

Information Observation Documentation Policy

Observation, documentation, and reflection are important skills for high-quality infant and toddler care. Developing these skills can help teachers with the following activities:

Sharing observations with families. For example, you might share how a toddler moved a toy shopping cart back and forth until she figured out how to squeeze it behind a table, and you might highlight how the child was learning about space and size. Sharing this information can also strengthen your relationship with families as you focus on celebrating children's growth and discoveries. Your communication may even inspire families to share more of their own observations with you.

Getting to know children better. Through ongoing observation, you learn about children's strengths, needs, knowledge, interests, and skills, and you uncover any barriers there may be to learning. You might, for example, notice that when you sit quietly with a toddler after drop-off time and stroke his back, it helps him slowly adjust to the classroom and transition into exploration.

Appreciating the unique learning style of each child. For example, through observations, you may notice and appreciate how an infant is learning by banging objects together, and you may have back-and-forth interactions focused on this activity.

Encouraging children's competence and success. Observations can help you notice how and when to intervene in ways that help children be successful. Instead of jumping in and fixing a "problem" for an infant or a toddler, provide just enough help, like loosening the lid on a jar but not taking it off. This encourages children to explore and learn more on their own.

Collecting information about children. You can use observations to plan for learning experiences and interactions. Taking time to observe allows you to explore what infants or toddler are focusing on, what their intentions might be, and what strategies they are using to learn.

Conducting screenings and assessments. Information from screenings and assessments can help you understand how infants and toddlers are progressing developmentally and help articulate concerns you may have about individual children.

Making informed decisions about organizing the environment. For example, as you observe an infant's increasing interest in and ability to pull up to a standing position, you might make sure there are enough opportunities in the environment to support this exploration.

Finding ways to improve the daily routines. As you observe daily care and routines, you may find that certain parts of the day go more smoothly than others. For example, you may find that when you and another caregiver go outside with eight toddlers it becomes a bit chaotic. After observing toddlers' reactions during transitions like going from indoors to outdoors, you might start earlier and try out small groups of three or four instead.

Observation is basic to everything that providers do in their work. It helps them learn about children so that they can measure each child's progress and acquisition of skills.

Over time, the written records of these observations provide a history of the children's lives at the center, as well as an insight into their development, strengths, needs, and interests. If a child's behavior changes suddenly, reviewing the records might help the providers to understand the causes for this shift in behavior. Since these records can be subpoenaed if there is a child abuse or neglect investigation, they should be concise and objective.

Staff should observe the children at different times of the day, when the children are alone and with other children, and in different settings. Children may behave quite differently during a diaper change compared to when they are playing or listening to a song. When taking notes, the staff should be as objective as possible so that facts, rather than opinions, are recorded.

Although Staff have busy schedules, it is important for them to find time to go over their observations and to discuss their thoughts and concerns with colleagues and supervisors.

In addition to being used in planning, in evaluating, and in reporting to parents the child's behavior and activities throughout the day, these records can be used to identify possible signs that a child has been abused or neglected.

If a staff observes potential signs of abuse or neglect, the provider can review notes from previous observations to see if the child's behaviors follow a certain pattern. This may also assist the state, if they become involved.

In addition, staff may want to explore the causes of changes in behavior. For example, if a normally at-ease child recently has been throwing temper tantrums during mealtimes and cries hysterically during diaper changes, the staff might want to understand what may be happening at home that could cause this sudden change in behavior. Staff should speak to parents to see if they have observed the same behaviors and the possible cause.

The protocols for making reports of child maltreatment and for follow-up should:

- Contact the Director if there are suspicions.
- Make a call to the Child and Abuse Hotline;
- The individual who suspects abuse must make the call to CPS;
- You are not allowed to question the child. Show no anger and just listen to what they disclose.
- Submit documentation, such as observation notes or anecdotal records, to CPS or other agencies;
- If the accused is staff, they will not be allowed to return to work until the investigation is complete;
- An accused staff will be allowed to return to work if the accusation of abuse or neglect is unsubstantiated or unfounded;
- If allegations of abuse and/or neglect are substantiated, corrective action up to and including termination of the staff member will result.

