

Fundamentals Course and Level I certificate: Guidelines for Observation of the Practitioner for the Observer, Instructor and Course Sponsor

One assignment during the Fundamentals course is that the practitioner (student) submits documentation that he or she has been observed once working with children, by a qualified observer. See also:

- *Information for Course Planners and Instructors*
- *Observation of the Practitioner at work* (outlines the process and documents the observation; observer signature is required on these forms)
- *Observer Stipend/Invoice Form* (to be used by contracted observers)

The purpose of the observation is to provide an opportunity for practitioners to practice reflective practice, expose the practitioner to a knowledgeable professional in the field who can articulate best practice, and to introduce the practitioner to being observed while working with children. This experience requires the practitioners to consider what they will do when observed, to be observed, and to reflect on that observation experience. It can create a supportive context for professional reflection and growth by the practitioner. It is an introduction to the observation process.

To meet Level I certificate requirements, the observation can be done outside of the Fundamental course, if necessary.

The required observation in the Fundamentals course is not the same as the required observation by a CDA advisor for CDA credential candidates. It does provide practice if the practitioner chooses to pursue the CDA credential, and it is beneficial for all practitioners who seek to grow professionally.

Selecting observers

The instructor of the Fundamentals course should work with the local Resource Development Specialist (RDS) to select a professional to make the classroom observations. The *Observation of the Practitioner* form includes the conflict of interest statement to be signed by the observer and outlines the components of the observation. The Observer should be a regional professional who has the flexibility to visit the practitioner once for about an hour during working hours. The Observer needs to have the experience and maturity to know how to do an accurate and complete observation, to give clear, supportive, and responsive feedback to the practitioner that is grounded in the strengths observed, and to be sensitive to the work settings and context of the practitioner. The Observer serves as the reflector of practice rather than an advisor or evaluator.

Some possible Observers are:

- The instructor of the Fundamentals course
- Other experienced presenters or higher education faculty
- The Resource Development Specialist
- Starting Points Leader
- Center Director or supervisor
- Current mentors
- Consultants (staff working in mental health, Essential Early Education, Family Infant toddler Program, Head Start, Parent Child Center, etc.)

- Retired professionals

Observers who are doing this observation outside of their regular work requirements may submit an invoice to the Child Development Division for a \$50 stipend (see Observer Stipend/Invoice form- contact Northern Lights).

A note on expectations

- The instructor and RDS (or other course sponsor) should work together to inform the students how this visit will be set up. The Observer should contact the practitioner first and then the practitioner should drive the process. S/he chooses when the observer will come and what likely will be happening during that time.
- The practitioner should inform the families in her program that he/she is being observed as part of a class she is taking, and confidential information about children and families will not be shared.
- The expectation is that the practitioner think ahead (and write on the form) about what she or he has done to support the children's learning during the observation visit. She should also write something about what she wants the observer to notice or give feedback about.
- Before the observation, the observer should connect with the practitioner to clarify expectations and to set a friendly and responsive tone. This may best be done outside of the classroom setting.
- The observer arrives and after a brief welcoming proceeds to observe for about 30 minutes. After the observation the observer and practitioner should have a follow-up conversation. Depending on the circumstances, this may be done in the classroom or by phone in the evening. Regardless, it should be completed soon after the observation.
- The paper work (*Observation of the Practitioner* - to the practitioner and *stipend* form – to Northern Lights) need to be complete and returned in a timely manner.
- The names and contact information of observers used should be collected by instructors and/or RDS in order to contact observers to evaluate this component of the Fundamentals course.
- Both the observer and practitioner are mandated reporters and maintain confidentiality. The observer may see unsafe practices during the observation visit. Though the observer is not a licenser, he or she should call the child care consumer concern line: 1-800-540-7942 or ccccl@ahs.state.vt.us with any concerns.

Connection to the Fundamentals Course

Training is more effective when it connects to practice and when experience is brought back into the classroom. This increases application of new knowledge and skills.

- It benefits the practitioner to be as informed as possible about the process. Consider doing a role play of the process in class – from talking with the observer on the phone, to planning for the visit, to having the observation, to discussing it with the observer. This may help the student be more prepared and enable him or her to feel more in control of the situation.
- Instructors may consider using the questions that the practitioner should complete on the *Observation* form for home work or as an in-class activity, before the observation.
- Instructors may use the feedback on the *Observation* form to help students develop some goals for their Professional Development Plan, later in the course.

Questions about the Observation process in the Fundamentals course should be directed to Northern Lights Career Development Center: www.northernlightscdc.org/ (nancy.sugarman@ccv.edu).