

Writing positively in child observations

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An observation describes an action, event or moment in time. Observations are a great tool.

It may be tempting to interpret a child's behaviour as 'good' or 'bad' or comment on a child's development or lack of, but it is important to remember that as an observation it should not have a judgment in it. An observation should describe what happened, the action, event or development in that moment in time.

Observations should always be written objectively.

Why is it so important to write positively?

Sometimes if you were to see comments in other children's records such as 'language skills not well developed', 'poor social skills' or 'can't relate to other children' without knowing that child, or in what context, you would form a judgment on them. Such comments are not observations but change into negative, judgmental statements, which tell us nothing useful about the child concerned and only that the author has dismissed that child as incapable in some way.

It is imperative that the writing of an observation along with the interpretation/analysis should critically examine the behaviour and/or development in as neutral a way as possible. It should then link and be able to lead through to learning possibilities, intentional teaching and challenging activities based on the observation and interpretation.

Another just as valid reason is that a parent has the ability to view their child's observations at any time. It is vital to write positively as a reflection of professionalism but also to not insult or hurt the parents feelings. At no point should your personal view of the behaviour (or for that matter the child) be reflected in your actions and observations.

A key way to remind oneself to remain positive is to ask yourself "Would I like to read that about me or my child?" If the answer is no then it is obvious that it is not something that should be worded in that way.

A perfect example of the difference in recording an observation:

1. **Negative (subjective):** T is playing with J. They are not playing well together because J keeps pestering T. They play only a short time before T goes to play alone. She does not like to play with J.
2. **Positive (objective):** T and J are building a block house. J knocks over the house. T builds it again. J knocks it over a second time. T then says, "I'm not going to play anymore." and T goes to the doll corner, picks up a doll, and rocks it leaving J in the block corner. J continues to play in the block corner.

This easily demonstrates the instant judgment we extract from the first observation with no ability to understand the situation as such and provides the potential in the analysis of a very different kind.

What to do if you're concerned by observations?

If you are concerned about an aspect of a child's development, then it is crucial to describe in detail what you saw. You need to focus on what the child can do and needs help with. The onus must be placed fairly and squarely on the adults involved to provide support, rather than condemn the child.

It is important to remember that it is the adults who are in control, not the child when it comes to the observation and recording of it. They are simply learning and experiencing life.