

Gathering further Evidence through Observation

It is important when trying to decide how to develop our practice further that we gather evidence to ensure that we have an accurate description of what is currently happening and what people's views are. We can learn about people's views through hearing their account of their experiences. However sometimes it is hard to talk fully about our experiences. Sometimes things that happen and actions are not accessible to our consciousness. Think about for example a member of staff saying that she always welcomes people to the home. She may not be fully aware what she actually does.

After observing her in practice we realise that she:

- Was really busy but took the time to stop what she was doing and make eye contact with a new visitor and ask them if she could help them
- Walked with them to where their relative was in the home and used this opportunity to talk to them along the way by asking some specific questions
- Appeared calm and unhurried when she was speaking
- Asked them questions like – how are you?; have you any questions? I will be able to come back and speak to you in about half an hour?

So, making observations about what is going on (e.g. during meal times how are these organised, where do people sit, how are people given choice, how are people helped to eat etc.).

Observation: Why do we do this?

Observation is a very important aspect of gathering evidence. What we think we do may be very different to what we actually do and observation is a good way to find this out. When we observe things we can look at behaviour but we can also pick up really important cues about the environment or the atmosphere. It may be that professionals and patients and families may notice very different things when observing what is going on.

Exercise:

Spend a few minutes looking at the photos below. What do you see? What do you think is going on? How do you think the people in the picture feel? How does looking at the photos make you feel?

In pairs, share your observations. Are you noticing different things? Are your responses and interpretations different? How are you similar in what you notice and respond to?



You may choose to observe general home activity or a specific event such as mealtimes. It is useful to think in advance about the kinds of things you are looking for. We might want to observe over a number of lunchtimes and record:

1. How many staff are there and what do they do?
2. What is the atmosphere like - noise level like in the room, pace?
3. How are people seated?
4. What is the interaction like between residents?
5. What is the interaction like between residents and staff?
6. How is the food served (is the person offered a choice? Is there any interaction? How much time do people get to eat one course before the next is served)?
7. Do the staff show signs of being under pressure, of rushing?
8. What happens to those people who need help to eat?
9. How do residents make their needs known during this time?

You may like to do this in four stages:

- Stage 1: Sit in the area and 'soak up the atmosphere', allow your attention to move freely between the different things that you notice.
- Stage 2: Get together with others to discuss what you notice.
- Stage 3: Discuss these and pay particular attention to how you can notch up those things that seemed to work well

Carry out one of these observations in your work area and be prepared to feedback the outcomes of this at our next meeting.