CiRCLe

Infant and Toddler Teacher Competencies

Implementation Guide for Observation & Goal-Setting

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Introduction

The Infant & Toddler Teacher Competencies have been created for use by teachers and coaches to guide classroom improvement efforts. The tool includes specific best practices that support infants' and toddlers' development in the areas of language and communication, early literacy, cognitive skills, social and emotional development, and physical development and health. The competencies are available in English and Spanish.

A classroom observation using the competencies can provide initial data from which coaches can create coaching goals in partnership with the teacher. As coaching continues over time, the coach will make additional observations and record updates to document the teacher's progress as s/he demonstrates additional skills. The competencies are meant to be an interactive tool, providing a framework for giving teachers ongoing feedback and a common language for discussing their skills. The goal-setting that follows any observations is designed to help coaches focus on specific teaching competencies as they work with teachers during each coaching session. The ultimate goal is for teachers to increase their independent use of high quality, effective, and developmentally appropriate teaching practices with the infants and toddlers in their classrooms.

GENERAL ORGANIZATION OF THE TOOL

The competencies are organized by developmental domains. Some developmental domains are further divided into subdomains. Each teaching behavior is also leveled to help the coach and teacher prioritize goals. Level 1 (purple) skills are foundational skills that should be prioritized first before moving on to Level 2 and Level 3 skills. Level 2 (blue) skills are increasingly advanced teaching strategies. Level 3 (green) skills include highly differentiated instruction and/or self-reflective teaching strategies.

There are two versions of the Infant & Toddler Teacher Competencies. The **Observation & Notetaking Version** is designed to be used for taking notes during a single observation. The **Goal-Setting Version** can be used as a running record for final observation ratings and when goals are set and met. Both versions are discussed in this guide.

Preparing to Use the Competencies

It is expected that coaches using the competencies will have a background in classroom coaching and familiarity with observing early childhood teachers in classrooms. In addition, because the competencies are specifically designed to be used in classrooms serving infants and toddlers, it is expected that those using this tool will have familiarity with infant and toddler development and with some of the ways that infant and toddler classrooms are distinct from classrooms of other age ranges (see the "Considerations for Infant and Toddler Classrooms" section on the following pages).

The specific competencies in this tool were derived from, and align with, the best practices and teaching strategies that are presented in the *CIRCLE Infant & Toddler Teacher Training: Play with Me* online professional development series on CLI Engage. It is strongly recommended that those preparing to use the competencies enroll in and complete this series of courses in order to be well-versed in the content and context of the skills they will be working on with teachers. After logging into CLI Engage, the *CIRCLE Infant & Toddler Teacher Training: Play with Me Series* can be accessed under the purple banner, Online Learning and Professional Development, by clicking the Full Course Catalog.

Whether or not a coach has completed all of the course content prior to using the competencies, s/he should become thoroughly familiar with all of the items in order to know what to look for during observations. The best way to accomplish this is to review the "Workshop" sections of each course, which include videos of the competencies demonstrated by real teachers.

