It’s All Connected  
The Use of Tools in Our Ongoing Work  
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NMAIMH competencies addressed

Direct service Skills
- observation and listening
- screening and assessment

Working with others
- building & maintaining relationships

Thinking
- analyzing information
- planning & organizing

As part of the CYFD Home Visiting program, we are required to participate in an evaluation process with the families we work with, administering a number of assessments, using several different screening tools. Last month we looked at the Social History, its value and how it can support our work with families. What is the general intention of the other tools? How are we supposed to introduce them? What do we do with the results? So many different questions come up for us as we think about this aspect of our work....

So, let’s start at the beginning – what tools do we use, what are the intentions of each and how often do we need to do them? The SDM (the standards manual) has a list, brief description and periodicity for all the tools used in our program. There is a list with description on page 9 while the frequency outlined is on page 29 – 30. The screening tools are used as an assessment process and they inform and guide the daily work of home visitors. Tools also provide a way to look at a family and their child’s functioning over time, noting change and growth. The results of screenings should be used as one of the key elements that drive services, contribute to service planning, determine frequency of home visits and help engage families. For example, if a parent/caregiver has a high EPDS, a low SSI and/or a high WAST, this may indicate the need for more frequency of visits. In addition, the developmental screen for infants and toddlers provide invaluable feedback to the parents about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social development of the child. The results of screening tools should be part of the dialogue with families and, ultimately, provide a way to help the family understand themselves and their child in a new way.
When thinking about *how to administer* any of the tools, keep in mind the relationship-based approach that we use as part of our work. Of the following, which supports a trusting relationship – telling a parent you must complete this assessment because it is required while pulling out a questionnaire and filling it out without any discussion about it or spending some time explaining the goal and purpose of the tool, how it could be beneficial and addressing the content in a more conversational manner? The latter builds trust, helps parents understand the value of the assessment and allows questions and concerns to arise more naturally. Even if a parent resists a certain tool, it’s an opportunity to gather more information about what is motivating their decision.

It is through ongoing communication and observation that we build relationships and support parent/child interactions and the screening tools are a vehicle to support that aspect of our work. The screening tools are to be seen as part of our ongoing work with families and are to be used within the context of the relationship. The important areas that the screening tools address are part of our continuous conversations with families that extend way beyond the actual implementation of the screening tool.

**Talking points for supervisors**

- Which tool is the easiest for your staff? Do you know why?
- Which tool do they struggle with most? Do you know why?
- What do your home visitors need in terms of support to be able to use the assessment tools and their results in their ongoing work with families?
- Where do your home visitors struggle with seeing tools as guiding goal setting, service planning and frequency of home visits? What can you do to support them?
- How can your staff support each other in becoming more comfortable in administering the tools?