



Infant-Toddler Specialist Network (ITSN)



Proactive Strategies to Support Classroom Routines and Schedules: The Power of Observation

Sarah Holmes, M.S.
Anna Nippert, M.S.
David P. Lindeman, Ph.D.
May 2018

Kansas Inservice Training System
University of Kansas Life Span Institute
2601 Gabriel, Parsons, Kansas 67357
620-421-6550 ext. 1618 or 1-800-362-0390 ext. 1618
kskits.org/kccto-kits-infant-toddler-specialist-network



The KCCTO-KITS Infant-Toddler Specialist Network is a program of the Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities, Inc. and the University of Kansas Life Span Institute at Parsons and is supported through a grant from the Kansas Department for Children and Families' Child Care and Early Education Services. However, information or opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the agency and no official endorsement should be inferred. (07/20/2017)

THE POWER OF OBSERVATION: WATCH & REFLECT

Watch

Utilizing what we know about developmental milestones, brain development, relationships, interaction techniques, and teaching strategies can only be successful if professionals are good observers of children. What does this mean? As professionals, we must take time to step back and **watch** children during their daily routines and interactions. As we watch, we should be looking at observable behaviors and actions from many angles to help us learn more about each child. When watching, it is important to think about your perceptions and biases. How you choose to view a behavior and/or action (your perception), either positively or negatively, will frame how you react to said behavior and/or action. Our brain seeks out information to CONFIRM what we already believe, along with the beliefs and choices we wish to justify. This can create a biased way of thinking and information gathering.

For Example: "Sarah is such a bad kid! She messes up everything!"

To support that belief, your brain focuses on the following events: Sarah knocked over a puzzle that Anna was playing with. Sarah chose not to come to the table at lunch. She did not take a nap and had to be supervised the whole time. When it was time to come inside from the playground, Sarah would not come to the door.

However, your brain failed to focus on: Sarah helping Tanisha pick up the blocks when it was time for breakfast. She served herself and passed the food at breakfast. Sarah sat quietly on her cot for 20 minutes reading books before getting up. On the playground, Sarah rode the bike (with the pedals) all by herself!

If you assume Sarah is a problem child, you will see only the negative behaviors, while continuing to gather information to support that belief. However, when you give weight to the positive/neutral behaviors, you will see that Sarah is a typical toddler who is helpful and kind, and thrives when provided consistent guidance from and interactions with others.

Consider the following list of questions when observing children. As you read through the questions, think of Adam's vignette, the example of Sarah above, and/or a child currently in your care.

"Where is the child physically in the room? Where does he spend his time" (Near others? Alone? Always in the same area? Moving from space to space continually?)

"What are the other children doing, and how does she respond to their activity?" (Watches? Joins? Avoids? Doesn't seem to notice others?)

"Where are the adults in the room and how does he respond to their presence or absence?" (Stays near adults? Doesn't seem to notice adults? Wants to interact with adults by talking, showing, giving objects? Becomes distressed as adults come and go?)

“How does the child interact with other children or adults in the room?” (Staying near? Avoiding? Asking to play? Watching/Laughing/Talking? Takes Turns? Hitting/Taking Toys/Crying? Helping Others?)

“What is she doing with materials/toys?” (Mouthing? Filling/Dumping? Stacking? Throwing? Pretend Play?)

“What language, verbal or non-verbal, is the child using?” (Eye contact? Smiling? Crying? Screeching? Arching away? Cuddling? Looking away? Singing? Using spoken words? Hitting/pushing/taking?)

“How does he respond to verbal/non-verbal redirection and classroom expectations?” (Complies with one- or two-step directions? Independent in completing tasks or needs adult assistance? Beginning to meet some classroom expectations without reminders?)

Reflect

After observing and identifying concrete, observable behaviors and actions, you must also **reflect** on what these behaviors and actions might mean. Reflection requires that we look for the reason or function driving a child’s behaviors and actions. This knowledge helps us build a more complete understanding of how to help that child learn and thrive. When reflecting on children’s behaviors and actions we often make incorrect assumptions about the motivations or purpose driving said behaviors and actions. Only YOU have the power to change your perception of the situation! It is important to remember that EVERY behavior/action is a request for something! Often, the children that need the most help, ask for it in the most challenging ways. A helpful acronym to remember when looking for the reason driving a child’s behavior/action is: HALT. When a child is engaged in a behavior/action and you don’t understand why, remind yourself to HALT and ask if the child is (H)ungry, (A)ngry, (L)onely, (T)ired. The signifiers of Angry and Lonely are not meant to be mutually exclusive. Angry is meant to remind you to look for an emotion driving a behavior or action. Lonely is meant to remind you to look at the role relationships has in driving a behavior or action.

The following reflective questions will guide you in your quest to find the reason(s) behind the behaviors and actions you observe:

“How do the child’s behaviors, cues, and actions match or not match with developmental milestones and/or brain stages for children her age?”

“How do I know if the child is developing positive relationships with other adults and peers in the classroom?”

“How do I know if the child is being appropriately challenged with the activities and materials I’ve provided? How do I know if he is overstimulated?”

“How do I know if the child is beginning to become distressed? Is this perhaps due to other children, adults, materials, or physical space?”

“How do I know if the child understands the expectations of the classroom?”

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE:

After reading again through Adam’s vignette, answer as many of the “watch” and “reflect” questions as you are able. How does your limited amount of knowledge about Adam affect your ability to answer these questions?

Now, think about a child currently in your care. This might be a child that you find it challenging to define the “why” behind his/her behaviors and actions. Answer the “watch” and “reflect” questions for this child. Did you find that your knowledge of that child made it easier to answer these questions?

By observing children during their daily routines and interactions, and reflecting on what this tells us about the children in our care, we begin to develop a holistic view of each child. This view provides us a better understanding of their developmental knowledge and skills, how they establish relationships and interact with others in the program, and what drives or motivates their behaviors and actions throughout the day.

This is powerful and necessary information needed to best support the routines and schedules in your classroom. As we become better observers of children’s development, daily routines, and interactions, we are able to identify the most effective strategies and supports needed to help children successfully engage in the classroom routines and schedules. Section Four of this TA packet will provide concrete auditory and visual cues and supports. These cues and supports, along with the interaction techniques and teaching strategies from Section Two, can be used to enhance the routines and schedules for each child in your classroom.