How Do We Measure Success?
A Look at the Year Ahead
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NMAIMH competencies addressed
Theoretical Foundations
• infant/very young child & family-centered practice
• relationship-focused practice
Reflection
• professional/personal development

I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.
Thomas Edison

How do you measure success in home visiting? That depends on your perspective. The State Legislature often wants to see numbers and hear anecdotes that demonstrate the effectiveness of home visiting. From an administrative point of view, part of a manager’s role is to make sure home visitors meet their required number of visits and that the data gets entered in a timely manner. But how do you, as a home visitor, as you’re leaving a family’s home, measure success?

One way of thinking about that is to ask, does the family, the parent, feel supported by me? Most home visitors understand how important the relationship between themselves and the parent is because relationships are the foundation for the work of home visiting. From the perspective of the home visitor, a supportive relationship is one way we can look at success.

Another way to measure success might be by the completion of a section of curriculum. That’s also important, yet curriculum alone is more about teaching and education, which may or may not make an impact. However, if the learning occurs in the context of relationship, it then becomes more meaningful and is likely to stay with us longer.

So now we’ve added a content piece that is delivered in the context of the relationship. How else could we enrich a home visit? Here we might ask, “Where’s the baby?” Keeping this in mind, in the context of the relationship you have with a family, and using content from curriculum related to a family’s goal, you might have a discussion with a...
parent about the effect of nutrition on her baby’s brain development. Now we’ve started
to bring the baby into the picture.

Is this a successful visit? If the parent is engaged in this conversation with you,
definitely! What else could you do here to create even more of an impact? What if, in
the midst of this conversation, or a conversation about the baby’s crawling skills, you
asked the parent to try a new activity to encourage the baby to crawl? And as you are
watching the interaction between the baby and his parent, you notice this brief little
exchange, where the parent made a silly expression, the baby let out a little chuckle,
and the parent smiled back. And what if you got all excited about that and commented
on that interaction to the parent? You might say something like, “Did you see what just
happened there?” You might elaborate on that and point out how well the parent read
and responded to her baby’s cues (attunement), or how parents often take those little
exchanges for granted but how important they are to the development of the baby’s
social and emotional skills.

Little moments like these might seem insignificant, but what just happened in that
interaction is at the heart of this work and the New Mexico Home Visiting Program. And
it is significant on a number of levels. In part, because the interaction was pleasurable to
both infant and parent, each comes away feeling more confident and competent. In
addition, repeated interactions similar to this build a sense of trust, safety and efficacy
for the infant. And by noticing and commenting on this interaction, this sense of
competence for the parent is enhanced. After all, doesn’t every parent want someone to
notice something positive they just did? Don’t most parents want to hear how important
they are to their child? That type of learning, not just knowledge but experiential
learning, in the moment, can stay with us a lifetime. These types of interaction are what
we refer to as mutual competence.

The September article asks the question, “How do we keep the parent-child relationship
at the center of our work?” This is the question we’ll be asking this year as we re-focus
and explore some of the key elements of the CYFD Home Visiting Program including
how we orient new families, make use of the tools (particularly the PICCOLO), develop
goals with families and document the work. All of this needs to be explored in the
context of the curriculum, models or approaches that are unique to each program and
the community the program serves.

One of the ways we’ll be exploring this is through small, regional workshops. We’ll also
be offering technical assistance and consultation to programs that is individualized, and
takes into account the nature of each program and the community each program
serves. This is important both because each program is unique and because we can all
learn from each other.

Sometimes learning and growing means stepping outside of our comfort zone. And
because we tend to stick with what’s familiar, we all need to encourage each other to
approach our work with an attitude of exploration and curiosity. We need to celebrate
even our willingness to think about trying something that might be a bit different, we
need to share our wisdom, and cheer each other on, because none of us can do this alone.

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection…

- As you reflect on the families you work with, which of those pieces (supportive relationships, curriculum, discussing how the curriculum topic impacts the child, and encouraging/noticing and naming positive interactions) are you most comfortable with? Which one(s) are you least comfortable with?
- What do you, as a home visitor, need to become more comfortable with the pieces that feel less familiar?
- As a supervisor, what can you do to support home visitors to integrate all these pieces?