Module 1 Section 3

Understanding Behavior Part 1 Careful Observation

We just covered some general strategies to build relationships and brain connections. How do we know when things make sense and feel comfortable to a child? How do we understand individual children's needs and behavior when they don't have the language development to tell us? How do we make sense of the behavior we see and hear?
Careful observation can help caregivers understand a child’s level of social emotional development.
Most of us have cell phones that we use every day. Before smart phones, we used to send text messages by using the number buttons with the corresponding letter. We look at the keys and see the numbers all the time. But when looking at this slide can you remember what letters go on which numbers?
We can see something every day even multiple times a day and not really notice all the details. It is only when we really take the time to look at these numbers that we realize what letters go with each number. To understand what a child is trying to communicate to us through behaviors, we must take time to carefully and thoughtfully observe the child.

Observation gives insight into how young children develop, why children do what they do, and what tasks are difficult for them. Careful observation can help us focus on the individual differences in development and offers a better understanding of the child.
Observation

Here are some tips for observation.

Record what you see and hear. Be objective. Just write down what you see. Not what you think it means; Use all of your senses. Think about what you are seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling; Note your own responses and how you are feeling; It is also really important to observe at different times and different days. Children are not always the same. Sometimes mornings are really hard, sometimes there are changes in routines so a specific day is more challenging.

Times you may want to observe and record behavior are before, during and after activities such as meals, nap, individual play, parallel play, drop off and pick up with families, etc. You certainly want to observe and record during times when difficult behaviors are present but it is helpful to also capture information during times when behavior is positive.
Describe What You See In This Picture

Jumping to conclusions or making assumptions about our observations of infants and toddlers behavior may happen as it is a natural part of our thinking. As caregivers you need to be aware of this when you observe. This awareness is important because what we think and feel can have an impact on how we see children. As we become more aware of our own thinking patterns, we are better able to understand and appreciate what we learn from our observations. It is important in our observations of young children to be very aware of not only how we see things, but how we interpret what we see.

With that in mind, take a look at this picture and describe what you see in this picture in the blue box. Just the facts. No interpretation.
Describe what you see in this picture
Here are some observations you might have made: two children are playing with the same toy. The child in the red shirt is reaching over for the toy and the child in the pink shirt is watching him take the toy.
Time for Reflection

After we take the time to document our observation, it is helpful to reflect on what we observed and make meaning of the information.

Here are some reflection questions that will help you understand your observation.
What was my purpose for observing?
Do I notice any similarities or patterns?
What do these observations suggest?
What else might be going on?
Is there anything else I want to observe or find out?
How does this observation fit with other things that I know about the child?

As you observe it is important to ask questions of yourself as well as others such as other caregivers and the child’s parents to get insight into the behavior. “I wonder...” questions are a good way to ask without appearing judgmental. In the next few slides let’s practice the skill of observation using these guiding questions. We don’t really know the story behind these two children so you can think of children you have cared for to answer the following questions.
Describe What You See In This Picture

I am going to watch him to see how he interacts with peers.

Describe What You See In This Picture

So imagine that you are doing an observation of the child with the red shirt. You might start by thinking “I am going to watch him to see how he interacts with peers.”
"The boy in red has had a pattern of challenging behaviors when he has to play in close proximity to peers".

You might be looking for patterns. Perhaps “The boy in red has had a pattern of challenging behaviors when he has to play in close proximity to peers”.
“Maybe the boy in red only has problems interacting with this specific child. Does he get along better with other children?”

Another question you might have is: “Maybe the boy in red only has problems interacting with this specific child. Does he get along better with other children?”
Another question you might ask yourself is “Does this little boy know how to play with other children? Is this the way he is trying to engage a friend in play?”
Describe What You See In This Picture

Is there a specific time of day that the little boy in red has a harder time?

You might also want to observe “if there is a specific time of day that the little boy in red has a harder time?”
You might also consider other explanations for his behavior. An example is that maybe this little boy is an only child so he doesn’t get much practice at peer interaction therefore school is the only place for him to learn these skills which may be the reason it is especially hard for him.
Learning From Families

While it is great that you can observe a child and take notes on their behavior, it is just as important to get the family involved and get their perspectives and observations. Families have repeated opportunities to observe their children over time and across settings.

Asking families to share their perspectives and observations can help caregivers enhance their understanding of a child and family, as well as determine additional ways to provide responsive care.