

Observation In-Depth

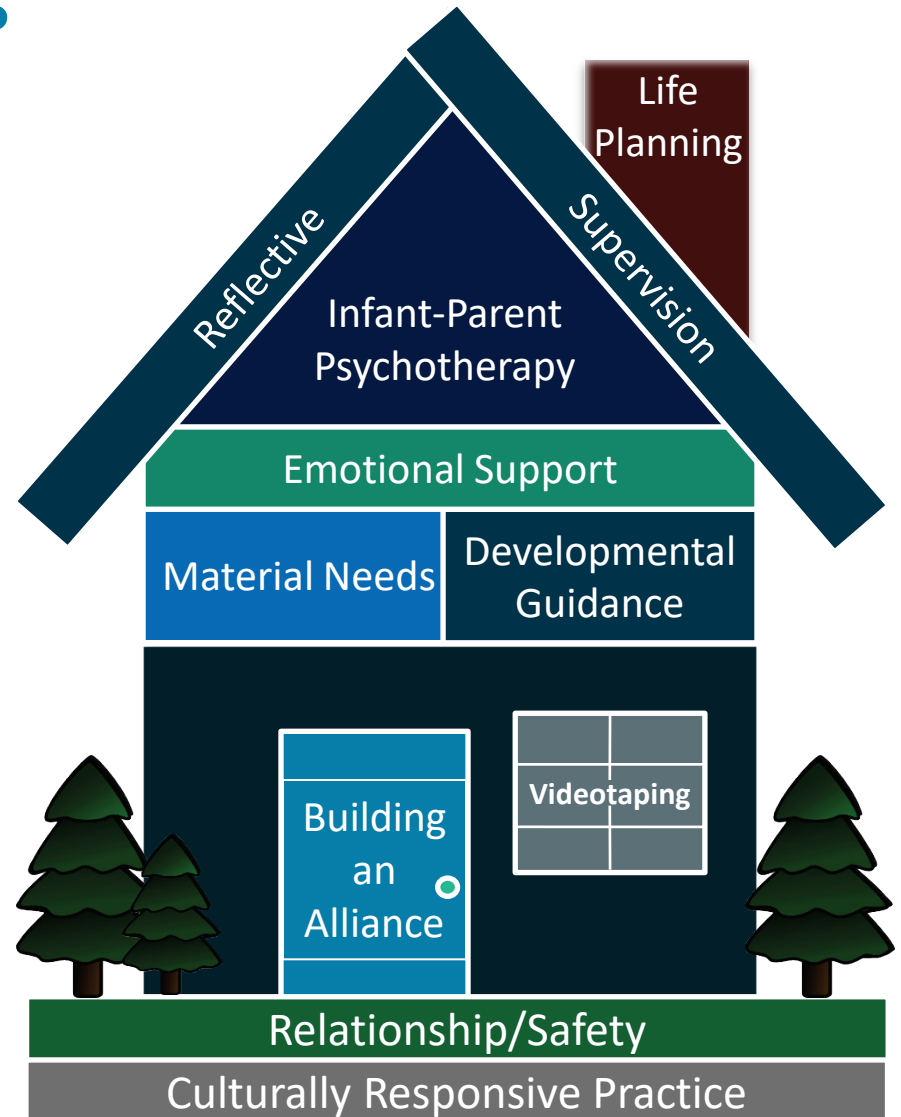


Training in the Michigan Model of Infant Mental Health Home Visiting

Infant Mental Health Home

Visiting Components

- Culturally Responsive Practice
- Building an Alliance
- Material Needs
- Developmental Guidance
- Emotional Support
- Infant-Parent Psychotherapy
- Life Course Planning
- Reflective Supervision
- Videotaping



