CiRCLe

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION TOOL

Infant & Toddler

Teacher _____

Center _____

Coach _____

School Year _____

Observation Date(s) _____

CHILDREN'S LEARNING INSTITUTE

UTHealth
The University of Texas
Health Science Center at Houston

INSTRUCTIONS

Purpose

The CIRCLE Classroom Observation Tool (COT) is a formative assessment tool for teachers. This version catalogs teaching behaviors that are known to make up high quality caregiving and instruction in infant and toddler classrooms. Coaches use the COT to identify which teaching behaviors need coaching support. Coaches then use this information to set goals with their teachers to improve these instructional behaviors.

Using the Online COT

The following form is designed to be used for notetaking during a single observation. We encourage you to record final observation scores in the online version of the COT, which can be found on the CLI Engage dashboard under *Quality Improvement and Innovation* after logging in to the platform (cliengage.org). Access is free for TSR Online eligible organizations (**click here to confirm eligibility and sign up**). Organizations not eligible under TSR Online can access the system for a reasonable fee. Contact clisolutionsgroup@uth.tmc.edu for more information.

Users of the online system are able to record multiple observations, set short-term goals, access professional development resources, generate reports, and track teachers' progress over time.

Click here to access the How-To Guide for more information on using the online system.

Organization

The goals on the COT are organized by developmental domains. Some developmental domains are further divided into subdomains. Each goal is also leveled to help the coach prioritize goals. Level 1 (purple) goals are foundational skills and should be prioritized first before moving on to Level 2 and Level 3 behaviors. Level 2 (blue) goals target increasingly advanced teaching strategies. Level 3 (green) goals include highly differentiated instruction and/or self-reflective teaching strategies.

General Scoring Information

For each goal, mark one of the following:

- OB (Observed) if the behavior was seen or heard during the classroom visit.

- OB (Observed) and NS (Needs Support) if the behavior was observed but requires additional coaching assistance to help the teacher master that skill (e.g., some clear opportunities were missed or the quality of the teaching behavior needs improvement).

- Leave blank any teaching behavior that was not observed or does not apply to the age range of the classroom (e.g., items specified as infants only or toddlers only).

The COT allows the coach to write notes in the Evidence / Notes column. These notes will be helpful during the feedback session with the teacher as goals are being set.

Baseline Observation

When first working with a teacher, the coach will conduct a baseline observation to see what behaviors the teacher is already using and which need more support. To get this baseline, the coach will schedule a two-hour observation when the lead teacher is present, children are in their regular class, and most children have arrived. The coach will observe how the teacher interacts with the children and will not provide feedback during this two-hour period. The results of this observation will help the coach and the teacher determine which goals to set to improve teaching practice.

Updates to COT Online

As the coach continues to work with the teacher, the teacher will begin to meet goals. The coach can record the date the goal was met in the Goal-Met Date column on the online COT. Any additional teaching behaviors that were observed will be marked in the Updates column. The coach will continue to set new goals with the teacher based on how the teacher progresses throughout the year.

CIRCLE CLASSROOM OBSERVATION TOOL: INFANT & TODDLER

Teacher _____   Center _____

Coach _____   Obs. Date(s) _____

PL=Priority Level   OB=Observed   NS=Observed but Needs Support

PL	Teaching Behavior		Evidence / Notes
**LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION**		
PROVIDING RICH LANGUAGE		
1	**Labels objects, concepts, and actions** throughout the day.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	**Describes objects** (how they look, feel, smell, etc.), **experiences** (e.g., "that was a long walk"), **or feelings or internal states** (e.g., "she looks tired").	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	**Makes comparisons** by talking **about** how **things** are the same (or not the same) and by talking about opposites (e.g., big/small).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Explains how things work** or **why things are done a certain way** (e.g., "We are going to walk quietly because the babies are sleeping").	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Links new objects, ideas, or concepts by making connections** to something the child already knows or has experienced (e.g., "That cat is black, just like the one we read about in the book yesterday.")	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Narrates what is happening** (e.g., "Ava is eating green peas today. Here comes the spoon!").	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**"Thinks aloud" by saying his or her perspective out loud** (e.g., "My favorite fruit is banana. I wonder if there will be bananas in this story?").	☐ OB ☐ NS	
ELICITING LANGUAGE		
2	**Elicits language from children by asking** a variety of both closed- and open-ended questions.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Encourages two-way conversation** by pausing, making eye contact, asking questions, and allowing children to both initiate and respond to conversational topics.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	**Provides opportunities** for children **to participate** both verbally and nonverbally in group activities.	☐ OB ☐ NS	

