



## **WHAT IS IT?**

Observation refers to carefully watching behavior in order to better understand what is happening. In the classroom, observation is an effective strategy to find out more about students' behavior in order to identify ways to meet their unique learning needs.

## **WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?**

Philip and Eric both have trouble cleaning up and moving between small group rotations. Ms. Roberts decided to complete intentional observations of both students across several activities. She noticed that...

- Philip initially cleans up when prompted, but quickly loses focus and begins wandering around.
- Eric continues working when told to clean up, even after multiple reminders.

After reflecting on her observations, she discovered that the root causes of their challenges were different...

- Philip had a hard time remembering what to do when given multi-step directions.
- Eric struggled with stopping one activity and starting the next.

From this, Ms. Roberts was able to identify strategies to encourage the same end goal (i.e., cleaning up and standing in line) based on each student's individual needs:

- She used a visual chart with Philip to help him remember the end-of-day routine.
- She started giving Eric 5-minute warnings before the end of an activity to give him time to prepare for an upcoming transition.

## **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

The things that happen to or around students often help explain their behavior. When you observe your students, you can better understand when and why certain behaviors may be occurring. From this, you can select and implement the most effective strategies to help students thrive in your classroom.

### **Things to Look for While Observing**

Consider the following as you observe students' behavior:

- What?** Be clear and specific in describing the behavior(s) that you observe.  
*Keep it objective by describing only what you see, not what you feel or think.*
- When?** Note the time of day when the behavior occurs.  
*For example, does this behavior only occur during whole group instruction or throughout the day?*
- Where?** Identify where the behavior is occurring.  
*For example, does it always occur on the playground, or is it across different settings?*
- Who?** Note who is around the student during the time of the behavior.  
*Does it occur with one or two specific children or with many children?*
- Why?** Identify the purpose or function of the behavior.  
*For example, was this a way to get my attention or was it to express his frustration? If the latter, why was he frustrated?*



## TIPS FOR OBSERVING BEHAVIOR

### 1. BEFORE observing the behavior of your students

- Identify student(s) who may be struggling with self-regulation skills.  
Data from the *Child Behavior Rating Scale* (CBRS) can be particularly helpful during this step. Look for students with scores below the benchmark (highlighted in red).
- Identify specific behaviors or self-regulatory skills that student(s) struggle with most.  
Look at which specific *CBRS* items they scored lowest on.
- Brainstorm why you think the student(s) struggles with these skills. Be sure to consider if there is a common theme across multiple students.
- Choose a student or group of students and a target behavior.  
Is there is a student for whom you feel the most concern? Or, is there is a specific behavior that has been extremely disruptive to your classroom routine?

### 2. WHILE observing the behavior of your students

- Focus your attention by sitting back and observing.  
This can be a logistical challenge, but you can make it work by:
  - Videotaping your interactions
  - Asking colleagues for help (so you can observe *or* they observe for you)
  - Scheduling observations when parent volunteers are available
- Consider what is happening *before, during, and after* a behavior that could be linked to it.  
Pay attention and write down these details. Keep a journal to track patterns that you observe, including when and where certain behaviors occur.
- Write down exactly what you see.  
Keep it separate from your feelings or thoughts about what is happening.  
“The student yelled at his peer” rather than “The student is being mean.”  
Make sure to include specific details.  
“They laughed and smiled during the book reading” rather than “All were happy.”

### 3. AFTER observing the behavior of your students

- Ask yourself what you learned from the observation (i.e., patterns, source of conflict).  
Use the [Root Cause Fishbone](#) to consider potential root causes for the behavior.  
([source](#))
- Gather additional information if needed via observation or by talking with others.
- Decide how to provide the best support for student(s) using this information.  
Refer to VKRP social-emotional and/or other resources.