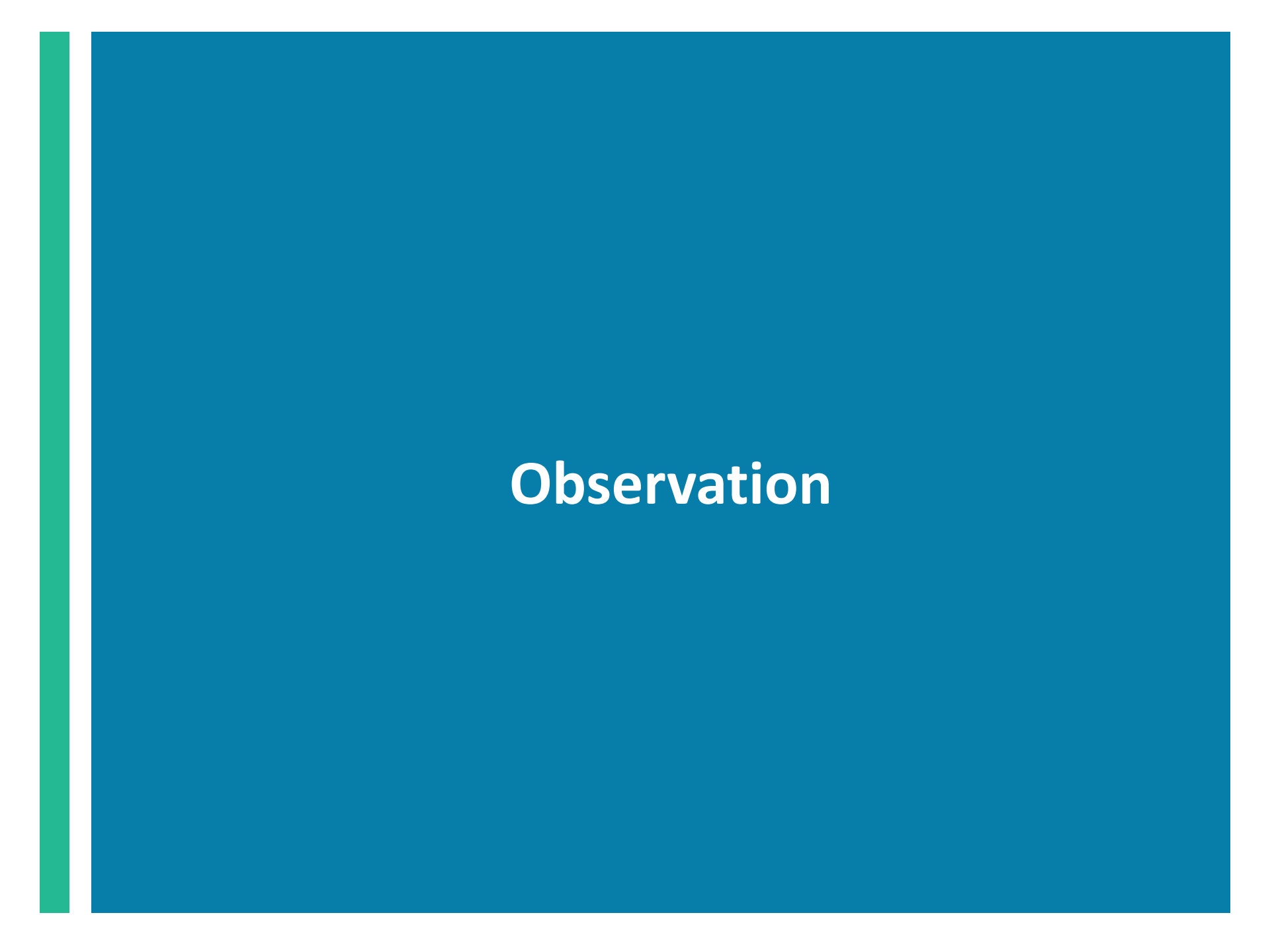


Any residual questions/thoughts/needs?