PL	Teaching Behavior		Evidence / Notes

RESPONDING CONTINGENTLY

PL	Teaching Behavior		Evidence / Notes
2	**Paces interactions with children** by speaking and moving at rates that match children's speed and pausing **to allow turn-taking in conversation** (including with nonverbal children).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	**Extends children's interest by adding new content or ideas** to broaden children's understanding or vocabulary (e.g., child points to a plane, teacher says "That's plane flying in the sky. Planes can go really fast. I wonder where that one is going?").	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	**Accepts children's incorrect communication and gently rephrases it**, modeling the correct grammar and pronunciation or adding words to make a complete sentence.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	**Provides an upward scaffold** in response to children's correct and complete verbalizations and gestures **by providing additional details** to deepen children's background knowledge and vocabulary.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	**Provides a downward scaffold** in response to children's incorrect, incomplete, or missing verbalizations and gestures by using techniques such as **simplifying the question, starting a word or phrase, and prompting for imitation**.	☐ OB ☐ NS	

EARLY LITERACY

BOOK READING

PL	Teaching Behavior		Evidence / Notes
1	**Reads with an enthusiastic or dramatic voice** and moderates tone based on the content of the book.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	**Shares control of the book** by letting children hold it, turn the pages, etc.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	**Begins book reading by capturing children's attention** and inviting their interest in the book. (for infants, positioning / for toddlers, rounding them up, excited).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	**Pauses to talk** and ask questions **about pictures in the book**.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	**Encourages participation in book readings** (e.g., encourages children to touch/hold books; points to pictures, responds to questions, acts out the story).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Sings songs and recites rhymes**, and encourages children's participation.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Uses props and/or extension activities** that are linked to book content (e.g., puppets, dramatic play around book plot).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Links book content to children's own experiences**.	☐ OB ☐ NS	

PL	Teaching Behavior		Evidence / Notes
	PRINT AND WRITING		
2	**Encourages play with drawing, painting, or writing tools** that promote fine motor skills.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	**Models writing as opportunities arise** (e.g., writing children's names on artwork; dictating children's vocalizations) (toddlers only).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	Takes advantage of incidental opportunities to **point out environmental print and letters of the alphabet** (toddlers only).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
	COGNITIVE SKILLS		
	OBSERVING AND THINKING SKILLS		
2	Draws attention to details of objects, actions, and events to **encourage observation**; encourages toddlers to verbalize their own observations.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Demonstrates and explains how things work** to help children understand cause and effect.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Talks about sequence** including steps to complete a task, repeated patterns, a daily schedule, or time concepts (e.g., today, tomorrow, before, next).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	Promotes **flexibility in thinking** by playing games that include **small surprises** or **hide-and-find**, offering **open-ended materials** and encouraging **multiple uses** (e.g., using a block as a phone), or **explaining schedule changes**.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	**Models "thinking aloud"** by talking as s/he **thinks through a problem, considers options,** or reflects on an outcome.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
	HANDS-ON LEARNING		
1	Offers **opportunities and experiences** for infants and toddlers to **explore using all five senses**.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	Follows children's lead to **maintain their attention** and support their interests.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	**Encourages imitation** when demonstrating skills and extending play.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Encourages continued effort, persistence,** or hard work on a task or problem.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Models and joins in pretend play** (with or without props) (toddlers only).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Engages children in math activities** such as shape recognition, counting, measuring, sorting, or classifying (toddlers only).	☐ OB ☐ NS	

PL	Teaching Behavior		Evidence / Notes

SCAFFOLDING LEARNING

PL	Teaching Behavior		Evidence / Notes
3	Scaffolds children's learning by **simplifying** (e.g., **breaking down task into smaller steps**; demonstrating and **prompting for imitation; starting a task for child to finish**; giving **hand-over-hand** assistance; giving **clues** or prompts; **simplifying a task by narrowing choices**; offering a simpler version of a toy).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	Scaffolds children's learning by adding **challenge** (offering a more **difficult task**; offering **more choices**; suggesting a **new challenge**.)	☐ OB ☐ NS	

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BUILDING TRUST AND EMOTIONAL SECURITY

PL	Teaching Behavior		Evidence / Notes
1	**Responds promptly and sensitively** (warmly and with genuine concern/understanding) to children's verbal and nonverbal signals, feelings, interests, and needs.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	**Expresses warmth and affection** through positive nonverbal behaviors such as getting down to **child's eye level, smiling, cuddling, using reassuring touch, gentle tone of voice**, and **pacing** that matches the child's energy level.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	**Provides comfort** to children in distress by responding quickly and calmly to provide **physical comfort**, or simply using **gentle, soothing words**.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	Is **consistent and predictable** in responsive behaviors, following through with commitments to children, and being consistent in classroom management and setting limits on behavior.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	Follows a **consistent daily schedule and routines** (may be shown by including **signals for transition routines**, references to visual daily schedule, talks about schedule, talks about change in daily routine when needed).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Explains what comes next** using simple reminders, especially before and during transitions.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	Models **respect for diversity** including culture, ethnicity, gender roles, special needs, and home languages, includes reading books or using materials that reflect diverse backgrounds.	☐ OB ☐ NS	

