

**\*\*Please note the PRESENT Training Guidance is to be used prior to accessing the PRESENT Tool\*\***

# CAPTURING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF PRE-VERBAL CHILDREN

**BE PRESENT TO PRESENT THE CHILD**

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**THE WORDS THAT ADULTS USE TO DESCRIBE THE LIVES OF A BABY/TODDLER ARE POWERFUL; THEY CAN PROVIDE BABY/TODDLER WITH OPPORTUNITY OR CONVERSELY, CAN LIMIT THE INFLUENCE THE BABY/TODDLER HAS ON THEIR WORLD AND EXPERIENCE**

- Immerse yourself in the experience of the baby/toddler
- Acknowledge the inner feelings that your observations provoke
- Reflect on the experience through the baby/toddler perspective

**Ask Yourself**

... Consider and reflect on your feelings that your observations have provoked? Do they support you to focus on the baby/toddler perspective? Is this challenging- if so why? Reflect on what this could tell you about the lived experience of the baby/toddler. What does it feel like to be a baby/toddler living/being here? If the baby/toddler could tell you, would they look forward to the day ahead and end it feeling content? Do you have the sense that the parent is attuned and empathetic to the baby/toddler's feeling and needs? Does baby/toddler feel safe and loved? Does this baby/toddler have someone in their life who really loves and cares about them?

## **PERSPECTIVE OF THE BABY/TODDLER**

Allow yourself to be with the baby/toddler; get down on the floor with them, interact and engage. This will enable you to focus on the individual baby/toddler and open up for the impact the baby/toddler can have on you.

## **RELATIONSHIPS, RECIPROCITY AND RESPONSIVENESS**

Protect time in your conversation with parents to be solely about the baby/toddler. Observe what parents say about the baby/toddler and how they say it. Asking parents to provide a narrative about their baby/toddler will be self-evident way of finding the voice of the baby/toddler. Is the communication used about and with the baby/toddler calm, playful, nurturing, fun, gentle, or is it confusing and irritating? Do parents speak fondly or negatively about their baby/toddler? Do you observe 'turn-taking' in communicating? Do parent and baby/toddler respond to one another? Is this positive? Do parents discuss their baby/toddler needs/ milestone achievements or is there an absence of this?

## **ENVIRONMENT**

Observe the environment through the perspective of the baby/toddler. Is there a safe place for baby/toddler to eat, sleep and rest/lie/sit/play and explore appropriate to their age and stage of development? Are there safety hazards within the environment such as cigarette smoke or clutter? Does the baby/toddler have opportunity for fresh air, outdoors and nature? If the TV is on, is the show appropriate? Is the TV always on?

## **STIMULATION**

Babies/toddler's are naturally curious and playful and will instigate interaction with people and the environment which is crucial to their development. Are there age and stage appropriate toys, books and play space? Is baby/toddler supported and encouraged to play and explore, both through interaction and independently? Do parents/caregivers recognise when baby/toddler is bored or over-stimulated and appropriately respond? Do parents provide interaction with baby/toddler one to one using their voice, face and touch?

## **EMPATHY AND EARLY ATTACHMENT**

Bonding and attachment rarely happens immediately for all parents and more usually takes time to develop. However, consistent care and closeness during the first 2 years are most critical for forming attachments. Do parents focus on the feelings, thoughts and experiences of their baby/toddler? Do they speculate aloud about why they might be upset? Is baby/toddler picked up and soothed when they are distressed? Do they settle as a result? Do you observe any of these **SECURE ATTACHMENT BEHAVIOURS** during times of stress or exploration?

1. Wanting to be near their primary caregiver
2. Returning to their caregiver if they feel afraid
3. Treating their caregiver as a base of security from which they can explore their environment
4. Distress when caregivers leave but easily comforted when they return? Between 6 months and 2 years approximately, do you observe separation anxiety when the care-giver leaves?

## **NEEDS AND NURTURE**

Optimal brain development and baby/toddler mental health are reliant on needs being met by a nurturing care-giver. Basic needs are essential but so too are the quality of interactions between and parent. Does baby/toddler appear unhappy/ happy? Is baby/toddler settled and vocalising perhaps or crying? Could this be due to hunger/ tiredness/ illness/ full nappy/ boredom? Do parents/ caregivers respond appropriately to any needs that the baby/toddler is trying to communicate? Is baby appropriately dressed for the temperature and activity? Are sleep requirements met?

## **TIME TO VALUE AND FEEL VALUED**

Does the primary carer take time to be 'with' baby/toddler, away from distractions to focus solely on them and what they are communicating and expressing? These moments can be during care activities such as nappy changing or play. Is baby/toddler being held, soothed and interacted with? Are routines/ arrangements appropriate to the age and stage of the baby? When baby/toddler needs something do parents/ carers prioritise their needs over their own? Do caregivers spend time "in the moment" with baby/toddler, observing them and responding to their cues in ways that both parent and baby/toddler enjoys? Are the baby/toddler's needs met with competing demands of siblings?