

Developmental Observation Topic Plan

What You Can Do and Say to Help Me Explore and Learn

(Exploring the Environment and Learning)



What parents will be observing



- how what they do and say can help their children explore and learn about the world
- how their children give them "clues" for the kind of support they need



Environment



For this DOT, it is important to put out materials that will support different kinds of exploration and ways of using the materials. Put out a generally interesting environment using objects and activities that parents and children have enjoyed during past sessions, as well as ones that are new to the group. Be sure that both old and new objects and activities cover the range of ages in your group. Some suggestions that can include both familiar and new objects and activities are:

- infant materials that are fun to look at and listen to, that they or their parents can activate; soft books; floor mats where infants can practice moving; some scarves for playing peek-a-boo
- homemade puppet box with puppets or cardboard box to climb into, with holes cut out for playing peek-a-boo
- large motor area with slide, rocking boat, or climber
- table-top activities with shaving cream or other squishy materials
- water table activities with water toys



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!



Opening Discussion



B. Introducing the Topic

1. Providing information on the DOT

Today we are going to talk about what you can **DO** or **SAY** to help your child develop motivation and skills for exploring and learning to use new objects and activities ... that is, their "thinking" skills.

At **EVERY** age, children notice and are interested in their environments. Some objects and activities seem to entice young children to try them out. Of these, some can be explored by the child alone, for example when an infant is watching the play of light in the window or a toddler is pouring water from a container during bath or water play. Many times, however, adult support can help the children to explore at a deeper level, learn new ways of using materials, persist in accomplishing a goal, and attach new vocabulary words to objects and actions.

Parents and other caregivers can help this process along in many ways. For example, they can:

- create opportunities for children to engage with different kinds of experiences, materials, and activities
- notice and comment on what children are interested in
- model what to do with new materials
- join the child's play to model different ways of using familiar materials or expand a play activity
- provide words to describe and label what children are experiencing and what children are seeing, doing, and playing with
- sit back but be available to enter again when needed - "wait & watch", then "join & support"



2. Sharing what we already know



Ask parents to share some things they already do to support their children's exploration and learning. Some possible conversations starters are:








- What opportunities does your child have to explore new environments and materials?
- Have you yourself created some of these opportunities?
- When you are with your child in these situations, what are some of the things that you already do to help him/her explore and learn?



Opening Discussion



3. Summarizing the main points

-  Developing the ability to learn from exploration and use of materials skills is one of the major "jobs" of early childhood
-  To get the most from their exploration, children also need to learn to persist as they work toward a goal
-  There are many things that we adults can do to help our children gain these skills, including providing opportunities to be in new environments and to play with objects that are at the right level of challenge - not too easy and not too hard.
-  While many parents may not consciously think about it, they themselves do many things to help their young children learn these important skills by supporting their interactions with their environments. These strategies are sometimes called "scaffolding" strategies because adults use them unobtrusively to help children build their knowledge and skills.
-  When parents DO think about it, they can consciously use these behaviors as "strategies" - they can do and say particular types of things to help their children learn these important thinking and motivational skills.
-  During play-time, we are going to ask you to try out some of these strategies with your child to see what happens.
-  Don't expect to see instant results, because thinking skills take time to develop - none of us learn something well the first time we try it, even with the best teacher!

C. Describing the Environment

Today's environment is a general play environment, but we have included some objects and activities that are familiar as well as some that are not. With familiar objects and activities, you can help your child go beyond what s/he can already do, using the materials in new ways. With new objects and activities, you can help by modeling the possibilities, and by being ready to support your child in different ways. You can also sit back and watch where your child is going with the material or activity, then join to support or celebrate success. We have put out a variety of materials and activities because children explore and learn about different ones in different ways.

You may find that you can use different strategies with these different types of activities and materials, because your children will be interacting with them in different ways!

D. Suggesting things to try

Today we are going to ask you to compare what your child does without your support, and then when you join in. We also want you to try some of the "scaffolding" strategies that we talked about and see how your child responds. We've made each of you a little "cheat sheet" to carry with you so you can remember what to try (*pass them out*). We've also put signs up in various places as reminders of what you might be able to try in different locations. See if you can use at least 3 of the strategies on the card.



Note to facilitator: As a reminder to parents, put these "things to try" on cards around the room with particular objects. The cheat sheet with scaffolding strategies is included at the end of this DOT.