Intentions for the Day

- Trainer's intentions:





Observation

Role of Observation in IMH Work



- The Dilemma:
 - One of the “reporters” (the infant) is non-verbal or has limited verbal skills, especially for complex feelings such as ambivalence or apprehension (the toddler)
 - Parents may have social, cultural, and individual level constraints on what is discussed directly
 - Parents may be emotionally unaware of the “drivers” of difficult interactions
 - We may represent danger or be a source of alarm to families, inhibiting what they will share verbally

What Do We Observe?

- We can see “attachment related behavior” – i.e., relational health, through holding, gaze, affect (expressions on the face), vocalizations, proximity, touch, pacing, and the clarity of infant cues and the how a parent responds to an infant’s emotions or bids for attention.
- Families often show us their struggles, especially related to early “wordless” experiences or memories that are dissociated from a story (memory without affect or affect without memory), through their behavior and interactions
- Actions can also suggest angels in the nursery and can lead to more nuanced questions/observations





The next activity will help you practice observing – including noticing what you tend to notice and what you might not see initially

Knowing What You See:



On your own:

- On a piece of paper, draw 4 columns with 1 large on the left and 3 small columns to the right.
- Write your observations in largest column
- **There are no right or wrong observations – we all see a part of the prism**

In break out room: Share observations with partner/group

Repeat second time

Video



Knowing What You See



- Reflection/Group Discussion – Did your group make similar observations? Did you make any observations you disagreed on?
- Did your typical focus of attention change at all from video one to video two?
- Following slides use material from:
 - The Massie-Campbell Scale
 - The Maternal Looking Guide (O'Rourke, 2017)
 - Beatrice Beebe's Microanalysis research
 - The Relational Health Screener

Key Elements to Observation

- Interactions are often fleeting so we are looking for the overall pattern of them – not necessarily any one interaction (videorecording is helpful because we can slow down and carefully review what we saw)
- It is especially helpful to observe during higher stress moments...those are when parents often “tell” us how interactions went for them as young children because they elicit implicit procedural memories and when infants/toddlers show us what they have come to expect
- We will discuss videotaping and review in more detail later



Holding/Handling:

The support a parent gives to the infant in arms and the way the infant molds while being held. The way the parent moves or physically handles the baby

- Importance: When held or moved about securely, infant feels safe and supported. Leads to trust and interest in primary attachment figures.
- Observable Strength Indicators:

Parent holds infant:

1. Against or close to body
2. Comfortably
3. So that infant feels safe

Infant:

1. Relaxes, turns toward parent
2. Looks out at the world
3. Holds, molds

Holding/Handling:

The support a parent gives to the infant in arms and the way the infant molds while being held. The way the parent moves or physically handles the baby

▪ Observable Risk Indicators:

Parent holds infant:

1. Away from body
2. Awkwardly or stiffly
3. Tightly & prolonged; often constrains movement
4. Holds baby too close to face
5. Rarely holds infant
6. Handling is awkward, tense, jerky, or intrusive

Infant:

1. Resists holding, arches away
2. Does not relax, pulls away often
3. Clings unceasingly (older infants)

Holding/Handling: Toddlers

- Importance: As toddlers begin to physically explore the world, returning to their “safe base” when they become tired, stressed, alarmed or frightened offers reassurance and quiets the attachment-seeking system. This return to safe base can include physical contact, including holding and cuddling, or gentle touches
- Some relational aspects to watch for during interaction:
 - When distressed, does toddler turn to parents for soothing or comfort? If not, what do they do instead?
 - Are they soothed by contact?
 - Do they cuddle in?
 - Are they held until they give a cue that they are ready to get down?
 - Is holding awkward, prolonged, or quickly terminated by parent?
 - Are there cultural norms around contact and holding that inform the interactions you observe?

Looking: Eye to eye contact between parent and infant that is initiated, sustained, and is purposeful.

