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

Chaos is merely order waiting to be deciphered.
José Saramago

In last month’s article we started a conversation about coherence in the work of home visiting. Coherence easily applies to many of aspects of home visiting. For example, does the narrative in the DAP note make sense or does it feel disconnected? Do we get a sense of the relationship between the parent and the baby over time? Is there continuity from one visit to the next? Is the intention of the home visit consistent with the family’s goals and the purpose of the home visiting program?

All of these questions relate to aspects of home visiting that are at the same time important and often very challenging for the home visitor to keep in mind. It can be relatively easy to have a conversation with a parent. However, to listen to a parent, keep the program purpose and family goals in mind, and to pay attention to the baby (and the interaction between baby and parent) all at the same time can be overwhelming! And sometimes it is only in reflecting on the visit that we regain our perspective. Fortunately there are some tools that can support the home visitor in making sense out of potential chaos: the Assessment and Plan sections of the DAP note.

Beginning with the second Data section from last month’s article, let's see how we can use the Assessment and Plan in a way that will make for a more coherent understanding of this visit.

D  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.

A  Loretta continues to be very focused on missing Eduardo’s father and misinterpreted Eduardo’s cues when he wanted her to take delight in him. Near the end of the visit she was able to respond to this need and both seemed to really enjoy each other for a couple of minutes.

P  Next week, bring Circle diagram [from Circle of Security] and discuss w/ Loretta & check in to see what might be in the way of calling the library.

The Assessment needs to help us make sense of the Data. It is the home visitor’s impression of, or reflection on key parts of the visit. As you read the Assessment above, does it add coherence or understanding?

Now look at the goals this parent and home visitor developed together:

1. Attend at least 5 story hours at the library over the next 2 months as one way to meet other parents.
2. Loretta will use the Circle [from the Circle of Security] to name Eduardo’s needs at least 1x on most of the visits we have together during the next 3 months.

Does the content of the Data and Assessment sections seem to flow from or be connected to the goals? This connection between the goals and what happens on the visit (and what is documented in the DAP note) provides the common thread of the work the parent and home visitor are engaged in.

The Plan should connect the current visit to the next one, particularly in relation to the family’s goals. It might reference an activity, a handout or a topic to discuss that is related to the goal. The Plan can also be thought of as the follow up to the visit that just took place.

Why is all this important? It helps the home visitor and the family stay focused on the purpose of the program and the reason the home visitor is sitting with the parent and her child(ren). It provides the home visitor with a roadmap, a way back when we stray too far from the path.

Talking points for supervisors

- Does the content of the DAP note reflect the goals the parent is working on?
- Does the Plan provide continuity between this visit and the next?
- When you review the Assessment and Plan sections of the previous visit’s DAP note, does it help prepare the home visitor for the next visit?
- What are some of the ways your program supports home visitors to pay attention/remember their intent or purpose for the home visit?