

**HOW TO: Develop Strength-Based Interventions Using CHEEERS**

6-3 **CHEEERS** is a way of observing all of the parent-child interactions that ultimately result in the parent-child relationship. By addressing these interactions in a strength-based manner, home visitors can promote positive relationships. CHEEERS is an acronym for:

- Cues
- Holding
- Expression
- Empathy
- Environment (pertaining to child development environment)
- Rhythm & reciprocity
- Smiles/joy

Please note that each example of CHEEERS represents the overall flavor of the visit and is associated with frequency. Since we are asking home visitors to choose one example from each of the CHEEERS, that example should represent what happened during the majority of the visit. So, if a parent does not respond to baby’s cues for the majority of the visit, the home visitor would complete the “c-cues” with an example of when the parent did not respond. In this way, an honest observation of the parent-child relationship can be documented.

A relationship requires at least 2 people. Therefore, the home visitor is expected write the “fact” that they observe and how the parent responds, with a brief statement about frequency of that type of response during the home visit. Without the frequency, it is difficult to understand parent-child interactions.

**1) CHEEERS Observation (example from CORE Training)**

C: In preparation for feeding infant, infant begins to fuss and cry. Mom laughs at infant and states, “she is not fussy enough”. This type of response occurred throughout most of the visit.

H: Mom held infant away from body in her hands with the infant facing up. Baby remained in this position until mom gave her the bottle.

Ex: Mom did not speak to baby. Mom spoke about baby’s need to get upset before feeding her. This happened throughout the visit.

Em: Infant fussed and opened and closed her mouth. Mom watched infant fuss for most of the visit.



En: Mom spoke about how baby liked looking at black and white toy. Toy was not present during the visit.

R: Infant initiated response via fussing. Mom did not respond for most of the visit.

S: Mom laughed at infant when fussing – no smiles from baby during this visit.

## 2) Addressing CHEEERS:

In reviewing the CHEEERS assessment, there are a number of parent-child interactions that may need to be addressed (potentially all). When a home visitor uses a Reflective Strategy, the parent does not feel “corrected” or “inadequate”. The parent feels good and listened to. Based upon the above CHEEERS, it makes sense to focus on Empathy and Smiles (joy). If we can help the parent understand what baby is thinking and feeling, this might transfer over into response to Cues and/or Rhythm/Reciprocity. When all the CHEEERS indicate lack of understanding the baby, it will be important to make sure activities are fun for both the baby and parent (the concept of joy). Point out to the mom when she and her infant are having fun together (note: this applies to dads as well). It is important to check the Parent Survey/Family Stress Checklist to see whether either parent has experienced early childhood abuse or neglect. If so, setting up visits so that there are opportunities for babies and their parents to feel joy together is a great place to start.

## 3) Developing a Plan:

Observing this type of interaction between a young infant and her parent may be distressing to the home visitor. Often, when our observations cause us stress, it is critical for us to regulate our strong feelings so that we can respond rather than react to what we are seeing. Practicing self-reflection and regulating our own feelings before we **do** anything becomes an essential skill. Prepare reflective questions focused on the home visitor’s experience, the parallels between her experience, the mom’s, and the baby’s. Practice curiosity rather than hypotheses. *Please note that when there are any issues related to feeding, it is critical that an infant be fed, so advocacy may be necessary.*

### **Plan:**

**Reflective Strategy: SATP** – After reviewing the Parent Survey/Family Stress Checklist, it may become apparent that this mom might be feeling inadequate and ineffective. Using Strategic ATP requires the home visitor to find one time during the visit that mom DOES show empathy and “grabbing it”, as a teachable moment. This could serve as a focused intervention (reminder that SATP has 4 steps; 1) Identify the behavior you want to see more of, 2) Watch for that behavior during the home visit, 3) Affirm that behavior (affirm versus praise, e.g., state the specific behavior that you observed), 4) Share with the parent the impact “this behavior” has on her developing baby.



**Reflective Strategy: Explore & Wonder** – if there is no opportunity to use SATP, develop with the home visitor the steps to Explore & Wonder when the infant demonstrates a need that the parent does not see. Explore & Wonder has 5 steps; 1) state the behavior that you see that the parent does not see; 2) Ask the parent what that behavior means (in this case, fussing). 3) If parent does not know or states a meaning that cannot be attributed to this baby; 4) Speculate what you think the baby might be needing (communicating). 5) Ask parent if he/she would be willing to try this next time the baby fusses. If parent disagrees, move back to problem solving and using Problem Talk, another Reflective Strategy.

**In Summary:** There may be other Reflective Strategies to use with this mom, home visitors know their families styles very well. Conversations in supervision should consider using the Reflective Strategies and checking back to see how they worked so that we can truly promote attachment and change the way a parent connects with his or her infant. This may be especially true when the mom or dad that we work with has experienced generational abuse, something we may not be able assess.

