

Developmental Observation Topic Plan

What Materials Help Me Play with Other Children?

(Forming Close, Secure Relationships)

Age Range: Birth—36 months



What parents will be observing



How different kinds of materials influence how young children interact with other children

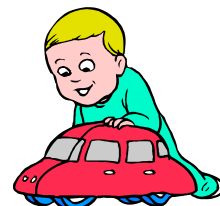


Environment



Put out a generally interesting environment using objects and activities that parents have enjoyed during past sessions. Be sure to include objects and activities appropriate to the range of ages in your group.

For this DOT, also include materials that lend themselves to children playing alone, as well as some that are likely to lead to more interaction. **Some suggestions for objects that children usually play with alone are:** play-doh or other types of art materials, manipulative toys such as hammer toys and jack-in-the-box, or even small moving toys like trucks or scooters. Gather duplicates of these objects, to put out part-way through the play. At the water or sand table, put typical pouring, scooping, etc. utensils. Have duplicates of these available as well, to put out part-way through the play.



Suggestions for objects that may increase interaction include duplicates of any of the above as well as the following: homemade "put-it-in" box with multiple holes to accommodate more than one child, a cardboard box to climb into, tube box; large motor toys such as a slide, rocking boat and/or climber. Have available one or two new, very interesting object to put out during sometime during parent-child time.



Opening Discussion



A. Hello Song (with names of each child and parent)

Hello (child's name), Hello (parent's name), How are you? How are you?

We're so glad to see you! We're so glad to see you! Come and play! Come and play!



Note to facilitator: As children become familiar with the song, they will begin to show their recognition. You will see them become still. They will start waiting to hear their name, and some will show smiles and other signs of pleasure when they hear it - be sure and point this out to the parents!



Opening Discussion



B. Introducing the Topic

1. Providing information on the DOT

Today we are going to talk about how young children are attracted to and interact with other children. Noticing, approaching, and responding to other children leads to early interactions. Interactions in turn lead to forming friendships. Even very young children have special friends.

From the moment they are born, children are attracted to other people. At birth, they turn to voices, look at faces, and are comforted by others. You might have noticed that very soon they show a special kind of interest in other children. For example, you might have seen the intense interest that babies have in each other. Or as they become walkers, how they imitate other children, often ending in follow and chase games. Or they might imitate other children by wanting to do the same thing - something resulting in a tug of war over toys!

Interactions with other children are critically important because children learn skills that they can't learn with adults! While adults change their own interactions in order to support the child's behavior, other children go their own way! So children have to learn to negotiate and interact in different ways. They are more likely to imitate what other children are doing because the actions are within their range of possibilities. When other children are slightly older than they are, they learn slightly more advanced actions and ways of playing. And older children can provide the motivation to learn and grow! Interactions and friendships also are important because they influence how children feel about themselves.

Children's interactions are influenced by many things in the environment. For example, they may interact with other children differently when you are present than when you are not, or depending on what you do. The types of objects available also make a difference. When there are just a FEW objects present, they may engage in more social play, whereas when many objects are present they may interact more with the objects.

The TYPES of objects available also make a difference. Small manipulative toys, for example, tend to be played with alone, although adding a second, duplicate toy may encourage imitation and interaction. When a brand-new object appears, children are more likely to explore it on their own, whereas with old, familiar toys they don't need time to explore and can get right to the play.

A child's age will also affect how children relate to other children. As babies, they love to watch other children. As they go beyond the baby stage, they may engage in parallel play with objects, each one doing their own thing but side by side. Some objects like slides or rocking boats encourage the beginnings of cooperative play because children can do their own thing with the same common object. But even an empty cardboard box can set this stage as children crawl through one at a time, taking turns in an imitation game! And finally, children begin to engage in cooperative social play, where they take different roles as they play together in the same setting. Chase is one early example, where children take turns being the chased and the chaser. Housekeeping is another, later developing example, where children begin to take on different pretend roles that support one another.

Children's interactions are influenced by age and environment.

Most parents are very concerned about sharing. Even as adults, it is hard for us to share! Young children do not automatically know how to share, or even understand what this means. Sharing is learned gradually and with the support of adults. You can support your child's learning by making sure there are enough materials for all, and that some of the materials are duplicates. You can also help children learn to interact positively with one another by modeling how to do this. For example, you can say, "She wants to play with this car now, so we'll play with the doll first and then we'll play with the car." Or if the object will support more than one child, you can say, "Can we play with this together?" You can support interactions in many ways, by giving children the right words to use as they try to join in play with other children.

2. Sharing what we already know



Ask parents to share some things they have already observed in their children in relation to how children respond to other children. Some possible conversation starters are:

- Think about your child in situations where there are other children - what have you observed about your child?
- What are some of the things your child does when other children are around?
- Is there a difference in your child's interactions with other children depending on whether you are on the playground as compared to at home? or in the library?