PROMOTING EMOTIONAL UNDERSTANDING

PL	Teaching Behavior		Evidence / Notes
2	**Labels feelings** and emotions expressed by infants and toddlers, and may also **label teacher's own feelings** in an appropriate way.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	**Encourages** children to **talk about their feelings**; may include modeling talking about own feelings, feelings of peers and/or characters in a story, and inviting children to continue such conversation (toddlers only).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	Makes **connections** between children's or storybook characters' **emotions, actions, and events** (e.g., "Joey stomped his foot because he felt mad"; "The pig was scared when the wolf blew his house down").	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	**Plans activities** to support children's **understanding of emotions** through songs, book readings, pretend play, or other teacher-initiated activities (toddlers only).	☐ OB ☐ NS	

PL	Teaching Behavior		Evidence / Notes

SUPPORTING COOPERATION AND SELF-REGULATION

PL	Teaching Behavior		Evidence / Notes
1	Uses descriptive, **specific praise** to encourage positive behavior (includes praising children's actions, ideas, cooperation with peers, following directions, etc.).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Offers a positive behavior to replace a child's negative or undesired behavior**; tells and/or models what children should do instead (e.g., "Let's draw on this paper instead of the wall," or "Use gentle hands like this." Substitute a toy/activity when a child wants a toy that is already in use).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Offers choices** between two or three things to allow children to practice independence and build self-confidence. *Excludes* choices offered to redirect behavior.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	Offers verbal and physical **cues for self-control** such as **gestures, songs/rhymes** that remind children to use specific behaviors, modeling **how to ask for help,** or **offering alternative behavior choices** (toddlers only).	☐ OB ☐ NS	

SUPPORTING SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

PL	Teaching Behavior		Evidence / Notes
1	Engages in **back-and-forth play**, (e.g., peek-a-boo, rolling a car or ball back and forth) including **sharing control** and giving child enough time to take a turn.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Models prosocial behaviors** throughout the day, including using **polite manners, offering comfort, modeling turn-taking** and **sharing**.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	Helps children **share space** by finding places for them to sit or stand when needed, providing enough materials, and modeling cooperative play.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Supports turn-taking** by modeling, explaining why and how to take turns, prompting, and specifically praising taking turns.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	**Plans small or large group activities for peer interactions** by creating opportunities to engage in back-and-forth peer play, work together on a task, or group songs/games/dances.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	**Prompts children for peer interaction behaviors** such as words and gestures for greetings, polite manners, invitations to play, requests to peers, and responses to questions from peers.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
3	Helps **resolve conflicts with peers** by staying close during play times, remaining calm, giving children words and actions they can use with each other, setting limits to keep children safe, offering help, and encouraging empathy.	☐ OB ☐ NS	

PL	Teaching Behavior		Evidence / Notes

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

SUPPORTING FINE AND GROSS MOTOR SKILLS

PL	Teaching Behavior		Evidence / Notes
1	Engages **infants** in **tummy time activities** (infants only).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	Provides **supported sitting for infants** (e.g., in lap, various kinds of seats) (infants only).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	Promotes **gross motor skills** (crawling, pulling to stand, jumping, dancing, ball play, running, climbing, balancing, etc.) with **games, toys, and songs.**	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	Promotes **fine motor practice** (e.g., grasping skills, building with blocks, lacing, simple puzzles, fill-and-empty activities); supports **hand-eye coordination** and/or **using both hands together**. *Excludes drawing, painting, or writing tools; see Early Literacy domain.*	☐ OB ☐ NS	

PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

PL	Teaching Behavior		Evidence / Notes
1	**Responds** promptly to **signals of physical needs**, including pain, discomfort, need for diaper change/potty; hunger or feeding cues; sleepiness.	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	Teaches **correct words** for **body parts** and their **functions.**	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	**Models and encourages independence in hygiene routines** (e.g., washing and drying hands, wiping face, blowing nose, covering cough, brushing teeth) (toddlers only).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	**Supports and encourages independence in feeding skills** (e.g., holding bottle, using fingers and/or utensils) (older infants and toddlers only).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	**Supports and encourages independence in dressing/ undressing** (e.g., taking off shoes, unzipping jacket, putting arms through sleeves) (toddlers only).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
1	**Supports and encourages independence in toileting routines** (e.g., pulling pants down and up at potty time, flushing) (toddlers only).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Talks about** and **offers nutritious food.**	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	Teaches **words and actions** related to **safety** (e.g, hot, dirty, safe/not safe, danger, stop, spit it out).	☐ OB ☐ NS	
2	**Models** and **encourages expression of internal states** by **verbalizing observations** of physical needs (e.g., hunger, fullness, sleepiness, pain, needing a diaper change/potty) and encouraging children to **express their needs.**	☐ OB ☐ NS	

Short-Term Goal Report

Teacher Name: Date:

CHOOSE COT GOALS

	Domain	Goal
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

ACTION PLAN

On My Own

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With Support

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Resources / Additional Comments

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