Coherence in the Work
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NMAIMH competencies addressed
Theoretical Foundations
  • Relationship-focused, therapeutic practice
Reflection
  • Professional/Personal Development
Thinking
  • Analyzing Information

Work is a way of bringing order to chaos, and there’s a basic satisfaction in seeing that we are able to make something a little more coherent by the end of the day.

Alain de Botton

Coherence in the work describes the way in which we provide continuity and make connections within the work of home visiting. It involves all the skills of listening, observation, and tracking themes, and begins from the moment of referral. It is the process of gathering information through the tools, conversation and perceptions, not only during the intake, but during each home visit.

Loretta talked about her brother buying a new home and wondered why he would do that when he was only working part-time. We talked about this and after a bit she mentioned she was kind of jealous. Eduardo kept trying to get Loretta’s attention as she was talking. He took his first steps this week! Loretta really looking forward to next week because Edward’s supposed to be coming, but she also worries he might be seeing someone else cause he gets kind of mad when she asks him why he can’t spend more time at home. She says she gets lonely. Eduardo started pulling stuff out of the garbage can so Loretta told him to stop it.¹

As you read this data portion of the DAP note, do you get a sense of what this mother and the home visitor are working on together (the goals)? It seems like this mother might feel well supported by her home visitor, which is clearly an important part of the home visitor-parent relationship. But does support alone fulfill the mission or purpose of the NM Home Visiting Program? As you read the note, did you notice missed opportunities to discuss the parent-child relationship, explore safety issues, talk about child development or wonder together about social supports?
Making connections occurs within the context of the home visit, as described in the questions above, and in relation to telling the story of that home visit in the DAP note. The glue that provides the common thread are the goals that the home visitor develops in partnership with the family, which are in turn, tied to one of the 18 short term outcomes that are related to the purpose of the NM Home Visiting Program.

Another way to think about coherence in the work of home visiting might be to liken it to making plans to travel somewhere. Before you set out on your journey, you need to decide what you want to get out of your travels. If you decide that you want to take a trip to enjoy the outdoors that, in effect, becomes the purpose or mission. As you consider possible destinations (goals), you wouldn’t choose the mall because that’s not consistent with your purpose for taking a journey. Going camping in the mountains, however, would be consistent with your purpose.

As you head off on your journey you might get side-tracked by some sight-seeing along the way or some side roads that you’d like to explore. We all get distracted from time to time, and sometimes these side roads are even related to our purpose. What becomes important is the ability to navigate back to the main road so we can reach our destination.

Perhaps you also decide to keep a journal of your adventures. At some point in your journey you pull over to get out and stretch, and almost step on a rattlesnake. As you relate your story, would you mention that you were about to step on a rattlesnake and stop there? Would you just forget about the entire event and not even write about it in your journal? In a similar way, we want to follow up on significant discussions and document that follow up in the DAP note narrative.

Coherence in the work also means the ability to tell a story in a way that it hangs together. If a concern or issue is mentioned, or if one of the tools indicated an area of concern or risk, what happened next? Did you have a discussion about it, was there follow-up related to the concern or issue in subsequent visits (and is it noted in your documentation)? Did you at some point offer a referral?
Coming back to the family that we started with, contrast what happened during that visit with the following account:

_Eduardo was trying to get Loretta’s attention by tugging on her shirt when she was talking to me. I asked Loretta what she thought he wanted. Loretta thought he was just bored. As we talked about this some more, Loretta shared that she was feeling lonely and wished Eduardo’s father would come by more often. She told me that Eduardo started walking this week, and his father doesn’t even know it. Loretta’s eyes welled up as she pulled Eduardo closer. Eduardo pushed away, took a couple of steps, smiled, but Loretta didn’t seem to notice. We talked some about Loretta feeling like Eduardo was rejecting her, but eventually got to the point where she began to see that he just wanted to show her what he could do. By the end of the visit Loretta and Eduardo were exchanging smiles and claps as he took a couple of little steps. I also checked in with Loretta to see if she had been able to call the library about story hours (so she could meet some other moms)._¹

Can you see that this narrative hangs together better than the previous one? Do you get a sense of the goals this parent and home visitor might be addressing? Does the tone of the visit seem not only supportive of the parent but meeting the purpose of the program as well?

Part of being an effective home visitor is to be able to hold the family and make meaning of their story. To the extent that there are large gaps and loose ends in the narratives of our home visits, there are likely to be large gaps and loose ends in our work with those families.

**Talking points for supervisors**

- When using the chart audit tool, as you read the home visitor’s narratives in the DAP note:
  - Do you get a sense of who this family is?
  - Are there large gaps in the story?
  - If there are concerns or risk factors identified from the tools, does the home visitor at least bring up the topic for possible discussion?
  - If a concern or issue is discussed, is it clear what the outcome of the discussion was, or is there follow-up conversation on subsequent visits?
  - Are the goals being addressed during at least most of the home visits?
  - Are the goals clearly related to the outcomes of the NM Home Visiting Program?

¹The Assessment & Plan sections of the DAP note were not included in the examples above even though they are important tools in creating a coherent narrative. These will be discussed in the next month’s article.