an attachment relationship with primary caregivers; it is these relationships that makes the child feel secure enough to reach out and explore new people and situations.
-  As children get older, they gradually begin to be willing to explore further away from their caregiver and to be curious about other adults, but feel comfortable only if a familiar caregiver is close by and easily available.
-  Being available for emotional refueling is an important parenting activity!

C. Describing the Environment

Today's environment is a general play environment. However, we have put out both familiar and unfamiliar objects and activities so that we can see how children turn to you in these two types of situations. For example, (describe what is familiar and what is novel, and show parents where these are).

We are also going to ask you to do an "experiment" - we want each of you at some point to interact with a child other than your own. When someone else interacts with your child, be sure to watch what your child does with this "unfamiliar" adult. Does s/he look at you?

D. Suggesting things to try

-  After your child is playing, gradually sit back - watch your child's reaction. Does he/she "check in" with you?
-  Try this with an unfamiliar material and a familiar one; is there any difference in whether your child checks in with you?
-  At some point during the parent-child time, interact with another child; what does your child do when an unfamiliar adult interacts with him?



Note to facilitator: As a reminder to parents, put these "things to try" on a chart tablet so parents can see it - show parents where it is.

E. Making Predictions

You will be watching to see how your child responds to all of these "experiments", and especially how s/he uses you as a source of security and emotional refueling.



- What do you think YOUR child will do?
- How do you think your child will respond to the "experiments?"



Parent-Child Observation Time



As you interact with each dyad,

-  briefly comment to parents about what you are seeing in relation to the topic
-  as parents try the "things to try," talk to them about their observations of how their child uses them for security in different situations (novel/familiar objects; unfamiliar adult); support this with your own observations



Transitions



A. From Activity to Snack

Ask each parent to "invite" another child to the snack table and to watch their own and other children's responses.

B. From Snack to Songs & Games

Entice children away from snack and to a central area by starting a familiar song or finger play with dyads who are finished with snack.

Do a song with actions and laughter, so that children will want to come! Or play a circle game with a parachute. Ask parents to hang back a little bit to see what their children will



Parent-Child Songs & Games



Sing/say 1 or 2 favorite songs/nursery rhymes. Include songs and games that are familiar and others that are new; include 1-2 circle games in which children hold hands with other adults. How do the children respond?



Closing Discussion






A. Reviewing Predictions

How did your child respond to the "experiments?"

- what happened when you moved away?
- did play with a familiar vs. novel material make a difference?
- how did your child use you for emotional refueling? (come to you, look at you, call you)

B. Main Points

-  Parents and other primary caregivers provide security and a base for emotional refueling, which make it possible for children to explore without feeling emotional uncomfortable
-  It is especially important for young children to be able to refuel in situations where things are new or unfamiliar
-  As children get older, they can be away for longer periods of time. But this need never goes away - as adults, we still have the need for emotional refueling from relatives and close friends!

C. Carry-Over to Home

- How can you use knowledge of how your child uses you as a base? Can you think of other times when you are at home or out in the community when similar things might happen? (unfamiliar people, new situations)
- Are there things you thought of today that you might be able to use at home? Are there ways that you thought of to help your child?



Closing Discussion



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. Even in music activities you can see children's interest in other children emerging!