Screening, Observation, and Assessments:

Formulating Crucial Connections in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

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Objectives

Participants will have a foundation in:

- The significance of screening tools
- The principles of careful observation for attachment behaviors, play capacities, and relationship patterns
- The elements of an assessment for shared understanding and intervention
- Linking findings to appropriate referrals
Mission

We will collaborate with our partners to develop a shared strengths-based and culturally sensitive understanding of a child’s development and behavior and translate such understanding into responsive action.
Centrality of Relationships: Observing, Learning, and Wondering Together

- Infants and Toddlers must be evaluated within the context of relationships with their primary caregivers
- Assessment should always include collaboration with parents and caregivers
- Building a therapeutic relationship
- Working together on behalf of the child
- Focus on individual, dyadic, and family strengths as well as weaknesses
- Multiple assessments over time are recommended
- Information from multiple sources is recommended
Screening

- Screening methods tell you if the child needs further assessment in a given developmental area.

- Many screening tools use caregiver report.
Suggested Developmental Screening Tools

- Caregiver Report Methods
  - Ages & Stages Questionnaires
  - CBCL
  - BITSEA
  - Mental Health Screening Tool

- Direct Assessment of Child
  - Bayley Infant Neurodevelopmental Screener
  - Batelle Developmental Inventory Screening Test
Screening Outcomes

- Indicators for further exploration.
- Children are moving targets.
- Different types of screening tools provide different results (depends on perspective of who is completing the screening tool).
Learning to Look, Looking to Learn

The Power of Observation
Importance of Observation

Observation Leads to Understanding
Parent-Child Observation

- Observing Attachment Behaviors
- Parent-Infant/Child Interaction Observation Tool
- The Crowell Procedure
“To an infant or child, the parent-child relationship is the greatest source of multisensory experience.” Lillas and Turnbull
Parent-Child Relationship
Contingent Communication

**Parent Domains**
- Emotional availability
- Nurturance/valuing
- Protection
- Comforting
- Teaching
- Play
- Discipline/limit setting
- Structure and routine

**Child Domains**
- Emotion regulation
- Security/trust
- Vigilance/safety
- Comfort seeking
- Learning/curiosity
- Play/imagination
- Self-control
- Self-regulation
Parent-Child Interaction Observation Tool

- Tool to help the evaluator to organize their observations of the parent and child’s interaction

- Ten dimensions with a 3 point rating scale for each dimension
The Crowell Procedure

- Attachment Behaviors
- Play Interactions
- Direction/Teaching
- Separation/Reunion
Observing Attachment Behaviors

- Does the child seem to feel safe, secure, and comfortable? Can the child explore and play with toys?
- What does the caregiver do to help the child get comfortable?
- Can the child and the caregiver share enjoyment?
- Does the dyad seem familiar with play and having fun together?
- Is there a sense of partnership in their play?
- Does the child reference the caregiver?
- How does the child respond when the caregiver restricts her?
- Does the child interact with the examiner?
Observing Play Behavior

- Who leads the play?
- Is the play mutual?
- Is the play reciprocal?
- Does the parent provide scaffolding?
- Is the affect positive or negative?
- Is the play sustained?
Observing Teaching

Parent and child most often asked to clean up/or given a teaching task

- How does parent explain the task?
- Does child follow instructions?
- How does parent handle refusals?
- Does parent provide scaffolding?
- Emotional tenor of interaction
Separation and Reunion

- Mary Ainsworth and Strange Situation
  - Parent can be asked to leave room briefly
  - Purpose is to elicit attachment behaviors at both points
  - Avoid if it would be too stressful
Social Emotional Functioning

How does the child organize her
- Cognitive
- Emotional
- Behavioral
- Sensory capacities
to function in the world and in relationships?

(DC0-3R Axis V and Greenspan’s ladder of development)
Infant-Toddler Mental Status Exam: Clinical and Developmental Exploration

- Appearance
- Reaction to Situation
- Adaptation: Exploration and Reaction to Transitions
- Self Regulation
- Sensory Regulation
- Unusual Behaviors
- Activity Level
- Attention Span
- Frustration Tolerance
- Expression of Aggression
- Muscle Tone and Strength
- Gross and Fine Motor Coordination
A competent assessment will begin with thoughtful reflection as to what purpose(s) should be served by this particular assessment.
Purpose(s)

Address presenting concerns

- Assess both resilience and potential for further deterioration of child’s functioning without intervention
- Identify risk factors impacting social emotional developmental trajectory
- Neither assume nor prematurely rule out the existence of pathology
- Understand how emotional and developmental concerns are impacting each other and how these are affecting the child and family
Young Children in High-risk/ Foster Care Settings

- Explore caregiver’s parenting styles and capacities;

- Identify areas in which caregivers need support to repair disruptions in relationships with their infants; identify ways that all caregivers and providers can best support infants to cope with separations and transitions;

- Address potential consequences of in utero drug exposure; premature birth, medically fragile status

- Address the challenges of both foster parents and bio parents in holding a full picture of the child’s needs and experiences
EVALUATE

- Length of engagement with family
- Settings that are most relevant to understanding a child’s functioning
EXPLORE

• Environmental and relational influences on all developmental domains

• What elicits optimum functioning from child

• The stories parents have to share about their child

• Changes and transitions that have been experienced by child and family

• Acculturation processes and their impacts on the different generations; both strengths and struggles
OBSERVE

- Sensory style of child

- Functional emotional capacities for shared attention, mutual engagement, intentional communication

- Levels of play: functional, parallel, interactive, collaborative, symbolic, logical sequences and flow

- Forms of scaffolding parent offers child

- Caregiver’s style of emotionally co-regulating child

- Parent’s availability to child and the interactive dance child and parent have developed
Both powerful and subtle ways family members affect each other
INTEGRATE

- Careful observation with interviewing and history gathering
- Attention to interactions between parent and child, and parent’s perceptions of child and his/her relationship with child
- Significance of communication differences to frustration tolerance and to parent and child’s capacities to read each others’ cues
- Sensory, medical, communication or motor differences with their implications for how the child copes with the world and relates to others
COLLABORATE

Effectively with evaluators from other disciplines to observe, gather information and consider how findings in different domains are interconnected.
COMMUNICATE with

- Strength based language that still acknowledges challenges and needs
- Sensitivity to different audiences: IEP evaluators, teachers, parents, other mental health providers
- A user friendly style
- Respect for other providers: offer a starting point for addressing family’s needs without deciding another provider’s treatment plan
- A formulation that conceptualizes the interweaving of strengths and vulnerabilities with careful reference to ongoing themes/concerns to be evaluated and monitored.
ATTEND

To the impact of the assessment process on the family and take care to ensure shared understanding of findings and recommendations between evaluator, family and other potential service providers.
Reflections, Questions, and Answers
DVD Bibliography

- Conversations in Rhyme
  www.seldomseenproductions.com

- Still-face in Infants and Toddlers

- Mary Ainsworth: Attachment and the Growth of Love
  Davidson Films
  735 Tank Farm Road, Ste. 210
  San Luis Obispo, CA. 93401