



PARENT- CHILD INTERACTION OBSERVATION TOOL¹

DATE OF OBSERVATION: _____

CHILD'S NAME: _____ AGE: _____ PARENT'S NAME: _____

OBSERVER'S NAME: _____ SITE: _____

1. Do child and parent look at one another frequently?	1 Infrequent eye contact	2 Some eye contact	3 Frequent and warm eye contact	NA*
Comments:				

2. Do child and parent enjoy physical contact?	1 Does not seem pleasurable	2 Sometimes seems pleasurable to both	3 Usually seems pleasurable to both	NA*
Comments				

3. Does child consistently express a range of emotions with parent (e.g. pleasure, distress, etc)?	1 Minimal expression of feelings	2 Some variation in expression of feelings	3 Wide range of expression of feelings	NA*
Comments:				

4. Does parent reflect back feelings in a way that lets the child know the parent is present and attentive?	1 Rarely reflects feelings back to child	2 Sometimes reflects feelings back to child	3 Usually in tune with child and reflects feelings	NA*
Comments:				

5. Does parent remain calm and interactive when child is upset or agitated?	1 Often becomes agitated	2 Remains calm some of the time	3 Usually remains calm and attentive	NA*
Comments:				

¹ Modified from a tool originally developed by Mary Claire Heffron, PhD, at Children's Hospital and Research Center in Oakland, CA.

6. Does parent encourage the child's vocalizations?	1 Does not encourage or praise child's verbal communication	2 Responds inconsistently to child's verbal communication	3 Actively and enthusiastically engages child in verbal give and take	NA*
Comments:				

7. Does the parent seem accurate about what child needs most of the time?	1 Not accurate about what child needs	2 Accurate about child's needs some of the time	3 Accurate about child's needs most of the time	NA*
Comments:				

8. Is engagement and play enjoyable for the child?	1 Child sometimes turns away from parent or seems unhappy	2 Child seems to enjoy being with the parent some of the time	3 Child often seems to enjoy being with the parent	NA*
Comments:				

9. Does parent talk to and about child in a way that is affectionate and positive?	1 Makes many negative statements	2 Makes some negative statements	3 Makes mostly positive statements	NA*
Comments:				

10. Is parent's voice warm and positive?	1 Not usually warm and positive	2 Sometimes warm and positive	3 Consistently warm and positive	NA*
Comments:				

Additional Comments:

*Not able to observe

ITEM	DEFINITION
1. Do child and parent look at one another frequently?	Refers to both amount and “quality” of the eye contact. Do the parent and child communicate interest and attentiveness to one another through non-verbal eye contact? Score a “1” when eye contact is poor and a “3” when eye contact is excellent.
2. Do child and parent enjoy physical contact?	Refers to level of comfort and pleasure the parent and child seem to derive from physical contact. Physical contact includes touching, sitting in close proximity, sitting on the parent’s lap. Do the parent and the child seem comfortable with physical closeness or does either one show discomfort by avoiding contact, wiggling out, shrugging or pushing the other away? Score a “1” when parent, child or both are uncomfortable with physical contact and a “3” when either parent or child (or both) enjoy physical contact.
3. Does child consistently express a range of emotions with parent (e.g. pleasure, distress, etc)?	Refers to the range of the child’s emotion along a continuum from positive to negative. Does the child express more than positive or negative emotion? For example, does the child always appear happy even when it seems as though a situation would elicit a negative emotion? Score a “1” when the child expresses only one emotion or only positive or only negative emotion and a “3” when the child expresses a range of both positive and negative emotions.
4. Does parent reflect back feelings in a way that lets the child know the parent is present and attentive?	Refers to amount of openness the parent shows with respect to the range of the child’s emotions. Does the parent show interest in what the child is actually experiencing in the moment? This includes a parent showing interest in understanding how the child feels by asking open-ended questions or reflecting back to the child what she thinks the child may be feeling. This is in contrast to telling the child not to feel a certain way, e.g., saying “stop crying,” or “it is not a big deal.” Score a “1” if the parent is disinterested in the child and a “3” if the parent is extremely present and attentive to the child.
5. Does parent remain calm and interactive when child is upset or agitated?	Refers to the parent’s response to the child’s emotion or behavior from being calm to being agitated. Does the parent appear to be overwhelmed by the child’s emotional expression? This may signal the parent’s difficulty self-regulating her emotions when faced with the child’s emotion. For example, to cope with the child’s negative emotion, the parent may become angry, overtly hostile toward the child or unresponsive. Score a “1” if the parent is upset when the child get’s upset and a “3” if the parent remains calm and attentive in the face of the child being upset.
6. Does parent encourage the child’s vocalizations?	Refers to the ways that a parent encourages the child’s vocalizations. Does the parent ask age-appropriate questions and give the child time to respond? Does the parent talk to the child in an interesting way that encourages the child to respond? For example, if the parent is reading a story to the child she points to pictures and emphasizes pictures or concepts that engage the child. Does the parent anticipate the child’s every need so that the child never has the opportunity to verbalize needs? Score a “1” if the parent does not encourage the child to verbalize and a “3” if the parent actively encourages verbalization.
7. Does the parent seem accurate about what child needs most of the time?	Refers to whether a parent’s response is met with resistance because the child feels misunderstood. Does the parent seem to understand what the child needs even if it might not be verbalized or obvious to an outsider? The parent seems to anticipate the child’s needs. Accuracy may be inferred when a parent’s response to the child appears to calm the child down. Score a “1” if the parent doesn’t seem to understand her child’s needs and score a “3” if the parent seems to understand her child’s needs.
8. Is engagement and play enjoyable for the child?	Refers to how much the child appears to enjoy being with the parent. Does the child seem to enjoy socializing with the parent? Parent and child play appears to be cooperative, non-judgmental nor competitive. The child appears to expect that the parent will be responsive and attentive and the child appears to be having fun. Score a “1” if the child appears to be unhappy with the parent and score a “3” if the child appears happy to be with the parent.
9. Does parent talk to and about child in a way that is affectionate and positive?	Refers to the amount of positive or negative comments the parent makes about the child, either directly to the child or to others. Does the parent communicate positive affection for the child regardless of the child’s accomplishments? A parent may “roll her eyes” when child does something she feels is inappropriate or may apologize to others for the child’s behavior. She may make undermining statements about the child, or communicate that she has unreasonable expectations. Score a “1” if the parent is critical to her child or when talking about her child and score a “3” if the parent talks positively to and about her child.
10. Is parent’s voice warm and positive?	Refers to the amount of warmth the parent expresses through her verbal communication. Does the parent’s tone of voice communicate warmth? The parent may sound hostile, disinterested, demanding or critical. The parent may use positive verbalizations but her non-verbal communication is negative. Score a “1” if the parent’s voice is not warm and score a “3” if the parent’s voice sounds truly warm and nurturing.