UNDERSTANDING THE COACHING CYCLE
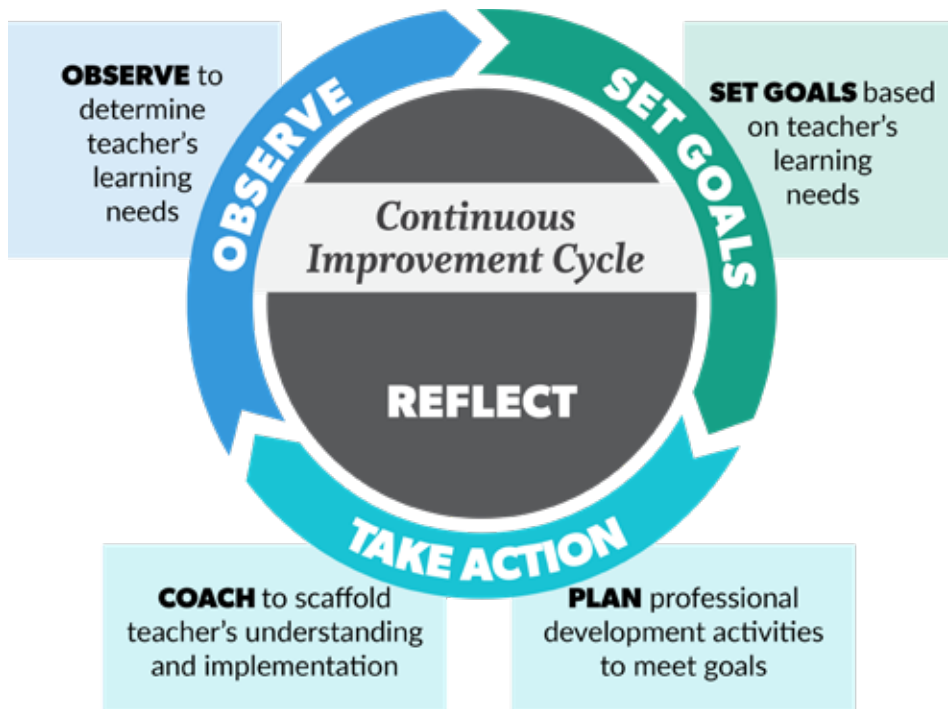
We encourage coaches to apply the competencies to a professional development cycle that includes assessing teacher needs, setting goals, planning related PD activities (e.g., course review, structured practice activities), and providing individualized coaching to scaffold teachers' learning as they work toward their goals. When beginning working with a teacher (the first cycle), we recommend coaches "assess" through a formal two-hour observation. In follow up cycles, "assess" also refers to evaluating the teacher's progress in meeting goals, which can be accomplished during routine coaching sessions. Goal-setting is discussed further in the following pages. For discussion of specific coaching strategies, see the *Coaching 101 Workbook*.

Conducting the Initial Observation

When first working with a teacher, the coach will conduct a baseline observation to see which skills the teacher is already demonstrating and which need more support. The coach will observe how the teacher interacts with the children and will not provide feedback during the observation. The results of this observation will help the coach and the teacher determine which goals to set to improve teaching practice.

The observation period should be long enough to observe the teacher across a variety of classroom activities and teaching formats (e.g., one-on-one, small group, large group if applicable). We recommend observing during a two-hour block, which should take place during the morning, after the majority of the children have arrived (though it can include the period when some children are still arriving).

This observation should be conducted at the beginning of the school year (BOY) or at the beginning of coaching work with the teacher, whichever is most appropriate given the teacher's circumstances. Coaches should already have met with the teacher at least once prior to the observation to establish rapport and review the details of the coaching program. At that initial meeting, the coach should also

provide the teacher and his/her supervisor with a copy of the Infant & Toddler Teacher Competencies and explain both the role of a coach and the process for completing this initial observation. Here is one suggestion for how to explain the purpose of the observation:

"As we begin working together, this observation will help me take some notes about all the great skills that you already have for working with the children, and it will help us identify some areas in which we might want to set goals as we continue working together. It's not a test and there is no score. It's just a tool to help us document the work we are doing together over time and the goals we will choose together to work on."

PRIOR TO BEGINNING OBSERVATION:

- Greet the teacher and remind her of the format for today's visit: you will be observing, not coaching, and will engage with the children as little as possible.

- Seat yourself where you can see and hear the teacher at all times during the visit. This may require moving around the room at times to maintain a good view, while trying to remain "in the background."

DOCUMENTING OBSERVATIONS

Using the Infant & Toddler Teacher Competencies **Observation & Notetaking Version**:

- Mark OB (Observed) if the behavior was seen or heard during the classroom visit.

- Mark OB (Observed) and NS (Needs Support) if the behavior was observed but requires additional coaching assistance to help the teacher master that skill (e.g., some clear opportunities were missed or the quality of the teaching behavior needs improvement).

- Leave blank any teaching behavior that was not observed or does not apply to the age range of the classroom (e.g., items specified as "infants only" or "toddlers only").

