

## Extend Your Learning Resources

### OBSERVE, REFLECT & SUPPORT

#### Observe

##### The purpose of observing staff is to:

- Identify effective teaching practices so early learning professionals can be recognized
- Identify early learning professionals who may need some support or coaching in a specific area

##### Before you begin observing your staff:

- Determine your evaluation criteria, that is, what are you looking for?
- Create an observation schedule:
  - Include formal and informal observations
  - Vary the time of day you observe staff
  - Vary the length of observation times
- Communicate the “why” and “how” of observations to all staff
- Make sure all staff have access to your evaluation criteria, that is, make sure they know what types of interactions, activities, you’ll be watching for
- Answer questions staff may have about the process and results of observations

##### During an observation, be sure to:

- Blend in- Position yourself somewhere in the room out of the way, where you can observe everything. You want to hear what is said, but not be noticed, and not be a distraction to children or the employee.
- Be objective- Your goal is to document and observe what is happening. Keep your notes factual, no matter how you are responding emotionally to what you observe.
- Stay positive- Keep a pleasant face and a positive attitude. Projecting positivity allows those being observed to relax and act more naturally.

*It can feel uncomfortable to formally observe or evaluate staff or volunteers, especially if there are just a few staff or volunteers in a small program. Intentionally supporting early learning professionals and volunteers is important for their personal growth and for the quality of your program. While observations can feel formal, feel free to adapt the Observe, Reflect, and Support routine to meet your needs and your supervision style.*

#### Reflect

Using your observation notes, this is your opportunity to sit with your early learning professional and have a two-way conversation. It is your opportunity to reflect aloud to him or her what you saw, and to listen as they reflect on your observations. When you listen and are open to the feedback, you will build trust. This trust allows you to learn about your early learning professional and better provide support for their growth.

**Before the meeting...**

- Take time to reflect on your notes
- Focus what you want to communicate to the early learning professional
- Clarify what you want to learn to give you a better picture of what you observed
- Set up a meeting with the early learning professional

**During the meeting...**

- Thank the early learning professional for meeting with you and being part of this process
- Define the goal of the “Reflection” portion conversation: mutual understanding of the events observed
- Describe what you observed- using clear, person-first language “I observed... I noticed”
- Ask the early learning professional to provide information they feel may be missing or to explain their approach in a given situation
- Listen with empathy to their reaction or questions about your observation
- Ask yourself: Do I have all the information I need to provide good support? Does the early learning professional have all the information needed to receive my support?

**Ways to Support...**

- During the meeting, look for ways that you can offer support
- Use the meeting time to begin setting a professional development plan, if needed

Depending on the early learning professional's reaction to the conversation, it may be necessary to take a short break or schedule a follow-up meeting where you can provide support and create an action plan

## Support

### There are 3 basic types of support you provide:

- **Positive Feedback-** Did you know high performing teams share positive feedback 6x more often than low performing teams? Positive feedback makes employees feel known, valued, and motivated.
- **Constructive Feedback-** Constructive feedback is essential for building up your early learning professional, not breaking them down. Do you see behavior or attitude that needs to be changed so the individual can be more successful? Addressing these situations through constructive feedback allow you to address small issues before they become big issues.
- **Coaching-** The goal of coaching is proactively helping all early learning professionals grow. Whether it is building new skills, increasing independence, or improving the quality of work, coaching is encouraging early learning professionals to take ownership of their professional development.

### Your support should be:

- **Specific-** “When [child] was crying because he didn’t get a turn on the slide, I saw you....” Is more effective and meaningful to the receiver than “Good job on the playground”.
- **“Owned by the giver”-** Start your sentences with “I” or “My”; example, “I saw what happened on the playground between you and Mary today.” Beginning sentences with “You” can sound accusatory and turn the receiver off to listening.
- **Delivered in a supportive climate-** A supportive climate is not only what you say, but where you say it. Strive to deliver feedback in person, in a distraction, disruption free environment.
- **Timely-** “If you see something, say something”. This applies to positive and constructive feedback. The longer the lag time between the action and feedback, the less impactful the feedback becomes.
- **Followed up with an action plan-** Work with the early learning professional to create an achievable plan of action, which includes goals, timeline, and follow-up meetings. This action plan could be a response to constructive feedback or to coaching.

*Self-Reflection (Early learning professionals who conduct staff observations, take a moment to answer these reflection questions).*

*I routinely observe my staff because I want our*

*program to... I routinely observe my staff because I*

*want my staff to....*

*In our program, observations are meant to....*