3. Summarizing the main points



Young children are "programmed" to be interested in others, and they seem to have a special interest in other children



Interactions with other children are especially important in learning the skills of social interaction and also provide a special motivation for learning



Different environments, including different types and numbers of objects, influence how children interact with one another - presence/absence of objects



There are many things that parents can do to help children learn positive ways of interacting. These include modeling how to interact (how to join or start an interaction, how to respond when another child initiates an interaction), labeling what they are doing with one another, and giving them words to use with other children.

C. Describing the Environment

Today's environment is a general play environment that will accommodate children of all ages present in your play group. In addition to this, be sure to include types of objects that children will tend to use alone, and types of objects that children will tend to group around and play with together.

Include some objects that usually elicit more "alone" play. At first, we will put out only a few of these. At some point, we will give you some duplicate toys to add into the play area. Watch to see how play changes.

We have also put out some objects that usually elicit more "together" play, like the climbing structures and the sand table (or water table). At first, we may have no other objects in those areas so we can see what the children will do. Then we might add in a few other toys to see how their play will change.

D. Suggesting things to try

Today we are going to ask you to watch to see how your child interacts with or plays with others when different kinds of materials are available. Some objects are usually used by one child alone, whereas others can be used by more than one child and so can help to support early interactions.

Watch for how your child indicates an interest in other children, and what s/he does when other children are near. Occasionally encourage your child to join another, or place your child in a location where there are other children.

We are also going to see if the number of materials makes a difference. We're going to have duplicate toys available that you can add in at some point, to see what happens. Also watch for how your child plays with other children around small objects as compared to what he does with others around large motor equipment.



Note to facilitator: Put signs up in different centers to remind parents of what to watch for [how does your child show interest in others? How does s/he interact with others? Do objects available make a difference? Remember to give parents duplicate toys to add in at some point so they can see if these make a difference in interactions].

E. Making Predictions

You will be watching to see how your child interacts with other children using different types of objects and different numbers of objects. And of course, we'll be talking about how children of different ages respond differently to other children. Also watch how your child's personality (temperament) influences how she/he interacts with other children.

Given what we have described for the day, what do you think YOUR child will do in relation to other children?

- Will your child be interested in other children? How will you know?
- Will the types of objects available make any difference?
- Will the number of objects available make any difference?
- Who do you think your child will imitate?
- Will there be conflicts? When/where do you think they will occur?



Parent-Child Observation Time



As you interact with each dyad,



Briefly comment to parents about what you are observing about their children's interactions with others; notice that even babies are very interested in other babies and older children.



As parents move from small to large motor objects and add in duplicate objects, ask them what they are observing and comment on what you are seeing. Which types of objects make it easier for children to interact with one another? What kinds of interactions do they see with different types of objects?



Transitions



A. From Activity to Snack

Try putting all of one part of the snack on one plate. Observe how children react when another child is given or takes a treat from the plate. Then pass out another part of the snack, so that it is automatically given to the child. Is there any difference in awareness of peers?

B. From Snack to Songs & Games

Use bubbles or parachute to entice children from the snack table back to the central rug area. Or simply start singing the songs and games. The main idea is to make the activity appealing for children so that they will WANT to transition. (Make sure the parents know that this is a "transition;" it's OK to stay at the snack table until their children are interested in coming over.)



Parent-Child Songs & Games



Sing/say 1 or 2 favorite songs/nursery rhymes. Be sure to include a song or game that children do with their parents (such as "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," as well as a song or game that involves all children (such as "Ring Around the Rosy"). Are peer interactions different in these two songs/games?






Closing Discussion



A. Reviewing Predictions

- How did your child respond?
- Did s/he do what you thought s/he would do?
- Did you notice more child-child interactions with some objects than others? What seemed to help children interact with one another rather than with you or alone?

B. Main Points

-  No matter how young or old they are, children are interested in other children; they pay attention to other children. When they do this, they are learning about others and how to interact with others.
-  Children start by watching each other, imitating each other, and then wanting what the other one has! They gradually learn to share, and finally to play together with the same material and then in cooperative roles.
-  The materials available can help to support or NOT support interactions between young children.

C. Carry-Over to Home

Based on what you saw today, what are some things you can do at home or in the community to help your child develop social skills for interacting with other children? (examples: provide more opportunities through play dates, taking child to the park, church; providing particular materials to encourage play of particular kinds, depending on the age of the child; make sure that "social" objects are available.)



Closing Discussion



D. Good-Bye Song

Be sure and use the same goodbye song each time so that it becomes a familiar routine. Call attention to how children begin to respond not only to their own names, but also how the older children are begin to know one another's names. Even in music activities you can see children's interest in other children emerging!