Screening Tools: Taking a Closer Look at How It All Fits Together
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NMAIMH competencies addressed
Direct Service Skills
- Observation & Listening
- Screening & Assessment
Theoretical Foundations
- Infant/Very Young Child & Family-Centered Practice
- Relationship-Focused Therapeutic Practice

When you think about screening tools, what images are conjured in your head? Something useful or just another chore? In the home visiting program, we utilize a variety of screening tools. The purpose behind each of them may differ; however, the overarching idea is that they will help us better support the parent-child relationship by addressing any concerns related to the parent, child or the parent-child interaction.

To better understand, let’s look at our work with a family as a puzzle. When we first meet with the family, it is like a brand new puzzle, fresh out of the box, ready to assemble. Each time we go visit the family, through our genuine concern and listening, we are able to start to put some pieces together of who this family is. The screening tools are an integral part of this process.

Here are some questions to ponder to help assemble this puzzle. What factors are important to know about this family to best support them? If we discovered a parent was depressed, how would that impact their ability to meet their baby’s needs as well as they would like to (postnatal depression screen)? What would the baby learn about the world if their parent rarely smiled at her or did not often pick her up when she cried? If we discovered that domestic violence was present in the home, would this environment create a sense of safety (interpersonal violence screening tool)? How would feeling unsafe influence the baby’s ability to learn?

If we want insight into how one parents, we would want to know what their early experiences were with their own parents. This would inform us what expectations the parent has in terms of support, affection, and trusting others. This information would not only guide us to how they would interact with their own child, but also with us. Additionally, the tools that look at the parent-child interaction, such as the PICCOLO, allows us to witness parent-child interactions and what the parent values in parenting.
Most importantly, we would look at celebrating what’s working with the parent, as many parents do not have this opportunity to reflect and receive positive feedback on what they are doing well.

How might the Maternal-Child Health/Demographic Information Form provide valuable information about the family? What might we think about if there have been numerous trips to the emergency room? What impact might it have if we knew the family had limited access to resources (health insurance, food stamps, etc.)? How would it influence us if we knew a parent was actively using drugs in the household? All of these components would help us add another piece to the puzzle.

Similarly, the Perinatal Questionnaire would give us a closer look into what the pregnancy was like and what care the mom received after giving birth. What questions might come up for you if you discovered the mom received no prenatal care and the pregnancy was not planned?

In terms of the child’s development, the ASQ-3 and ASQ-SE would enable us to add more pieces to the puzzle by assessing where the baby is at with his gross motor, fine motor, problem-solving, personal-social, and communication skills. The ASQ-SE allows us to get a closer look into how the child is progressing from a social-emotional perspective. How might we use the information from these tools and the conversation that follows to address any parental concerns and how might we use the parent-child relationship to enhance these skills?

The tools are a part of an ongoing conversation with families. When using a curriculum, think about how a tool and a piece of the curriculum could go hand-in-hand. Finally, keep in mind that if parents are sharing information with you, it is because you have allowed them to feel safe, trusting you with intimate details of their life. This of course speaks to the relationship you have been able to form with the parent and in part, the ability of the home visitor to make the tools part of the conversation.

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection…

- Always ask yourself: In what way does this particular screening tool help me to keep the parent-child relationship in mind?
- How can I incorporate the findings from the screening tools to support the parent child relationship into my ongoing work with this family?
- How can I explain this screening tool to the parent(s) from a parent-child relationship framework?
- How can you listen for possible family goals when obtaining information from the screening tools?