

## **4.6 - OBSERVATION NOTES**

**RATIONALE:** To provide factual observations of the participants' use of the service which may assist the parties and the Courts in determining future access arrangements.

**STANDARD:** Staff must record factual observations of the interaction between the child and the parties, including interactions with staff at all visits and exchanges. Notes are written by staff who directly observe interactions. Notes do not include opinions or recommendations

\*We are often asked why we do not video record Supervised Parenting Time or type the observation notes during the visit or exchange. Videotaping, especially in our group setting, would include other parties and their children as well as staff and could be subpoenaed thereby creating a privacy issue. If you have them you have to keep them and be prepared to hand them over. Children feel more secure with staff on hand in the room as opposed to being under the eye of a video camera which also cannot intervene if need be. Video tapes can also be edited.

**POLICY:** Observation notes are written by staff who directly observe interactions and completed at the time of the visit/exchange.

### **PROCEDURES:**

- Notes include:
  - The date the visit or exchange occurred
  - Names of all parties involved, including any authorized guests and persons who may pick up/drop off the children and their relationship to the child; as well as any support people, interpreters, service animals or OCL observers
  - Birthdates of the children
  - Any allergies, medical conditions or special needs.
  - Any instructions provided by the Residential party regarding the care of the children during the visit or exchange, including anything the Residential Party or Visiting Party has provided for the visit or exchange such as snacks or gifts as per the terms of the Service Agreement
  - Any fee payments made by the parties, without specifying the amount
  - Interactions and conversations exchanged
  - Comments/requests made by the parties and/or children
  - A clear summary of any incident affecting the health, safety or well-being of any child, participant or staff.
  - During an exchange, the time the child was dropped off by the Residential Party is to be noted as well as a brief description of the conversation that took place prior to the party leaving or the child being separated from the Residential Party

- Any activities and/or discussions that the child and Centre staff were involved in with the Visiting Party during the period prior to the child's departure, should also be noted (procedure is repeated when the child is returned to the Residential Party)
- Notes are recorded objectively and reflect observations made from the time the child/each party arrives at the access Centre
- Staff/volunteers/recorders who complete Observation Notes are only identified by their initials or their first name and last initial.
- To maintain confidentiality, any personal service user information given to staff, such as a new address or telephone number is NOT included in the Observation Notes. Such information is recorded separately and subsequently transferred to the participant file and the iSAID system.
- The note taker documents conversations between parties and children using direct quotes, as opposed to paraphrasing. Intonation (e.g., loud voice, whisper) and non-verbal actions (e.g., a hug, a kick) are included.
- It is important for staff to document displays of parenting skills, for example, how the party handles conflict between siblings.
- If during the time of the visit/exchange, any type of intervention occurs, then such intervention is clearly noted.
- Observation notes should not be altered. If any errors are made, the errors are to be corrected by drawing a single line through the error and initialling and dating the change.

#### Notes for Cancellations

- When a visit or exchange is cancelled, the notes contain the following information:
  - Who cancelled the visit or exchange,
  - Why, when and how notification was given,
  - When the other party was informed of the cancellation.
- A visit or exchange that begins, but is ended early is not a cancellation, but an early termination. Such early endings are recorded in the notes with an explanation as to the reason. Staff refer to iSAID definitions for a list of the types of reasons for cancellation.
- Failure of a Residential or visiting party or both to attend a scheduled visit (i.e. no show) is documented in the Observation Notes

#### Situations of Abuse/ Suspected Abuse

- Staff/volunteers note any bumps or bruises on the child that are visible while the child is at the visit location and include a physical description of the injury.
- If a party informs a staff that the child has a bruise and describes the reason for the injury, for example, on their hand as a result of a fall while playing at

home, staff record this in the Observation Notes. Staff also relay this information verbally to the visiting party at the beginning of the visit or exchange.

- If a disclosure of abuse is made by the Residential party, Visiting party or the child, staff record the details of the disclosure in the Observation Notes.

#### Review of Notes

- The staff who records observations on the Observation Notes Form has a second staff review their notes as soon as possible after completion.
- A review of all Observation Notes is conducted as a means to ensure the notes are completed and maintained and identify any patterns which may be concerning.
- All Observation Notes are reviewed, signed, and dated by the Coordinator/designate or by a person delegated by the Coordinator for review, prior to filing and being used for reports.

#### Access to Observation Notes and Files

- Observation Notes refer to the notes made during visits and exchanges and does NOT include the rest of the Participant File, such as intake information, reports from other sources or telephone logs.
- No person is permitted to read/access the notes immediately following a visit/exchange.
- Professionals require releases from both parties in order to come into the office to review the Observation Notes or to obtain a copy of the Observation Notes.
- Permitting participants or other professionals to access/read Observation Notes, except for reports, is at the discretion of the Centre Coordinator
- Notes are not photocopied by staff at the time of a visit/exchange or at the time of review/reading of notes. If the reader wishes to have a copy of the notes, they must make a written request to the Coordinator.
- Anyone reading/accessing Observation Notes is monitored at all times by a Centre employee to ensure that the notes are not copied or modified.
- Reading/accessing notes is not an opportunity for someone to argue about the contents of the notes.
- A record is made anytime someone comes in to read the Observation Notes that includes the name of the person who read the notes, the name of the staff member who monitored them, and the date.