

GUIDELINES FOR ACCURATE AND OBJECTIVE RECORDING—BEHAVIORAL DESCRIPTIONS

- Record facts rather than opinions.
- Record enough detail to capture what happened—avoid biasing your description.
- Use active verbs (action words).
- Observe without interpreting.
- Record only what you see or hear. Be careful to avoid recording something that did not occur.
- Use words that describe but do not judge.
- Record the behaviors in the order they occur. Order can make a difference.
- Consider what information you need about the context. (For example, are other children present? Is the child doing something that he or she observed you or another child doing earlier?)

Writing Objective Anecdotal Records

Avoid words that are inherently subjective. Observation notes should be behavioral descriptions that will help to inform and will provide evidence for the hypotheses that you form about the child. A behavior may have different meaning if viewed by someone else. Provide enough information in your anecdotal record so that hypotheses can be made when looking over time. Avoid judgments in the anecdotal record unless you clearly identify them and offer support for your inferences (for example, “He seems to ___ because he is ___”). In your descriptions, avoid doing the following:

- **Attributing Feelings.** Instead, describe the behavior. We can observe behaviors that suggest different feelings, and we can record what children say about what they feel. However, feelings are manifested in many different ways, particularly in diverse cultural groups. A behavior that signals sadness for one person may just be a manifestation of fatigue in another person. Describe what you see: smiling, eyes wide open, looking for several minutes only at ___, sitting quietly and looking at the book, crying, frowning, and so on.
- **Ascribing motivations or reasons for doing things.** These cannot be objectively observed. Instead, describe the behaviors that suggest that a child is interested in doing something (“She spent 25 minutes of her free play time in ___,” “He went to the block area every day this week,” and so on) or provide the information that suggests why a child is doing something. Parents are often surprised to hear that their child “loves” doing something at school. The child may just be doing that activity to

be close to a certain peer or to avoid a different activity, or to gain the approval of the teacher.

Anecdotal Records Activity: Recognizing Subjective Language

The following paragraphs include inferences—that is, they are not written objectively. Please look through and note the types of judgments that are being made. Go through the document and highlight all the inferences that you find, then check the “anecdotal records activity answer key” to see if you identified all of them. (Note how little you know about what the children are actually doing.)

Amy, Jamil, and Nora are in the dramatic play area. They are very active and they love to explore their environment. They are very cooperative. They like to play and explore a lot, but they especially love the dress-up clothes.

Miriam is very independent and is capable of painting with supervision and assistance.

Janna loves to imitate the teachers in the center as they work throughout the day. Her temperament is very easygoing and she seems to display much patience with learning new activities. She stayed with the activity for a long time.

Kevin is slower to warm up than other children. When a parent came in and read the children books and sat on the floor with them, he did not want to be near her.

Kai loves being read to. He participates when stories are being read by pointing to objects or pictures. His attention seems focused on the adult who is talking to him—he looks directly at the adult and responding to the adult, for example, by answering questions.

Anecdotal Records Activity Answer Key

The inferences are identified in ***bold italicized*** print. Alternative records that do not include inferences are presented in brackets:

Amy, Jamil, and Nora are in the dramatic play area. They are ***very active*** and ***they love*** to explore their environment. They are ***very cooperative***. They ***like to play and explore a lot, but they especially love the dress-up clothes***. [Instead: In the dramatic play area, Amy, Jamil, and Nora explore the available props and dress-up clothes, and spend much of their time in the center trying on the dress-up clothes. They share the materials without any conflicts and continue their play for (specify length of time). (Describe specific play activities that the children engage in.)]

Miriam is very independent and is capable of painting with supervision and assistance.

Janna ***loves to imitate*** the teachers in the center as they work throughout the day. Her ***temperament is very easygoing*** and she ***seems to display much patience*** with learning new activities. She stayed with the activity for ***a long time***. [Instead: Janna imitates the teachers in the center (describe specific ways that she does this). She stayed with the activity for (specify length of time).]

Kevin is ***slower to warm up*** than other children. When a parent came in and read the children books and sat on the floor with them, he ***did not want to be near her***. [Instead: Today I observed Kevin's reaction to an unfamiliar adult. A parent came to read books to the children. Kevin usually sits close to the book and the person reading, but today he sat far from the parent and stayed close to me.]

Kai ***loves being read to***. He participates when stories are being read by pointing to objects or pictures. His attention seems focused on the adult who is talking to him—he looks directly at the adult and responding to the adult, for example, by answering questions.

PORTFOLIOS

“An organized, purposeful compilation of evidence documenting a child’s development and learning over time . . . like a photograph album that brings back memories for the person involved, shows change over time, and can introduce a new person to what has been. . . . The more you study it the more you see it . . . ” (McAfee and Leong 1994).¹

Examples of what you might include in a portfolio:

- Periodic dated samples of drawings and writings
- Tape recordings
- Pictures
- Lists of books and stories read
- Written observations
- Checklists
- Rating scales
- Parent questionnaires
- Health screening forms

¹ McAfee, Oralie, and Deborah J. Leong. *Assessing and Guiding Young Children’s Development and Learning*. 4th ed. Boston, MA: Allyn-Bacon, 2007.