- Importance: Looking increases feelings of care, pride, wonder, enchantment and love. Being able to sustain attention allows for interaction.
- Observable Strength Indicators:

Parent looks at infant:

1. Attentively
2. With interest; delight
3. For sustained/comfortable periods of time
4. Seems to enjoy looking at baby
5. Holds newborn at optimal range for interaction (7.5 to 10 inches)

Infant:

1. Looks toward parent's face
2. Searches for parent's face or
3. Watches parent's face for sustained periods of time

Looking:

Eye to eye contact between parent and infant that is initiated, sustained, and is purposeful.

▪ Observable Risk Indicators:

Parent's looks at infant are:

1. Absent
2. Rare or fleeting glances
3. Prolonged or with riveted quality
4. "Chases" infant – does not allow infant to avert gaze to down-regulate as needed
5. In newborn phase, positions baby too close or too far for interaction

Infant (6 weeks on):

1. Always looks away
2. Rare or fleeting glances
3. Seems riveted to parent's face for prolonged periods (beyond 2 minutes)
4. Strongly averts head to right or left

Examples



- Beatrice Beebe - Decoding Mother-Infant Interaction: Microanalysis of Interaction (Beginning to 1:55)
- The Research of Dr. Beatrice Beebe (father - infant interaction) (1:20 to 2:20)

Toddlers: Looking/Shared Joy and Pleasure

- Importance: Parents and toddlers show enjoyment in each other by pleasant facial expressions, including looking at each other. They may glance at each other briefly, with the toddler initiating eye contact to draw parent attention to what they find interesting. Toddler also looks to parental affect for social cues and to assess safety or danger in unfamiliar settings or with unfamiliar people.
- Some relational aspects to watch for during interaction:
 - Do both partners attend to objects and glance toward each other when playing and interacting?
 - Do both partners initiate and respond to joint attention?
 - Does toddler reference the parent for social cues? Is parent aware of toddler's focus and attending to their interests?

Talking/Vocalizing: Communication and response between parent and infant.



- Importance: Talking increases interest, enjoyment and playful exchanges that are basic to appropriate interactions.

- Observable Strength Indicators:

Parent:

1. Initiates conversation
2. Coos, babbles, imitates infant
3. Vocalizes in comfortable pattern or tone

Infant:

1. Initiates conversation
2. Coos, babbles pleasurably
3. Cries out when uncomfortable; smiles or laughs when content

Talking/Vocalizing: Communication and response between parent and infant.



▪ Observable Risk Indicators:

Parent:

1. Never speaks to infant
2. Rarely coos, murmurs, talks
3. Vocalizations are too intense

Infant:

1. Never vocalizes, is always quiet
2. Rarely coos, babbles, or whimpers
3. Cries intensely, uncontrollably, and constant prolonged periods

