

# DC-informed Early Childhood Observation Tool

*(work in progress, may use/adapt with attribution)*

For Children Ages 3–8

Observer Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Observation: \_\_\_\_\_

Setting: (circle one) Home | Preschool | Primary Classroom | Playground | Other:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name or Initial/Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's (Approximate) Age: \_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION 1: Developmental Domain “Snapshots of the Waterfall”

Observe the child's behavior for 15–30 minutes. Take note of what you see in each domain. Use objective, specific language (what the child does, not what you think).

Domain	What I Observed (write 1–2 objective examples)
Physical (Gross/Fine Motor) (e.g., climbing, running, drawing, building, balancing)	
Cognitive (e.g., problem-solving, pretend play, following routines, understanding cause/effect)	
Language (e.g., vocabulary used, conversation skills, storytelling, asking/answering questions)	
Social-Emotional (e.g., expressing feelings, peer interactions, emotional regulation, empathy)	

## SECTION 2: Developmental Cascades + Unfolding Development:

### Interconnected Growth

Based on what you observed, how might development in one domain be affecting the others, either now or in the future as the developmental cascade progresses over time? Choose one of the examples above and explore how it may be connected across domains and over time.

Cascade Analysis:

1. “I noticed that when the child...”
2. “This behavior may reflect a strength or struggle in the \_\_\_\_\_ domain(s).”

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3. “This could be influencing their current or future development in the (which other domain?) domain because...”

## SECTION 3: Attuned Adult Support (Partners in Development)

Imagine you are the care partner/educator. Choose 2–3 supportive strategies you could use to support this child’s development in a sensitive and responsive way, in the context of the child’s unfolding development and developmentally appropriate practice (DAP).

1. Strategy: \_\_\_\_\_

Why this strategy?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Strategy: \_\_\_\_\_

Why this strategy?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Strategy: \_\_\_\_\_

Why this strategy?

\_\_\_\_\_

## REFLECTION: What surprised or stood out to you?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Instructor Notes & Suggestions:

- This tool can be used during live observation, while watching video footage, or in case study analysis.
- Encourage students to stay objective in their notes (focus on what the child does, not interpretations) and then to interpret their observations using the lenses of Developmental Cascades/Unfolding Development and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP).
- Encourage students to recognize that the connection between authentic observation/assessment and effective planning is through reflection: both personal reflections such as this exercise, as well as professional reflective practice.