Using DAP Notes to Support Families  
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NMAIMH competencies addressed

Theoretical Foundations
- Infant/very young child & family centered practice
- Relationship-focused, therapeutic practice

Communicating
- Listening
- Speaking
- Writing

Reflection
- Contemplation

In last month’s article we looked at the writing of DAP notes as a vehicle for capturing the important elements of a home visit with a family, using the metaphor of thinking of the home visit as an opportunity to learn the family’s “song”. Having a written record of that song gives us an opportunity to review our work with families over time and track progress towards goals.

The regular practice of reviewing DAP notes prior to each home visit will help the home visitor make connections between visits for the family and establish continuity across visits. This activity will also help keep the family’s goals in mind during home visits, which can then be discussed with the family to evaluate progress towards achieving those goals and to assess whether the goals have been met or if new goals need to be added. After the visit the home visitor might then record family statements regarding progress towards goals in the “data” section of the DAP notes, share their own perspective in the “assessment” section, and then record “next steps” toward achieving the family goals in the “plan” section.

The act of writing a DAP note can be broken down into components that include, to begin with, recall (of what was observed or heard during a visit). This would be captured under the “data” section of the DAP note. We can put on our Sherlock Holmes cap for this step in the process. This is about “just the facts”. While we were with the family, what actions did we observe, what was said, and was there something significant about the environment that should be noted? We try to keep out speculation and interpretation during this portion of the DAP process. And the more we practice this recall skill, the better we get at making a mental note of our observations when we are with families.
The second component can be thought of as reflection. This is where we record our impressions of what we observed or heard during a visit as part of the “assessment” section of the DAP note. It is important to be sure our assessments are grounded in the data we recorded. This is where we can share what we think about what we observed based on our professional experience and training. Reflective supervision will assist us in this aspect of the work. Writing our assessments down helps us to identify what they are. In turn, we can review these assessments during reflective supervision in order to become aware of any potential judgment or prejudice that might be seeping into our assessment of what we have observed.

A third component of writing DAP notes for each home visit can be thought of as informed decision-making, which would then be entered under the “plan” section. Based on the data and assessment, what needs to be done next? This can take the form of a note to oneself such as, “check-in with family on next visit about outcome of doctor visit”. Or, it may relate to an agreed upon (with the family) next-step, such as relating to a newly formulated goal. This plan for next-steps helps to connect the last home visit with the next one as we work toward helping families achieve their goals.

Overall, the writing of DAP notes is more than just a reiteration of what happened on a home visit. It is a dynamic process that helps us be more thoughtful, reflective, and deliberate in our work with families. Writing the DAP note for a home visit with a family can be thought of as an extension of the actual visit, where working for the family continues after the time spent together is over.

**Talking points for supervisors**

- How are home visitors using DAP notes to track goals and to inform their work with families?
- Have home visitors bring an example of a DAP note to a reflective supervision session for a family where the home visitor is feeling challenged. Review each section of the DAP note asking the following questions:
  1. Is the information recorded in the data section “just the facts”? Are these facts relevant to helping families achieve their goals?
  2. Is the home visitor’s assessment based on professional experience and knowledge or are there elements of judgment or statements that relate more to the personally held values and beliefs of the home visitor?
  3. Looking at the plan section of the DAP note, are there next-steps included that should be discussed with the family to be sure that they are in agreement with them?
- Home visitors might feel compelled to include as much as they can of a visit in the DAP notes. Have a discussion about how to decide on what the essential elements of the visit are that should be included in the data section of the DAP note.