Home Visiting and The FAN  
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NMAIMH competencies addressed:

Direct Service Skills
- Observation & listening
- Responding with empathy

Working with Others
- Building & maintaining relationships
- Empathy & compassion

Reflection
- Contemplation
- Self-awareness
- Curiosity
- Professional/personal development

How do we better attune to ourselves and to the families we work with? The FAN Approach (Facilitating Attuned Interactions) created by Dr. Linda Gilkerson from the Erikson Institute Fussy Baby Network is a powerful tool to help home visitors read the cues of individuals and meet the needs of the people we serve. Not only has the FAN been an integral tool in my work as a home visitor, but I also notice myself “FAN-ing” people in my day-to-day interactions; as I have begun to embody these concepts. The FAN deepened my practice as a home visitor, and I continue to weave the concepts into my current role as a Home Visiting Consultant working with groups. The skills learned through the FAN won’t come as a surprise, rather it will put language and validate much of what we already do as home visitors. This approach enhanced my abilities to “be with” and to sincerely meet individuals and groups where they are.

It is human nature to want to “fix” or “solve” another’s problem, but a transformation can be made when we can take a step back, reflect and share the control. Through this, we can provide an opportunity for empowerment and to build the capacity of the individual or group. We all come to this work with valuable expertise, and of course we want to share it, but it’s vital to read the cues and attune to the individual first. When we are able to do this, we can truly follow the lead of the family, allow them to feel heard and meet their needs. This approach enables the creation of a trusting and safe space, which as we know is imperative in building relationships. The FAN model describes five core processes to help the home visitor match the individual and create attunement.

Through the use of the FAN, we can identify where an individual is by looking at the core processes: Mindful Self-Regulation (Calming), Empathetic Inquiry (Feelings), Collaborative Exploration (Thinking), Capacity Building (Doing), and Integration (Reflecting). Not only are we
looking at the person in front of us, but we are self-reflecting and noticing where on the FAN we are. In order to be fully present and attune to our families, it’s imperative to be aware of our own feelings of dysregulation, and connect to the tools that keep us grounded. We use the FAN to help match the parent with intention to build connection, validity and to allow an opportunity for the parent to access their own capacity. It’s important to note that we may not touch all five core processes in one visit. A person may need to stay in one place longer than another depending on the day or situation. As Dr. Gilkerson states, the FAN can be looked at as a GPS, “it finds where you are, tracks movement and re-routes as needed.” We will have mismatches along the way, but it’s how we repair the mismatch that matters most.

The FAN gives structure to home visits and helps us navigate our time in a more organized way. The FAN talks about the “Big Three”, the beginning, middle and the end of the visit. The beginning question may look like “What has it been like for you to care for your baby since our last visit?” These questions put the focus on the parent’s immediate concern and puts baby front and center. Mid-way through the visit there is a check-in question asking, “Have we gotten to what you most wanted to talk about today?” This question has been a game-changer in my practice. Asking this middle of the Arc question truly honors the partnership between parent and home visitor, ensures that we are meeting the parent’s needs and also offers the home visitor an opportunity to bridge to what they brought to the visit, such as a screening tool or activity. At the end of the visit, we ask the parent to offer three words to describe their baby and “What would you like to remember from our time together?” My initial reaction when introduced to this question was, “What if they say NOTHING?” The reality is they might say “NOTHING”, and that’s OK, here is our chance to validate their feeling and possibly explore. Asking this question opens up a new way of thinking; or better yet reflecting. When we continue to ask and explore, we are creating new practices and new patterns…it will come. Many times we leave visits and cannot gauge the impact of our work together or what actually resonated for the family. This question offers the parent an opportunity to tell you their take-away’s and may leave you with newfound insight. I can promise you, that some of the answers you receive will leave you with goosebumps and highlight the power in your work!

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection...

- How do you know when you are becoming dysregulated? What do you feel in your physical body, thoughts and emotions?
- What Mindful Self-Regulation tools do you use to feel grounded?

References/Additional Resources


New Mexico Home Visiting Program Standards [PDF]. (n.d.)