

## What are FILTERS?

What do you bring to an observation that helps you tune into the special qualities of each child? What do you bring to the observation that keeps you at a distance and gets in the way of building a relationship?

## Your Culture

1. beliefs about childrearing
2. beliefs about appropriate ways to communicate
3. beliefs about children's independence

Strategies?

1. Be aware of how your culture - your attitudes and beliefs and expectations- shapes you as a person.
2. Observe to discover similarities and differences. Be aware that differences exist and we have to recognize them before we can bridge them.
3. Find out what culture means to each family and the way their behavior reflects this.

## Your Individuality

1. your temperament and that of the child
2. your interests
3. your feelings

**Our job is to be objective!!**

Adapted from The Power of Observation by Jablon, Dombro and Dichtelmiller

## Four Guidelines to Help you be An Effective Observer

1. Observe over time. Observing the same child over time enables you to see that child change and grow.
2. Watch children in varied situations. Children may act differently according to the situation.
3. Keep track of what you see. This will help you become an intentional observer, notice patterns, and obtain a more complete picture of the child.
4. Observe in and out of action. You can observe not only when you are out of the action, but also when you are engaged in an activity. After the fact, make your notes.

## Observing and Recording Behavior

*If you have a child of two or three, let her give you beginning lessons in looking. Ask the child to come from the front of the house to the back and closely observe her small journey. It will be full of pauses, circling, touching, and picking up in order to smell, shake, taste, rub and scrape. The child's eyes won't leave the ground and every piece of paper, every scrap, every object along the way will be a new discovery. It does not matter if this is familiar territory, the same house, the same rug or chair. To the child, the journey of this particular day, with its special light and sound has never been made before. So the child treats the situation with the open curiosity and attention that it deserves. The child is quite right. Corita Kent*

Children have few preconceived notions about what the world ought to be like, about how they should feel, or what they must do according to prescribed formulas. They view the world with abundant possibilities. Each day is filled with the excitement of new discoveries, rather than the pressing weight of obligations. Each minute and each activity is experienced as "now" rather than as a worried look into the future.

Unlike adults, young children have yet to develop permanent labels, automatic responses, or typical uses for the stuff they see all around them. They haven't learned the "right" answers or the "right" way to use things. This lack of experience and information can get them in trouble and put them in danger. Because of this, most adults see our role as protecting children from themselves. On the other hand, adults alternatively often see this innocence and ignorance as endearing and humorous. Children are viewed as "cute" and we chuckle when "kids say the darnedest things."

But when we watch them with openness and respect, we cannot trivialize children in these ways. Close observation helps us see that childhood is filled with curiosity, creativity, and unlimited possibility. Children are born to dive in, take apart, rearrange and invent, using whatever captures their imagination and curiosity for a whim or an intense purpose. As grown-ups we have a balancing act to do. We must offer the words and tools children need to make it safely in the world and provide multiple opportunities and materials to expand their curiosity and inventiveness. We must focus on their curiosity and investigation as much as we emphasize their safety and security so as not to squelch children's natural curiosity and their right to learn in their own effective ways.

From The Art of Awareness by Deb Curtis and Margie Carter

## The Power of Observation - One provider's story

Johnny was a red-headed two-year old who could empty a shelf of toys faster than any child I've ever known. I would spend the days he came to child care racing around after him, trying to keep some semblance of order. Around this time, I had to take a course on observing as part of my studies. I was upset. I knew how to watch children. I could see what they were doing!! After about two months, it dawned on me: Observing wasn't just about what children do. It was watching them from the outside with the purpose of trying to understand what they are feeling and experiencing on the inside.

This revelation helped me to get to know Johnny. I began using observing to help me look at the world through his eyes and was surprised to see that he was bright, curious, and had a sense of humor. I noticed he loved music and would spend up to 5-10 minutes at a time strumming on a toy guitar. This was a far cry from my original opinion of him as chaotic. As I began sitting and singing with him and bringing out other instruments, something changed. I'm embarrassed to admit it, but one of those things was that I began liking him. He had to sense it because he started spending more time with me reading, talking and preparing snack and less time scattering toys around. Our relationship, born out of observing, centered him and gave us the means to enjoy and learn from one another.

The Power of Observation

Jablon, Dombro and Dichtelmiller

## Anecdotal Record

DATE: March 27, 2005

SUBJECT: J.T.

OBSERVER: Joan Smith

OBSERVATION TECHNIQUE USED: Anecdotal Record

TIME: 8.30 am

During breakfast time this morning, J.T. finished all her food and drank her cup of juice, finishing before her classmates. She then moved her hands and knocked over her neighbor Sean's cup of juice. She then shouted: "Joan, look! Sean spilled his juice." Sean denied this by saying a "NO". J.T. snapped, "Yes! You spilled the juice!" I then intervened and said that I saw what happened. J.T. covered her face and cried.

