

# Home Observation Guidelines for Families



We want to make a video of you and your child playing together in everyday activities at home for an hour. Below is a description of what we hope to see in the observation and some tips for planning it.

## Why do we need the video?

The purpose of the video is to see how your child interacts, communicates, and plays with you at home during everyday activities. This is important because young children can act differently at home than they do with a new person in a clinic setting. The observation is video recorded to measure social communication and play and possible red flags of autism spectrum disorder. We do not need to see your child playing alone. Instead, we want to observe you trying to get your child to interact and play with you. We hope to get a good picture of your child's strengths and any areas of difficulty during the video. We also want to see what strategies and supports you use that help your child interact and learn. We may ask to make other videos of you and your child to monitor change over time and so we can improve your child's intervention program.

## What should you be doing during the hour?

We would like to see you and your child during activities that your child particularly likes. We would also like to see activities that happen regularly in your house, but that may not be your child's favorite. If your child has any behaviors that you are worried about or that are unusual, it would be helpful to try to get your child to show these behaviors during the video.

Below are 6 categories of activities that parents often do with toddlers, with examples of each category. If possible, we want you to interact with your child in activities from each of these 6 categories:

### Activity Categories with Examples of Activities

#### Play with Toys

- stuffed bear & feeding set
- vehicles and people figures
- blocks • puzzles • play dough

#### Meals and Snacks

- cookies and milk
- bananas & grapes
- goldfish crackers & juice

#### Book Sharing

- Goodnight Moon
- cars and trucks book
- alphabet book

#### Play with People

- Itsy Bitsy Spider
- Ring-around-the-Rosie
- I'm gonna get you

#### Caregiving

- hand washing
- taking a bath • brushing teeth
- dressing • changing diapers

#### Family Chores

- doing laundry • picking up toys
- watering plants
- feeding pets • checking the mail

These activities can be in any room in your home or in your yard. For example, snack may be in the kitchen and then hand washing may be in the bathroom. You can record the home observation yourself or you can have someone help to be the videographer. This can be a family member or friend, or your evaluator can record the observation during a videoconference. The videographer can follow you and your child to different rooms or to your yard. You will need to reposition your smart phone or notebook computer in each room as you move around.

## Who should be in the video?

The parent who usually takes care of your child should be in the video. If both parents want to be in the video, it is best to take turns so that only one parent is trying to engage the child in each activity. Siblings or other close relatives or friends can be in the video but should not take the lead unless they usually take care of your child.

The person running the camera should not be interacting with you or your child other than a brief greeting at the door. The videographer should not answer questions about how your child did or how your child is developing. The diagnostic team who will be evaluating your child can answer any questions for you after reviewing the video.

### **How much time should we spend on each activity?**

In order to get through 6 activities in an hour, you should spend about 5 to 10 minutes on each activity. It is fine if you spend a little more or less time on each category. It is also fine if you do not complete activities from each of the 6 categories. We want you to organize the hour observation so that we can see you interact with your child in a variety of different activities that you usually do every day. Please do not feel limited by these guidelines or that you need to finish everything during the hour video.

You do not need to spend the whole 5 to 10 minutes doing the same activity. For example, you might spend about 10 minutes on Play with Toys by playing with blocks for a few minutes, moving to trucks for another few minutes, and ending this activity category with puzzles.

### **What about distractions or interruptions?**

We would like to keep distractions during the hour observation to a minimum, such as television, phone calls, or conversations with other people that do not include your child. If an interruption cannot be avoided, please try to get back to interacting with your child as quickly as possible.

The camera and person running it may also be a distraction. The videographer should stay focused on the camera and not talk to your child. This helps the interaction between you and your child to be as natural as possible. During the hour, the videographer might cue you in the following ways:

- Suggest that it is a good time to move to another activity.
- Let you know that everything is going well.
- Remind you about activity categories that you have not yet done with your child.

### **What if my child gets upset or I start to feel uncomfortable?**

If your child gets upset at any point during the video, you should comfort your child the way you usually do. Seeing how your child responds when upset will provide useful information about your child. If your child needs a break from interacting, it is fine to take breaks as needed.

You can ask that the video stop or be rescheduled at any point during the video. You can also ask that the videographer pause if you or your child needs a break or for sensitive activities like diaper changing. Diaper changing can be a good activity from the caregiving category to do with your child. If you decide to do this, we will respect your child's privacy.

### **What if I need help planning the hour?**

We will contact you to schedule this home video. During that phone call, we will help you plan and organize your hour observation. We realize that planning this hour can feel like a big task, so we will guide you through this. In addition, the videographer can help you remember your plan for the video when at your home. However, you can change plans during the video depending on your child's mood and interests.

When you are done with your hour of activities, record answers to 3 brief questions so we know how typical your child's behavior was during this hour:

1. Was your child as comfortable as usual at home with you?
2. Did your child communicate more or less than usual?
3. Was your child more or less engaged with you in these activities than usual?

Thanks for letting us video you and your child interacting at home. This information will help us know more about your child. The information will also help us improve our screening tools to identify children with autism spectrum disorder and other communication problems earlier.

*Developed by the FIRST WORDS® Project*

