**Early Years - Identifying Need - Observation**

Observation is key to understanding a child’s development. Assessments made through observation will help you to see patterns in behaviours, possible barriers, and areas of strength and need; these will inform your planning and next steps.

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| **Focused Observation Strategies** |
| **Narrative Observation**: Plan several periods of 5 to 10 minutes where you can unobtrusively watch and record everything you see the child do. Avoid making any judgements as you write and be as objective as possible. It is impossible to capture everything so make a number of observations before drawing any conclusions. It is important to capture different activities, different times of day and different days of the week.These observations will show you what a child does when their activity is not being directed: * what or who they choose to play with
* if they are able to make a choice of activity
* how long they stay with something they have chosen to do
* how they respond to the environment around them
* whether they stop and listen when the whole class is addressed
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| **Structured observation**: During this type of observation you will be looking out for a particular behaviour, for example, starting a conversation with an adult, taking turns or changing activity, for periods of 5 to 10 minutes. You make a mark for each time the child performs the target behaviour in a set number of minutes. Again, you need to do this several times and in different contexts. These observations will tell you the frequency of a particular behaviour. You may notice for example that a child talks to others more often outdoors than indoors. |
| **Tracking observation**: Start with a sketch map of your environment (inside and out), with all your activity areas marked. Observing again for a period of 5 to 10 minutes, mark the child’s journey around the classroom, perhaps with a note of how long they spend at a particular activity. These observations will show you where a child chooses to go:* are they ‘flitting’ from activity to activity without engaging fully in anything?
* do they follow a repetitive route around the activities?
* do they avoid the areas that might require a particular skill (such as the home corner or story area)?
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| **Incidental notes or observations** (sticky notes, incident records, and home/ school diaries): These observations will help you identify patterns or common circumstances. It can be useful to sort them by different criteria – time of day, day of the week, adult-led or child initiated. |