The Infant & Toddler Teacher Competencies Observation & Notetaking Version allows the coach to write notes in the Evidence / Notes column. These notes will be helpful during the feedback session with the teacher as goals are being set.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES

When a competency is observed, the corresponding indicator should be marked as Observed. As straightforward as this may seem, the accuracy and completeness of recorded data depends on the following key guidelines:

- When a behavior listed on the competencies is seen, even if it's implemented at a lower level of proficiency than desired, mark the indicator as OB (Observed). After marking an indicator as OB, check off the NS (Needs Support) box if the teacher needs support to improve the quality of implementation in this area. Marking an item NS requires personal judgment and serves as a note to the coach to give some future attention to this behavior. The coach may choose to set a goal related to this behavior or to highlight it during a reflective feedback conversation with the teacher.

- If a specific behavior is not directly observed, the corresponding indicator must be left blank. Do not give credit for behaviors that are not *directly observed*, even if there is evidence that the behavior occurred (such as books left on a table, which might imply a read aloud occurred).

- Notice the verb used at the beginning of each item. For example, if the item says "**Models**…," the item should be marked OB only if the teacher shows children what to do by doing the action herself, rather than telling the children what to do. For items that refer to using "**planned activities,**" the coach should look for signs the activity was planned ahead of time, such as organized materials or classroom setup (but the teacher must implement the activity during the observation window for the item to be marked OB). If the item says "**Teaches…**" (for example, "Teaches words and actions related to safety"), the coach should use his/her judgment as to whether the teacher is *intentionally teaching* the word or action as opposed to *incidentally* using the word or performing the action.

- Note that some items are marked "(toddlers only)" or "(infants only)." If observing in a classroom in which that age group is not present, leave those items blank—they will not be part of goal-setting items for the teacher. Some teachers (e.g., in a family childcare home) may teach a mixed age group, in which case mark all items as appropriate for the range of ages seen.

After the Observation: Goal-Setting

When a coach is observing a teacher whom s/he will later be coaching, we recommend recording observation ratings in the Infant & Toddler Teacher Competencies **Goal-Setting Version**. This version of the form lists the same teacher behaviors in the same order, but instead of the Evidence / Notes area next to each item, there are columns to record which skills were observed at Beginning of Year (BOY) and Middle of Year (MOY), which behaviors were observed at some other time during coaching but had not been targeted as goals (Updates), and dates that goals were set and met. The coach should record initial observation ratings in the **Observed: BOY** column.

GOAL-SETTING

The coach uses the data collected to identify possible areas for growth. Through a reflective follow-up discussion with the teacher, including use of questioning and scaffolding, the coach and teacher agree on appropriate individualized goals. This conversation can take place right after the observation (if feasible) or on a separate day soon after the observation. The coach will use the **Goal Set Date** column on the Goal-Setting Version to record the date a goal is set. A realistic number of goals should be selected that can be practiced within a short period of time.

When determining how many goals to set, take into account the following considerations:

1. Complexity of the selected goals

- Does meeting the goal require repeated and focused opportunities for practice (complex)?
- Can a goal be practiced simultaneously with other related goals (less complex)?
- Which goals can be practiced by the teacher independently and which ones need coaching support?

2. Length of time a coach provides support during a given coaching cycle

- How much time can the coach give the teacher to support implementation of each goal? For example, a teacher may be working on complex goals, but the coach is available to provide a substantial amount of support. In this scenario, a greater number of complex goals might be set during that cycle.

3. Length of time between coaching visits

- How much independent practice is expected of the teacher? For example, shorter time periods between visits may call for fewer goals each cycle.

4. Expertise level of the teacher and familiarity with the continuous improvement process

- Does the teacher's expertise vary by domain? For example, for a teacher who has limited skills in the area of language stimulation, it may be appropriate to set a few basic goals first, such as increasing his/her ability to label objects and actions and to use descriptive language. The coach might also assign a review of specific sections of the *Talk with Me* online course. With a teacher who has already demonstrated a good foundation in this domain, the coach may focus on a different domain or set goals in the language domain that require greater skill, such as upward and downward scaffolding or extending children's interest by adding new content or ideas.

- Does the teacher need help adjusting to a continuous improvement model? A teacher who has difficulty adjusting to the expectations of each coaching cycle may need to focus on fewer goals.

Some coaching programs follow a structured protocol in which there is a predetermined sequence of domains covered across coaching sessions. Goals are set based on items that were not observed or were marked NS within that domain. However, some coaching programs choose to set goals more flexibly, such as setting goals in two or more domains as needed by the teacher. In such cases, we suggest the following action plan:

1. Start with the Needs Support (NS) items, as these are behaviors for which the teacher already has some demonstrated ability. With coaching support, these goal behaviors should improve within a short time and contribute to feelings of accomplishment and success for the teacher.