TIME: 9.05 am

In going out to playtime, J.T. declared that she would be the one to hold my hand and she pushed the child who was already holding my hand. He retaliated and hit her. J.T. complained that she was hit. I talked to her and explained that we don't use our bodies for hurting. She stopped crying.

TIME 11.15

During play dough time, J.T. made flat circles with her bare hands. She made around ten flat circles and said: "I made pancakes" and handed me one piece. I asked if she likes pancakes. She answered, "My Papa and me always eat pancakes.". Then she added, "Yum!" Billy shouted that they were not pancakes but only dough. J.T dashed to Billy and threw two pieces of dough at his face and cried loudly.

SUMMARY:

From my observation of J.T. this morning, I found out that she was hitting children during specific activities or when she was in close proximity to them like during breakfast time. Often, these aggressive incidents happen when she was provoked or challenged. At these times she resorted to hitting. Those who provoked her or got in her way were her usual victims. Usually after hitting, she cried. I need to attend to J.T.'s specific behavior. I will observe her tomorrow afternoon to determine if her hitting behavior happens at all times of the day or in the morning only.

## Description or Interpretation?

Read the following recorded observations and determine whether they are descriptions or interpretations.

1. Juan grabbed the baby doll away from Lila. Juan is very bossy and doesn't like to share.

Description  
 Interpretation

2. Rayna played in the block area by herself for 10 minutes. First, she built a tall building. Then, she placed plastic farm animals on the top of the building.

Description  
 Interpretation

3. Tanya worked with markers at the art table. She must be sad because she used only dark colors.

Description  
 Interpretation

4. Kareem is sitting on the beanbag chair in the library area. He is telling a story while he turns the pages of a book.

Description  
 Interpretation

5. Shannon takes all of the cookies during snack time. I don't think that her mother is giving her enough to eat before she comes to the program.

Description  
 Interpretation

6. Isaac is trying to hang his coat up in the cubby. He throws it on the floor in front of the cubby because he has difficulty reaching the hook.

Description  
 Interpretation.

## How to Record - Observational Instruments

### I. Running Records (also called Specimen Records or Descriptive Narratives)

- This is a continuous observation of a behavior stream for a particular period of time
  - The observer writes in the present tense, factually recording what the child says and does for a length of time or a particular activity.
  - During the recording, the observer does not interpret any of the specific information.
- **After** recording the event, the observer then writes a conclusion in past tense, which briefly summarizes the behavior or activity observed.
- Pros and Cons
  - **Pros:** Collection of detailed, descriptive narrative data about development
  - **Cons:** Scheduling; expertise and objectivity required

### II. Anecdotal Records

- This is a short, concise, nonjudgmental written record of a directly observed incident
  - The observer records the incident after the observation, captures the essence of the event or behavior and writes in the **past tense**.
  - The observer records the event because it has been identified as developmentally significant and valuable.
  - The goal is to gather information to document significant and on-going evidence of the child's development through selected observations.
  - After recording the event, the observer then writes a conclusion in **past tense**, which briefly summarizes the development or the behavior or activity observed.
- Pros and cons
  - **Pros:** ease of use, provides a rich source of documentation for charting developmental growth and to use during parent conferences.
  - **Cons:** subject to observer bias

### III. Checklist

- A checklist is an inventory of behaviors, skills or characteristics that the observer marks or checks if they are present.
  - The observer investigates easily observed behaviors or skills
  - The checklist may be filled out during or after the observation
  - The observer must be familiar with each item on the checklist and what earns a check

- Pros and Cons
  - **Pros:** efficient and convenient; simple and time-efficient; focuses on specific behaviors, skills or characteristics; variety of subjects can be assessed
  - **Cons:** subjectivity of rating; prone to observer bias can be based on impressions; do not indicate the conditions that surround the observation; behaviors are isolated because they are evaluated out of context.

#### IV. Tally Sampling

- This is also sometimes called a Frequency Count. It uses sampling and observation of specific events, identified behaviors, or specific situations
  - It is used to determine how often a specific event or behavior occurs.
  - During the recording, the observer records a tally or tick every time a particular observable (overt, apparent) event or behavior occurs.
  - This yields quantitative data because it is based on numerical counts.
  - It can be used to examine a wide range of topics and is versatile because of its flexibility in choice or subject.
  - Information can be used to analyze a setting situation and revise activities, materials and to monitor developmental changes.
- Pros and Cons
  - **Pros:** efficient and simple to implement and analyze
  - **Cons:** recording frequencies takes behavior out of context; no indication of what preceded or followed the event - does not identify the cause of the behavior.

## Recording Dos and Don'ts

Do	Don't
Try to write every detail	Don't leave info out
Use words that describe action, whenever possible.	Don't forget to use words that describe what is happening.
Describe what you are seeing & hearing in the order that things happen.	Don't write the events out of order.
Use words that describe only what you see and hear.	Don't write your opinion of what you think is happening.
Choose times for observing so that you can watch and record without interruption.	Don't try to observe when you are going to be busy.