



DAP Notes

(and other musical devices)

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NMAIMH competencies addressed

Theoretical Foundations

- Infant/very young child & family centered practice
- Relationship-focused, therapeutic practice

Communicating

- Listening
- Speaking
- Writing

Reflection

- Contemplation
- Parallel process

For those of you who are musically inclined, if I were to show you how to play a song on an instrument of your choice, there would be an interaction between the two of us that would include a demonstration of the song, along with instruction on how to play the song. Days later you might sit down with your guitar or piano and try to recall the musical interaction between the two of us in order to reproduce that song. You might remember some of the song, but aspects of the melody or the rhythm may have become lost. It might have been helpful to you if I included a written representation of the song, such as the musical notes written down on a piece of paper, with a time signature, on a music staff.

Meeting with families on a home visit is like learning that family's song. And with each visit, a new song is learned, often a variation on a theme, sometimes incorporating new instrumentation, but always celebrating a unique melody that expresses the time you spent together. It is important to be able to refer back to that song after the visit so you can keep that family's tune in your head when you are away from them, to reflect on the intricacies and nuances of that song, and to bring new insights and appreciations to your next visit with the family.

Our service notes, and specifically within the CYFD Home Visiting programs, the use of the DAP format (**D**ata, **A**ssessment, **P**lan) are the equivalent to writing down the musical score for a song. The home visitor needs to capture each home visit (or song) in written form as a representation of that visit.

As mentioned above, one reason we write DAP notes has to do with keeping the family's tune "in our head". Another way of describing this is "holding the family in mind". By reviewing DAP notes from previous visits before each home visit, the home visitor returns to the family with a mental picture of their shared time together which can be discussed with the family. Discussing aspects of previous visits helps caregivers feel held in the mind of the home visitor. This has a positive impact on the relationship between the home visitor and the caregiver as the caregiver comes to understand that the home visitor thinks about the family outside of the visits. Discussing something from a previous visit is one way of using DAP notes to strengthen the relationship while at the same time bringing continuity to the work with families.

Often the families that we work with live busy and stressful lives. They may move from one activity to another without any opportunity to reflect on what they have done. Home visits can seem like one more activity within the day, without there being a connection to anything that came before (or after). This is where the home visitor can utilize the ongoing DAP notes they have created to help caregivers see the connections between visits and to identify progress towards goals. Using the DAP format to help organize home visits as they relate to family goals, the home visitor collects data pertaining to each goal on every visit. The combined information provides a rich chronological overview of data regarding progress towards goals. Using the information captured in the DAP notes, the home visitor is able to share an overview perspective with the family about how far they have come, what goals they have been achieved, and identify those areas that still need attention.

Overtime, the home visitors DAP notes become more than a just series of isolated songs, they become an entire symphony! One can identify familiar themes, high notes and low notes, strong sections as well as less structured melodic lines, and a beginning, middle, and end. All together DAP notes create a cohesive composition that help make sense of the home visiting experience for both the home visitor and the family.

Talking points for supervisors

- Consider asking home visitors to review all of the DAP notes that have been written for a particular family and ask what insights they experienced as a result of the review. Were they able to connect some dots?
 - During your reflective supervision time with your home visitors, help them to think back to earlier sessions to see if they can build upon previous discussions or interactions with families to help them develop some "next steps" regarding a current challenge.
 - If you do not already do so, try keeping a daily journal for a few weeks. After that time, notice how the act of reflecting on and writing down your daily activities has influenced your perspective!
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