2. Next, look for the domain areas (section headings) where the teacher has the greatest need (has the fewest items checked).

3. If there are many areas in which the teacher needs to grow his/her skills, partner with the teacher to decide together on goals to address first. For example, one teacher may be unfamiliar with how to look at books with infants and may be eager for guidance in this area. Another teacher may be new to the toddler age level and want to focus first on how to support cooperation and self-regulation in children of this age. Respecting and welcoming teachers' input while reviewing the results and engaging in goal-setting together will help lay a positive foundation for the coaching relationship.

4. See the Infant Toddler Coaching 101 Workbook for recommendations related to creating a plan of action for each skill.

5. Determine the most appropriate coaching strategy to use with each teacher.

6. Implement the plan!

Coaches should meet with their teachers on a regular basis; for example, a coach may meet with a teacher to review the teacher's progress and goals every two weeks. As the teacher practices and the coach sees him/her demonstrating the goal behavior at high quality, the coach will record the date in the Goal Met Date column. Goals that are not met should be carried over into the next cycle.

Observed: Updates Column

As a coach continues to work with the teacher, s/he may see the teacher demonstrate new behaviors that weren't observed at BOY or MOY and were not officially set as goals. This column serves as an

"update" to formal observation data. To record an update, write the date the behavior is observed. These updates do not change goals set or met.

Middle of Year Updates

Some programs require another formal observation at mid-year to more closely track progress. For the MOY observation, use the same procedure used at the BOY observation, and revisit the prioritization of goals for the remaining time in the coaching program or before the end of the school year.

Considerations for Infant and Toddler Classrooms

Infant and toddler classrooms can be quite different from preschool classrooms, and this can impact the observation experience. Keep in mind the following when observing in an infant or toddler classroom:

- Infants will have individualized needs and schedules—individual infants may be sleeping or eating at various times, rather than all together. Thus, teachers' activities are likely to move flexibly between engaging infants in play and performing basic care tasks such as feeding, diapering, putting children down for a nap, and documenting these activities. Observations can take place during any of the above activities, although there should be ample time during the two-hour observation period when more than one child is awake at a time.

- Infants and toddlers should not be expected to sit still in groups for extended periods of time. It is appropriate for teachers to offer activities to groups of infants and toddlers but not require every child to participate.

- Infant classrooms may be set up with less clearly defined play centers than preschool classrooms. This does not preclude teachers from arranging materials and toys during the course of the day to offer specific learning activities such as book reading, music and singing, gross motor play, and sensory exploration activities.

- Because infants and young toddlers may not yet be using intelligible speech, it is particularly important to notice teachers' pacing and sensitivity to children's communicative signals during teacher-child interactions. For example, a teacher may receive credit for many skills in the "Providing Rich Language" subdomain but may need practice pausing and giving the children time to respond or initiate their own vocalizations or gestures. The coach's notes on these aspects of interactions will prove valuable when setting coaching goals.

Online Version

An online version of the Infant & Toddler Teacher Competencies can be found on the CLI Engage dashboard under *Quality Improvement and Innovation* after logging in to the platform (cliengage.org). The online version mirrors the paper-pencil goal-setting form but allows users to generate reports that show progress over time. Access is free for TSR Online eligible organizations (**click** here **to confirm eligibility and sign up**). Users of the online system are able to record multiple observations, set short-term goals, access professional development resources, watch video exemplars of competency items, generate reports, and track teachers' progress over time.

Click here **to access the How-To Guide** for more information on using the online version of the Infant & Toddler Teacher Competencies.

Organizations not eligible under TSR Online can access the system for a reasonable fee. Contact clisolutionsgroup@uth.tmc.edu for more information.

Resource Links:

Coaching 101 Workbook

Infant & Toddler Teacher Competencies Observation & Notetaking Version

Infant & Toddler Teacher Competencies Goal-Setting Version

How to Access the CIRCLE Infant and Toddler Training

How to Use the Infant and Toddler Teacher Goal-Setting System