Toddlers: Talking/Vocalizing

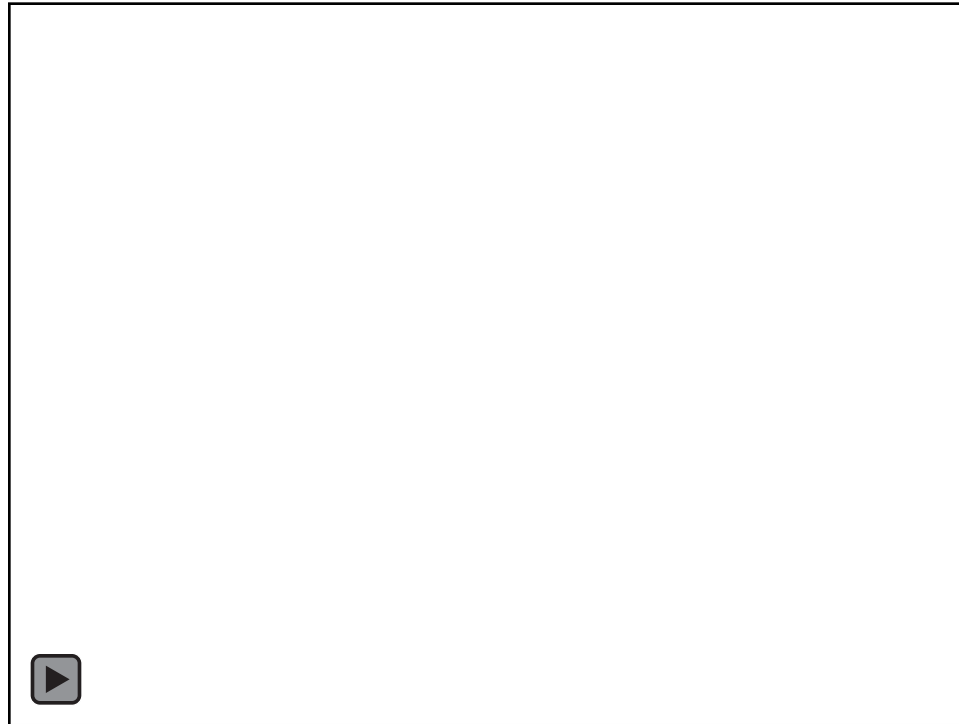


- Importance: As toddlers begin to vocalize more, we see the multiple ways they communicate, including gestures and words, interact with their parent. Having language for one's feeling states assists the toddler in emotion and behavioral regulation.
- Some relational aspects to watch for during interaction:
 - Does the toddler attempt to convey thoughts, ideas, or feelings?
 - Does the toddler respond to parental requests?
 - Does the toddler respond to their name?
 - Does the parent respond and expand on the toddler's communication?
 - Does the parent put words to the child's thoughts and emotional experiences?

Talking to Daddy



“Blood” Toddler



Touching: The effort to initiate and sustain skin-to-skin contact.

- Importance: Touching suggests warmth, care, affection, strength, presence, gentleness.
- Observable Strength Indicators:

Parent:

1. Reaches toward or touches infant gently & appropriately
2. When close, touches or caresses infant lovingly
3. Touches infant to comfort when infant is distressed

Infant:

1. Reaches for or touches parent
2. Explores parent's face (older infant)
3. Touches or holds on to parent if distressed; is comforted by touch

Touching: The effort to initiate and sustain skin-to-skin contact.



▪ Observable Risk Indicators:

Parent:

1. Never reaches toward or touches infant
2. Rarely or only fleetingly touches infant
3. When close, is always touching infant

Infant:

1. Never reaches for or touches parent
2. Rarely touches parent
3. Is constantly touching or clinging to parent

Toddlers: Touching



- Importance: Developing bodily autonomy is an important emotional experience for toddlers. Experiencing the respectful boundaries of their own and other's bodies promotes a sense of agency, control, mastery, and empathy for self and others.
- Some relational aspects to watch for during interaction:
 - Is parental touch generally gentle and non-intrusive, or is the child touched or handled like an object?
 - Is the toddler allowed to say “no” to unwanted touches, tickling, kisses, or other forms of touching?
 - How does culture inform expectations regarding touch?
 - Is toddler encouraged/supported to respect other's physical boundaries?

Emotion:

The state that characterizes the parent's or infant's behavior during observation.

- Importance: Expression of emotion provides infant with powerful first message about how the caregiving environment is to be experienced and what emotions will be “allowed” or disallowed in the caregiving environment.

- Observable Strength Indicators:

Parent is:

1. Attentive, available, comfortable
2. Responsive
3. Expressive, communicates clearly and appropriately

Infant:

1. Attentive, available, comfortable
2. Responsive
3. Expressive: communicates with cries, smiles, laughs (older infant)

Emotion: The state that characterizes the parent's or infant's behavior during observation.



■ **Observable Risk Indicators:**

Parent is:

1. Always intensely anguished and fearful
2. Frequently irritable/fearful
3. Mostly bland or constricted in expressions
4. Has constant, fixed smile

(Older) Infant is:

1. Always intensely anguished and fearful
2. Frequently irritable/fearful
3. Mostly bland or constricted in expressions
4. Constant/fixed smile

I Didn't Poop, I Peed



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7AwNiWRAw0>

SMALL GROUP:

Practice with the Following Video

- What do you see?
- What do you feel?
- What do you think?
- What do you think the baby and mother are experiencing – i.e., what would they tell us?
- How does your cultural/social identity impact what you notice?
- What would you *want* to do or say as the clinician?
- What *would* you do or say?



