Introducing the CHEERS Check-In to Families

The CHEERS Check-In Tool is a great opportunity to partner with parents to support parent-child relationships, and you can set the tone from the beginning with how you introduce the CCI to families. You’ll be completing it at least twice a year with each family, and so this will become a familiar activity, just like an ASQ or ASQ-SE. The CHEERS Check-In should feel to families like a supported interaction with their baby, rather than an “assessment” or “tool.”

It is important to let parents know that you will be observing the parent-child interaction ahead of the visit so you can plan it out together. This will help make sure the parent is ready and comfortable. Together with the parent, you’ll want to think about what activity they are most comfortable doing with the baby. This could be a play activity (like tummy-time or other play activity) or some other routine care task, like feeding, diapering, or bathing. You’ll want to let the parent know that you’ll be observing without disruption for 5-10 minutes.

You’ll be observing the focus child and one primary parent or caregiver during the CCI, and so to the degree it is possible, the home visitor should set up the environment so there are no excess distractions (televisions, radios, and other distractions so the play is not interrupted). When that is not possible, it is fine to use the CHEERS Check-In if there are others present, such as siblings, a parenting partner, or other family members. When preparing to administer the tool, be flexible and reschedule if the child is fussy, tired, or not feeling well or if parent is not comfortable at this time.

Here are some ways to introduce the CHEERS Check-In observation:

“Next week, when I come, we are going to make sure you and your child have a full 6-to-8-minute period of time in which you both can just play and be present with each other – without my interference. When you are done, we can talk together about what the experience was like for you. Please feel free to choose whatever activity you would like to do with your child.

• It can be a favorite activity you and your child like to do together, or
• An activity that is part of your regular routine, or
• I could bring an activity that you think you would both like to do!”

You could also say:

"Next week I am going to give you and Junior some time to do your thing, and I am just going to stay out of your way for like 5 minutes or so. You two can just play or hang out together like I am not even there. Then you and I can talk about how it went and what we noticed." 

Introduce the process again on the day of the visit:

“As we discussed last week, today, I am going to be quiet and let you and your child play together, without me interfering in your play, in whatever way is most natural for both of you. After about 6-8 minutes or whenever it is comfortable for you, we can re-connect.”

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Once the interaction ends, check in with the parent:

This conversation is an opportunity to help the parent explore and think about their relationship with their baby, and how the interaction that has just occurred fits into that relationship. To support this conversation, be non-judgmental, open, and curious. Finally, be collaborative and support the parent in discovering their own knowledge about their relationship with their baby.

- How did the interaction feel to the parent, or what did they think?
- What moment did they most enjoy?
- What did they notice about the baby’s experiences and feelings?
- How typical did the parent think the interaction was today?
- In the future, what would they like to do more of with their baby?
- Remember to use your HFA Reflective Strategies to support the conversation! Use ATP or SATP to support strengths you observed. Use NORM, Ex & W, FNT, or PT to partner with the parent to address any areas where there are opportunities to support more nurturing interactions.

Adapted from the Early Relational Health Screen (David Willis et al., unpublished manuscript) and with input from Kate Rosenblum, PhD, at www.zerotothrive.org

**Scoring and Planning Using the CHEERS Check-In**

The CHEERS Check-In is scored once you’re back at the office and not during the visit with the family.

Results of the CCI should be discussed with your Supervisor and become a part of the family’s HFA Service Plan to support your ongoing work with the family. Ways to support parents in increasing positive parent-child interactions include the use of the HFA Reflective Strategies, curriculum activities, tools introduced in Core training such as What I’d Like for my Child, the Values activity, in addition to supporting parents in developing protective factors (particularly the Social and Emotional Competence of Children). Any plans you identify should be added to the HFA Service Plan.

**Area to Address:**
Scores of 4 or less in any domain. This is an area to support with HFA Reflective Strategies, parenting materials and other tools to increase positive interactions.

**Emerging Strength:**
Scores of 5 in any domain. This is an area you’ll want to support using Strategic ATPs. Look out for opportunities to acknowledge and build on successes in these domain areas.

**Area to Promote:**
Scores of 6 or 7 in any domain. This is an area to use ATPs to acknowledge strengths and promote the parent’s feeling of success in their interaction with their child.