E. Making Predictions

You will be watching to see what happens when you try out some of the strategies that we talked about.





- What do you think will happen?
- How do you think your child will respond? (Remembering that your role is to help your child explore and learn, as well as to help your child persist toward a goal)



Parent-Child Observation Time



As you interact with each dyad,

-  remind parents to try some of the strategies
-  if you see a strategy happening, comment on it and on its effect on children
-  use some of the strategies yourself, if you notice an opportunity and it is not too intrusive
-  if a parent asks you to model, do it! then encourage them to try



Transitions



A. From Activity to Snack

Without being obvious about it, model some of the strategies during snack as opportunities arise. Or if you notice a parent using a strategy, point it out and also notice its effect on children.



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.



Parent-Child Songs & Games



 Sing/say 1 or 2 favorite songs/nursery rhymes.

As you do them, pay attention to how you are helping your child participate.

For example, are you positioning him/her in a certain way? Are you helping him/her do the motions? How?









Closing Discussion



A. Reviewing Predictions

-  Which strategy did you find most interesting and useful?
-  How did your child respond?
-  Did s/he do what you thought s/he would do?
-  Did s/he do anything as a result of your support ("scaffolding") that you thought s/he couldn't do?

B. Main Points


Young children are VERY interested in exploring and learning, and we as parents and caregivers have VERY important roles.

- We can make sure that they have plenty of opportunities
- We can help them learn from those opportunities by making sure that they can engage in the activities and experiences at their own level of understanding
- We can be available to support and join
- We can guide them to higher levels of understanding by providing language, being a play partner, and modeling options.



HOW children explore and learn changes as they develop their language and understanding. Parents and caregivers can help make sure that children move smoothly through this process.

C. Carry-Over to Home

-  Based on what you saw today, are there things you could do at home to help your child explore and learn?

Examples:

- what are some ways you have thought of to provide opportunities for thinking and exploring?
- what are some ways you have thought of to use some of the strategies we have talked about?

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!








Helping Your Child Explore and Learn



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Set the Stage

- 
Position yourself and your child so that you can look at one another and so that you can look at and establish an interaction around the same object, activity or event
- 
Make use of your child's interest in just about everything, and build on it (including changing diapers and riding in the car!)
- 
Provide appealing objects (toys, household objects, natural objects) appropriate to your child's age
- 
Physically support a younger child if needed so that s/he can freely interact with objects or participate in activities
- 
Watch, watch and listen - pay attention to what your child is interested in, then use the strategies below to respond and take it further

Let Your Child Be Your Guide

Match and follow your child's focus or interest

- **Observe and listen** for what your child is interested in (watch for focused attention, reaches, points, movement toward, words), then join in
- **Talk** about what your child is doing or is interested in - give names for objects, explain what she/he is seeing and doing
- As your child begins to use words, put **words into a phrase or sentence** and **repeat** them back
- **Maintain the focus** as long as your child is interested

Help your child maintain attention to and interest in the object, activity, or event

Be an interested and interesting partner!

- **Show warmth and encouragement** for his/her efforts
- **Introduce something new** to keep the interest and the interaction going - do something unexpected (act surprised, make a face, turn something upside down, make a toy do something unexpected)



Helping Your Child Explore and Learn



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Let Your Child Be Your Guide

Establish reciprocal roles (s/he has a role, you have a role) to support the child's engagement

- **Respond** when your child tries to let you know what s/he is doing or thinking (looks or vocalizes to you, hands you an object)
- **Set up predictable turn-taking routines** around the object or event
- **Allow time** for your child to take a turn - wait for a signal, expect a response
- If needed, **help** your child to take his/her turn
- **Talk** about what you and your child are doing
- **Keep it going** by adding new elements and roles

- **Show your child new actions or elements** that you think your child would enjoy trying - then wait to see if your child will follow along (example – if your child is playing with a small box, try showing your child how he can put blocks in the box and then dump them out; if you are playing with a scarf with your infant, try playing peek-a-boo behind the scarf)
- if your child is interested but needs help, **help** your child to use the new actions (suggest, demonstrate, make it a little easier)
- **Offer things to think about** - "I wonder what would happen if we;" if your child seems interested, try it and see
- **Talk about what you are doing** - use new words to describe objects, actions, and events

add something new to challenge your child to learn something new