

## Transforming the PICCOLO

Julia Bergkamp, IMH-E

### NMAIMH competencies addressed:

#### Direct Service Skills:

- Observation & listening
- Screening & assessment
- Responding with empathy

#### Working with Others:

- Building & maintaining relationships
- Empathy & compassion

#### Reflection:

- Contemplation
- Self-awareness
- Curiosity
- Emotional response
- Parallel process

---

It is no secret that the PICCOLO has been one of the more challenging tools for home visitors to complete with families. Although we know that there can be great value in using the tool to capture and reveal the power in the parent-child interaction, barriers continue to arise. This article is intended to offer another perspective on how one home visitor has made the PICCOLO transformative, meaningful and more than just a tool. Through a conversation with Ana, a five year-seasoned home visitor, we explore her journey with the PICCOLO, and the shift in her practice.

“It was sloppy at first,” Ana reports as she talks about her first experiences with the PICCOLO. As a new home visitor she struggled with the tool, specifically the introduction, the process and the discomfort of videotaping. With the support of tools such as the FAN (Gilkerson, 2013), and reflective supervision, Ana was able to discern her feelings from her

families feelings; revealing her *own* resistance and uneasiness, often translating into parent refusals and incompletes. Ana notes that there was a drastic shift in her practice around the PICCOLO when she began to integrate the FAN, which gave the visits more structure. Mindful self-regulation allowed Ana to be present and grounded when discussing the PICCOLO, allowing the families to create their own experiences of the tool. Ana also spoke to the importance of honoring her own feelings by stating, “It doesn’t work if you are not honest with yourself, it’s okay to have feelings, but when we take these feelings to families, our resistance will rub off on them.”

In order for the PICCOLO to be transformative, a trusting relationship must first and foremost be developed. Taking time to know the family gives the home visitor information on how to individualize and tailor the presentation and process of the tool, in order to create buy-in and value. Ana reports using a three step process regarding the PICCOLO. In one visit she begins describing what the PICCOLO is, why we do it and what to expect. During this visit, she explains the “29 Things Parents Do that Support Learning”, using language and terms that will resonate with the family. At the next visit she videotapes the parent and child interacting, offering a choice of when during the visit they would like to do it. Afterwards, she allows time for reflection, asking, “What was it like for you to play with your child?” The third visit is where the magic happens, when she brings the video and the “29 Things...” to review in collaboration with the family. Together they watch the video in its entirety, following a parent-led reflective conversation in reviewing each item. This space offers the family an opportunity to build their reflective capacity and highlight strengths.



The parallel process can be noted in the transformation families have experienced through the PICCOLO. In reviewing of the video with the parents, Ana offers a third-party perspective; often revealing “aha” moments, “delighting in”, attunement, and connection. These are observations the family may have never heard before. When a parent is able to receive encouragement, praise and affirmations from their home visitor, they are likely to transfer these feelings to their child. Ana compares her experience with the PICCOLO to the Circle of Security concept of “the hands” (Cooper, Hoffman, & Powell, 2016). When a home visitor is able to create a safe, holding space for parents to reflect on their parenting, they are more apt to associate positive feelings and meaning to the tool while also being the hands for their child.

Meaning and value are words that Ana’s families are likely to report about the PICCOLO. Families find it so useful to their parenting, that they are now videotaping themselves off the home visiting clock. One family was experiencing challenges in the relationship between their older teenage daughter and toddler, stemming from feelings of exclusion and annoyance. Because the mother felt pride, delight, and connection during her PICCOLO experience, she decided to use the tool on her older child and toddler (she wanted her to see what she saw). The video was able to highlight the beauty in the interactions between sisters, and the idol role that big sister plays.

The PICCOLO is a journey, and we won’t get there overnight as revealed by our seasoned home visitor, Ana. By using our tools, reflective supervision and most importantly knowing our families, we can begin to understand what works and what doesn’t. We are absolutely allowed to have our own feelings around the PICCOLO, but it is what we do with

these feelings that matter most. By knowing ourselves and employing regulation skills, we can allow families to have their own experience of the tool and support families in reaching their greatest potentials.

---

### Questions to encourage discussion and reflection...

- How and when do you start talking about the PICCOLO?
  - What has worked in your practice regarding the PICCOLO and what has not?
  - How do you make the PICCOLO meaningful for the families you work with?
  - What are the mindful self-regulation skills you employ when feeling activated?
- 

### References/Additional Resources

Cooper, G., Hoffman, K., & Powell, B. (2016). *Handouts | Circle of Security*. Retrieved from <https://www.circleofsecurityinternational.com/handouts>

Gilkerson, L., (2013). Erikson Institute Fussy Baby Network