Keeping The Baby In Mind:

The parent's capacity to keep the baby in mind even when interacting with another child or adult.

- Importance: Conveys that the parent is able to retain a sense of the baby and the baby's experience even when mildly distracted by others
- Observable Strength Indicators:

Parent:

1. Often looks at or orients to the baby
2. Responds to baby's cues even as talking with another

Keeping The Baby In Mind:

The parent's capacity to keep the baby in mind even when interacting with another child or adult.



- **Observable Risk Indicators:**

Parent:

1. Glances are only cursory (especially in the newborn phase)
2. Seems to forget about the baby
3. Ignores baby for extended periods of time

Shared Enjoyment:

The degree to which the dyad or triad seem to enjoy being together, sharing delight or pleasure.

- Importance: Babies who feel delighted in learn that they are worthy of affection, pleasure and positive interaction; the overarching emotional tone of the relationship sets the stage for future relationships

- **Observable Strength** Indicators:

1. Infant and parent share smiles, a sense of reciprocity and connectedness.
2. Moments of “disconnect” (fussiness/negativity) parental inattention, are quickly repaired.
3. There is an overall sense of joy and pleasure in the relationship.

Shared Enjoyment:

The degree to which the dyad or triad seem to enjoy being together, sharing delight or pleasure.



- **Observable Risk Indicators:**

1. There is notable inconsistency or inability in the dyad's ability to share joy and pleasure
2. Parental anxiety, depression, irritability or persistent distractibility seem to interfere
3. The baby is frequently negativistic, or non-responsive
4. There is a little sense of joy or pleasure in the relationship, or the overarching tone is negative

Practice

- What do you see?
- What do you feel?
- What do you think?
- What do you think the baby and mother are experiencing – i.e., what would they tell us?
- How does your cultural/social identity impact what you notice?
- What would you *want* to do or say?
- What *would* you do or say?



Pacing And Timing: The degree to which the parent and child seem synchronous in their interactions, with natural variations in pauses and initiations in interaction.



▪ **Observable Strength Indicators:**

1. There is a sense that the parent is aware of what the baby can “take in” and adjusts to the baby accordingly
2. As the baby ages, there is a sense of shared initiation and reciprocity
3. The baby is responsive to the parent’s initiations
4. There is a sense of “serve and return”

Pacing And Timing: The degree to which the parent and child seem synchronous in their interactions, with natural variations in pauses and initiations in interaction.

▪ **Observable Risk Indicators:**

1. The interactions are asynchronous and poorly paced.
2. The parent may be intrusive, for example looming in on the baby or poking and prodding at the baby, with no regard for the baby's response.
3. The baby may avoid or disregard the parent's initiations.

Video



Specific Toddler Behaviors to Observe



- The toddler seeks either visual or physical reassurance from the parent when something or someone startles or alarms them, then settles easily with reassurance
- Child periodically asks for and enjoys having caregiver hold, hug, and cuddle him – “recharge moments”
- If parent moves very far, child follows along and continues his play in the area she has moved to
- Toddler’s play is focused and purposeful
- Toddler and parent negotiate differing intentions and agendas

Pulling it together



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

How would you describe this interaction in a coaching call so others could have a glimpse of what you “saw?”

Final Thoughts

- Residual comments/questions?
- When you do your coaching call write-ups, you can be thinking about what precise observations (including what became right before an interaction - what leads to a baby being put down, picked up, given a warm or hostile glance, etc.) that can help your call group have an image of the interactions
- Make sure to include any questions to help illuminate unseen bias or culturally-informed “expectations” (we don’t know what we don’t know!)

Switch Gears

- Videotaping

