

Promoting School Readiness through Home Visiting

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NMAIMH competencies addressed:

Working With Others:

- Building and maintaining relationships
- Empathy and compassion

Reflection:

- Self-awareness
- Personal development

Direct Service Skills:

- Observation and listening
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This article emphasizes the importance of parent-child relationships in early learning and child development outcomes. The parent-child relationship, in the first five years of a child's life, plays a critical role in their social and cognitive development. This first relationship helps a child build cognitive, social-emotional, and self-regulatory skills, which sets the stage for life-long adaptation and functioning. A child's experience of interactions that occur within the home establishes the structure for how they will interpret the world around them. It affects the way the child will respond to events, educational experiences, relationships, etc.

An excellent source for understanding the importance of parent-child relationships in the child's early life is Dr. Bruce Perry. In his work, Dr. Perry explains how trauma adversely affects child development, as well as how supportive relationships are key to healthy outcomes. He says healthy, responsive relationships support resilience and can turn toxic stress into tolerable stress that can help individuals respond and adapt to adversity (Perry 2016).

When a child receives attentive emotional, social, and cognitive support during the early years, they develop a well-regulated stress response system, which leads to short and long-term developmental success (Perry 2016).

When trauma or unpredictable stress happens the parts of the brain involved in the stress response stop working properly. This can lead to emotional, behavioral, and learning problems. Trauma-related alterations to the brain can shut down areas that would normally control impulses. This can make it more difficult for children to learn traditional cognitive content in school, including the ability to learn to read (Perry 2016). Our role, as helping professionals, is to support parents and other caregivers to understand these critical formative years.

The Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) Home Visiting Program is committed to promote healthy and strong parent-child relationships throughout the system of care. Some of the strategies to support strong relationships and early learning include having a well-trained, competent workforce, administering screening tools, providing activities, and connecting families with resources in their community. The purpose of administering screening tools is to identify and reduce risk factors and increase resilience.

The following are some of the tools home visitors utilize to support healthy parent/child relationships and school readiness:

1. Circle of Security (COS) is an evidence-based intervention program for parents and children that focuses on relationships. This approach helps parents/caregivers understand their child's emotions by learning to read their cues, support their ability to successfully manage emotions, enhance their self-esteem, and honor their innate wisdom and desire for their child to feel secure (Shaver 2019).
2. Parenting Interactions with Children: Checklist of Observations Linked to Outcomes (PICCOLO). This approach focuses on positive interactions between parent and child and builds upon their strengths. PICCOLO observations show what parents do to support their child's development, what parents believe is important to do with their children, what parents feel comfortable doing in front of others, and what parents know to do with their children (Roggman, et.al., 2013). The PICCOLO should be administered within 6 weeks of enrollment if the infant is four months of age or older and every 6 months thereafter.

While administering the PICCOLO, home visitors are encouraged to be positive with the parents, focus on the strengths seen in the relationship; be practical, encourage parents to be part of regular routines; and be culturally sensitive, keeping in mind what interactions are most important to the family. Home visitors support developmental parenting behaviors by providing positive observations, feedback, asking about the child's feelings, cues, frustrations, and interests, as well as offering further information about child development.

Administering the PICCOLO during virtual visits presents unique challenges as well as opportunities for home visitors. The use of the PICCOLO is one way that we show our effectiveness as a home visiting system working under the Home Visiting Accountability Act.

The following are some strategies to help home visitors engage families to complete the screening:

- Conduct screen over the phone.
- Provide materials to family at their homes. Leave activity at the door and meet with family over the telephone while they are conducting the activity.

- Have parents pick the activity or routine to complete and meet with home visitor over the telephone to review the interaction.
- Have parents videotape themselves and send the video to the home visitor to be discussed.
- Conduct a live observation over Zoom or another platform.

Administering the PICCOLO to families has been a challenge for home visitors due to different reasons during the pandemic.

The PICCOLO is used to observe four parenting behaviors:

- Affection: Warmth, physical closeness, and positive expressions toward child
- Responsiveness: Responding to child's cues, emotions, words, interests and behaviors
- Encouragement: Active support of exploration, effort, skills, initiative, curiosity, creativity, and play
- Teaching: Shared conversation and play, cognitive stimulation, exploration, and asking questions (Roggman, Cook, Innocenti, Norman, Christiansen, & Anderson, 2013).

3. Reflections on Parenting: This tool was developed for CYFD Home Visiting Program by the Center for Development and Disability, UNM. The screening tool is a reflection on the parents' own experiences as a child and the family they grew up in. It helps parents to reflect on their childhood in relation to the type of parents they would like to be. The way they parent their own children is impacted by the way they were parented (which they may not be aware of). This screening tool is designed to be administered through a conversation to explore in depth every question and offer resources to parents if needed. Home visitors can support parents by providing education about self-regulation techniques, parenting classes, and connecting parents to other resources in their community.

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection...

- What is our responsibility as home visitors in supporting healthy parent-child relationships?
 - What strategies/resources do you utilize to support positive parent-child interactions?
 - How do you think your childhood experiences have influenced your relationship with others as an adult?
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References/Additional Resources

Perry. B. (2016). The Braine Science Behind Student Trauma. Retrieved from: <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-the-brain-science-behind-student-trauma/2016/12>

Roggman, L. A., Cook, G. A., Innocenti, M. S., Norman, V., Christiansen, K., & Anderson, S. (2013). *Parenting Interactions with Children: Checklist of Observations Linked to Outcomes (PICCOLO)*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Shaver. P. (2019) Circle of Security. *Resources for Parents*. Retrieved from: <https://www.circleofsecurityinternational.com/resources-for-parents/>