

# Developmental Observation Topic Plan

## What's My Style?: Understanding What I Am Like

### (Experiencing, Expressing, and Regulating Emotions)



### What parents will be observing



How children's responses to different environments, materials, situations, and people give clues to their child's style of approaching the world (temperament)



## Environment



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

Because parents will be observing for indicators of children's temperament, you need to plan an environment that will highlight how children respond differently to different situations.

Some good observation opportunities occur during transitions, as well as in response to changes in routines, new people, and difficult tasks. So:

- plan to change the play-group routine in a couple of places (see "transitions" below)
- prepare, but don't put out right away, a new, unfamiliar toy or object (for example, a new piece of equipment or a newly decorated cardboard box)
- ask an unfamiliar person to come into the room for a while, and to circulate and interact with the children during the parent-child play 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. Children's **TEMPERAMENT** is also often observable during this time, as children hear their own names and as others are looking at them.



## Opening Discussion



### B. Introducing the Topic

#### 1. Providing information on the DOT

Today we are going to talk about children's temperament ... their "style." One of the ways that temperament has been studied is to try to figure out the "traits" that make each child unique. Some of these traits are listed on the chart (*make a chart with the 5 words below on it.*)

- intensity - how intensely the child responds (from big reactors to low reactors - both positive and negative emotions; "drama")
- activity level - how energetic and active the child is (from "movers" to "watchers")
- interactions with others (from "glad to meet you" to "let's take it slowly")
- adaptability - how well the child responds to change (from "let's go!" to "let's stay here")
- persistence - how easily frustrated the child is when trying to do something (from "let's try it again" to "I'm done")

#### 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:

- what have you observed about this already?
- how would you describe your child's temperament?
- Give situations below as examples. What would the child be likely to do...
  - *when something is new (a person, an object, an activity, a place)?*
  - *when something is difficult?*
  - *when something changes (a different routine, something ends before child is finished)?*

**Understanding  
your child's  
temperament  
helps you help  
them!**

#### 3. Summarizing the main points



Children are very different from one another in how they approach the world



Temperament is the word used to generally describe "what the child is like" (adaptable, cautious, curious, energetic/active, friendly, shy)



As parents and caregivers, we can better help children learn about and adjust to their world once we know the child's own personal style ("temperament")





## C. Describing the Environment

Differences in temperament are especially easy to see in particular kinds of situations, for example when there is something new (a person, an object, an activity), when something is hard to do, and when there is a change in routine. Transitions from one activity to another are also a good time to observe temperament.

Today's environment is a general play environment. But we will have some new objects available. We will also change the routine a little bit. Also, we have asked someone new to come into the room and interact with the children. When these things happen, watch for how your child responds.



## D. Suggesting things to try

-  Give your child a new material or take him/her to a new activity
-  Give your child a toy that you know will be hard for him/her to do
-  When the stranger comes into the room and interacts with your child, pretend to be busy with something else (but watch your child from the corner of your eye!)
-  When the new material comes out, watch for how your child responds to it

 **Note to facilitator:** As a reminder to parents, put these "things to try" on a chart tablet so parents can see it - show parents where it is.

## E. Making Predictions

You will be watching to see how your child responds to all of these "experiments". Remember that children of different ages are likely to respond differently, as are children with different temperaments. That's what we are watching for!




- What do you think YOUR child will do?
- What traits do you think you will see? (refer to the list of traits on the chart tablet)



## Parent-Child Observation Time



As you interact with each dyad,

-  briefly comment to parents about what you are seeing; refer to the traits posted on the chart
-  as parents try the "things to try," talk to them about their observations of their child; relate this to the traits posted on the chart
-  as you change the routine and as you are transitioning to a new activity, watch children so that you can talk with parents about what you saw.

At some point during this time, bring out a new, very interesting material.

At another point, have the stranger come into the room and interact with children.



## Transitions



### A. From Activity to Snack

Ask the parents to move to the snack area without bringing their children along, to see how the children respond.

For the snack, have something to eat that is new and somewhat messy, such as jello cubes that children have to pick up with their fingers. Watch for how different children respond.

### B. From Snack to Songs & Games

Use a different approach for this transition than the one you typically use. For example, if you use bubbles or a parachute, trying singing a new, active song instead, or vice versa. Watch for how long it takes individual children to come over.



## Parent-Child Songs & Games



Sing/say 1 or 2 favorite songs/nursery rhymes. Include songs and games that are familiar and others that are new; also include some that contain children's names and some that don't - *what do you notice about how children respond?*



## Closing Discussion



### A. Reviewing Predictions

How did your child respond to the "experiments?"

- what traits did you see in your child?
- were they what you expected?

### B. Main Points

#### Young children

- each child has his/her own way of interacting with things, people, and situations - these come together to make up each child's "style" or "temperament"

#### Parents and other familiar caregivers can

- by becoming more aware of their child's temperament parents are better prepared for what might happen in different situations and better able to help with unfamiliar or difficult times. For example:
  - if your child responds negatively to new sounds, people, and places, introduce your child slowly to these situations; stay with him/her and give him/her time
  - if your child is hesitant to try new things, be sure to recognize and celebrate new accomplishments, as well as create new opportunities to practice new skills
  - if your child has trouble moving to something new, let him/her know ahead of time that a change is coming, and assure him/her that s/he can come back this later if s/he wants to



## Closing Discussion



### C. Carry-Over to Home

- How can you use knowledge of your child's temperament to help with transition times and other difficult situations?
- Are there situations at home or in the community that you can think of ... Are there things you thought of today that you might be able to use at home? Are there ways that you thought of to help your child make the most of ...? Adapt what you do to make it easier for your child to ...?

### 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!