

ECECD HOME VISITING GUIDANCE DOCUMENTATION OF SERVICE NOTES GUIDANCE DOCUMENT 5

The Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) provides a comprehensive data management system for home visiting programs. All programs must document client information and service activities in the data system within five days of an activity (Home Visiting Program Standard 9.4). This includes entering service notes.

CONSULTATION AND TRAINING

Service Note: What should it cover?

The service note allows the home visitor to document information that is not captured by the drop-down menus. When writing a service note, think about the baby, the parent-child interaction and significant events that occurred during the visit. It may be helpful to describe the sequence of events during the visit (what happened/what was discussed first, then second etc.). The service note should tell the story of the family. This ensures that if the family is transferred to another home visitor, they have a base to start conversations and build relationships and trust without the possibility of re-traumatizing the family.

Service notes may include details on the following:

- Parent/child interactions
- Screening tools, including results/risk scores
- Referrals made
- Risk factors
- Curriculum
- Family health
- Goals
- Strengths/protective factors
- Social supports

ECECD does not endorse a particular note-taking model. As long as the service note accurately captures the visit, each program is free to use whichever model they choose. This Guidance Document provides an overview of two note-taking models: The DAP Note and Snapshot of Visit.

Data, Assessment, and Plan (DAP) notes

DATA: This portion of the note focuses on the facts of the visit. This includes any observation the home visitor makes (for example, the interactions the parent had with the child, statements made by the parent, and any significant actions/occurrences that took place during the visit). This is also an area where the home visitor can discuss progress on the family's goal(s). The key is to objectively state what occurred during the visit.

Example: Data: *“Baby began crying and immediately mom went over to baby, picked him up and began feeding. Mom stated she was worried about her milk production and that baby is not gaining weight. Baby appears healthy, but has well-baby check-up next week. Encouraged mom to discuss concerns with baby’s pediatrician.”*

ASSESSMENT: Based on the data recorded, the home visitor should reflect on what they observed or heard. Using their professional knowledge, the home visitor should assess the situation.

Example: Assessment: *“Mom appears to be in tune with baby’s needs. Mom open to discussing baby’s weight with pediatrician.”*

PLAN: Based on the data and assessment sections, the home visitor will describe the next steps they will take with the family to provide them with support and to help them achieve their goals. The home visitor should include when the next visit or contact with the family is expected, any tools or requested information the home visitor should bring to the next visit, and any referrals that will need to be followed up on.

Example: Plan: *“Mom will talk to pediatrician about baby’s weight and her milk production. Will follow-up with mom on whether she discussed concerns with pediatrician. Will discuss pediatrician’s recommendations and continue to explore mom’s concerns at the next visit on February 16, 2021.”*

Snapshot of Visit

The Snapshot is similar to a DAP note; however, there is no “assessment” portion. In the snapshot, you will focus on the facts of the visit, including observations and statements made by the family. The Snapshot format has two steps:

Snapshot of the visit, including progress (or barriers) toward the family’s goals: This includes any observations the home visitor makes (for example, the interactions the parent had with the child), statements made by the parent, and any significant actions/occurrences that took place during the visit. This is also an area where the home visitor can discuss the family’s goals. The key is to objectively state what occurred during the visit.

Example: *“Mom, Dad, and Baby were present at the visit. Baby was sleeping in her crib when home visitor arrived. Mom stated that baby had her 1-month checkup last week and doctor said baby is in good health. Mom stated she was worried about how she would manage Baby when Dad returns to work next week. Mom states she sometimes feels overwhelmed when baby continuously cries. Discussed mom’s concerns and created a safety plan addressing what mom will do when she begins to feel overwhelmed. Left plan with Mom. Baby began crying and mom immediately went over to baby, rocked her back and forth and spoke to her in a soothing tone. Baby stopped crying. Pointed out to mom what a good job she was doing in soothing her baby.”*

What will the home visitor do on the next visit?

Based on what happened at this visit, what are the next steps the home visitor will take to provide support to the family and how will the home visitor help them achieve their goals? When will the next visit or contact with the family occur? What tools or requested information should the home visitor bring to the next visit? Are there any referrals that will need to be followed up on?

Example: *“Scheduled next visit for March 22, 2021. At this visit will follow-up with mom on how she is coping with Dad going back to work and whether she has utilized any of the strategies we created in her safety plan.”*

Reviewing Service Notes

After a service note is completed, the home visitor should review their notes. It is also important to make sure that the appropriate drop-down items are checked. Here is a list of questions to consider when reviewing service notes:

- If another person observed this home visit, would they describe this visit in the same way? Same sequence, same events, same perceptions?
- If another person read the service notes, would they have a clear understanding of the family’s situation? Has the home visitor painted a picture of the family?
- If a parent asked to see this service note, would they agree with what is written (i.e. is accurate and non-judgmental)?
- Does this service note provide enough information to help guide the next visit?

Phrases to Use

The following are some suggested phrases to use throughout your service notes to help remain objective.

- Mom/Dad stated
- Discussed
- Addressed
- Mom/Dad reported
- Followed-up (describe what you talked about)
- Reflected on
- Checked-in on (describe what you talked about)
- Summarized (describe what you talked about)
- Observed
- Explained

Remember, a service note is required for every home visit and should paint an accurate picture of the visit and the family. Your agency may require additional information in the service note, such as the length of the visit and the travel time it took to get to and from the visit. If further guidance is needed on writing a service note, talk to your supervisor. If additional guidance is needed, please contact the assigned CDD Consultant.

DATA

Drop-Down Menus (ECSC Tip Sheet #7, Entering a Client Service)

It is not sufficient to *only* utilize the drop-down menus. **Every documented home visit must be accompanied by a service note.** The dropdown items are designed to be an integral part of the service note. They provide more specific information on what was discussed during the home visit. Selecting an item from the drop-down menu will require a brief explanation in the service note. For example, if “Parent-Child Interaction Observed” was selected, the home visitor should describe what was observed in the service note. There is no requirement that every dropdown category get checked. Only check those items that apply to your specific home visit. The drop down box data is important to capture because it is represented in reports and data to reflect the work done with families.

There are services that are provided to non-clients such as Safe Sleep Education or referrals at outreach events, etc. (ECSC Tip Sheet #8 Entering a non-client Service).

PERFORMANCE (see Home Visiting Program Standard 6.3)

Documentation must be thorough and complete. ECECD requires service notes to include aspects of what was seen, heard and observed. This will support any action necessary to support the safety of children. Documentation must reflect facts and observed behaviors without interpretation and judgment or assessment of events. It is also important to use respectful language throughout the service note as a family has a right to see their case file, including your notes, at any time.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE STRATEGIES (Tip Sheet 7.1 Entering a telehealth service)

Service notes entered during a state of emergency, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, should always reflect what is happening with the family. It is important during to be objective and only state facts, observations and disclosures from family. It is also imperative that all referrals and resources provided to the family be documented in the ECSC Database and in the files.