



Observing employee performance can be a useful way of confirming and recognising employees for their efforts and also provides an opportunity to discuss areas requiring improvement based on evidence. Observations can also provide newly appointed employees with constructive feedback and support as part of a mentoring program. Observations that are conducted in a transparent and open way are more likely to add value to the process of continuous improvement, ongoing dialogue and performance evaluation.

While this is a useful practice for gaining insights into an employee's performance, employers must take care that observations are done in a considered and respectful manner, and by a person with appropriate experience in observing practice.

The Educational Leader may be the most appropriate person to perform and/or guide the process of observing performance with due consideration being given to their role in the service and any potential conflict of interest.

What is behavioural evidence?

Behavioural evidence is a collection of observations describing the behaviour of individuals as they engage in their daily work practices. As individuals, we often demonstrate our knowledge, skills and attitudes through our behaviour. What we know, do and say can have a direct impact on those around us, including families, fellow colleagues and most importantly, children. There are a number of things to consider when collecting and documenting behavioural evidence of early childhood employees, including:

- how the employee communicates with children, families and colleagues (including words, tone of voice, facial expressions, body language and gestures)
- how the employee positions themselves with the children and their level of interaction (including the quality of interactions)
- the frequency and purpose of the employee's interactions with other colleagues

- the manner in which the employee communicates and responds to the needs and engagement of families as they enter the service
- the manner in which the employee arranges the environment, and utilises equipment and program materials to support learning and development in children.

Behavioural observations can be supported by documentary evidence about what the employer has observed. This may include, for example, items from portfolios, assessments for learning and development, general program documentation and reflection journals.

Making decisions about observations

Documenting observations is mostly straightforward; what is seen and heard is documented. The more complex part is analysing the evidence and relating it to the observations made.

Initially this may seem difficult, particularly if it is the first time the employer is involved in managing employees and/or it is the first time they are undertaking such a task within an early childhood education and care context.

However, there are key indicators of quality practice and behavioural markers specifically relating to interactions with others that employers can refer to, and this will enable them to formulate sound decisions on the performance of the employee. These indicators describe important elements of behaviour that can be observed and that demonstrate quality practice in varying degrees.

[Refer to Tool 3.1 List of Performance Indicators.](#)



The practice of observing

Employers must keep in mind that an employee who is being observed is likely to feel intimidated or nervous, and this may impact on their performance on the day. It is important to ensure that the manner in which the observation is conducted provides evidence representing the normal practice and skill of the employee.

The person conducting the observation must ensure the following are done:

- inform the employee in advance (at least two weeks prior) that they will be observed as part of the EM&D process and provide them with the date and time of the observation
- on arrival, greet the employee and discuss the purpose of the visit, assuring them that there will be very minimal or no interference with the program
- position themselves discreetly to have minimum impact on the employee's natural interactions and implementation of the program, also ensuring that there is minimal impact on how children engage with the program and employee
- record observations and keep track of the time during the visit.

Refer to Tool 3.6 Recording Observations for Behavioural Evidence.

To ensure that the right information is collected during the observation, it is important to seek clarification from the employee on a practice or strategy that the observer is unclear about. This should be done with sensitivity and in a manner that does not interrupt the program or intimidate the employee.

The following are useful hints when having discussions with the employee who is being observed:

- wait for an appropriate time to engage, such as a pause in conversation between the employee and child/ren or at the end of the interaction
- use a short statement of what has been observed followed by a non-threatening, open-ended question
- listen to the explanation and document the employee's reasoning without making immediate judgement. It is useful to take the time to reflect on the employee's answer before providing feedback
- ensure the session is not disrupted by lengthy discussion and consider following up at the completion of the session or at another appropriate time.

If the observer is of the view that children have been put at risk due to the behaviour of the employee, they must intervene immediately to ensure a safe environment for the child/ren.

Other factors to consider

Observations of behaviour provide a valuable insight into the skills and talents of the employee as well as areas to improve for greater effectiveness. It is important to acknowledge these skills and talents when interacting with the employee to maintain a positive working relationship and commitment to continuous improvement.

Observations of employees where the intention is to gain behavioural evidence will include details that are sensitive in nature.



The observer must remain impartial, be objective, demonstrate respect for the employee and maintain the confidentiality of information gathered. This includes the approach to recording observations, sharing and storing of information.

It is important to understand that taking observations of behaviour is only one method of collecting evidence to inform decisions regarding employee performance. There are many other tools that can be used including other tools in this resource such as Section C of [Tool 3.2](#) to gain a sound understanding and perspective and must be included and considered when evaluating employee performance.