



~ submitted by Margaret Holmberg; CT-AIMH member Board of Directors,  
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# **Play: Guidance from an Infant Mental Health Perspective**

A key skill for promoting play for very young children by an infant mental health informed care giver is observation. Observation is another of those “tasks” (like listening) that seems so easy, just keep your eyes open and look around, right? In fact, observing babies and young children takes a lot of practice. If you have had a course in observation you remember carefully watching and writing about a child, noting the way the child moved, the way the child looked, the choices the child made, the vocalizations the child made, the approaches the child made to other caregivers, to other children, the responses the child made to and received from others in the area. Then you remember reading your notes to be sure you accurately described each of those actions. You re-read your notes to find what your interpretation was versus what you objectively observed. Then you summarized the 5-10 minutes of observation, wondering if what you observed was typical behavior and response or unique to that moment in time for this baby.

Competent observation by a caregiver is so critical for promoting good infant mental health. Based on observations, respectful decisions are made about what play objects/toys are provided, what helpful information is shared with parents, what goals you make for each child in your care.

Take five minutes to watch a baby, just sit quietly and watch the baby play with her hands, explore his toes with his mouth, wonder what is going on in that little mind. Remember, slow down and watch, wait and wonder?

*Why Do Babies Like Boxes Best*, NAEYC 2009 <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1776-why-do-babies-like-boxes-best> (available to ZTT members).