

Growing Together at PACT

Staff Reflections on Implementing Circle of Security with Donna and Nan

Donna is a participant in the Growing Together Parenting Program at PACT. Her 18 month old daughter, Nan, is not walking yet and her mother is content to carry her and the child is most comfortable being held by her mother. (PT sees no movement pattern dysfunction, just mild low tone). Frequently, Nan exhibits a lot of resistance, crying and tantrums, to separating from her mother in order to engage in activities and is resisting walking (with support). Donna's response to Nan's outbursts is to pick her up and hold her and withdraw from activities. Recently, Nan has begun to explore the classroom by crawling around and pulling herself to stand

What we observe at this point is that Donna does not provide feedback to her daughter when she is out exploring. She says she is happy to see Nan doing more and has the common parent posture to "let sleeping dogs lie". What's missing is that Nan is not getting the feedback that she needs to explore and develop secure attachment and Donna is not building any confidence in her ability to help her daughter progress. Donna has a lifetime of deferring to others to manage her life and has succumbed to that role as a parent by not having the tools to be a bigger, stronger, wiser, and kind parent. Holding her distraught child makes her feel like a good mother.

How can COS help in this situation?

Donna can receive coaching to help her to know how to support her daughter "going out on the circle".

Example: Staff notices Nan exploring, points this out to Donna, and can model language for Donna to use to acknowledge and support her daughter's exploration. This is a confidence building experience for both Donna and her daughter that can be practiced regularly while they participate in the Growing Together class and on home visits.

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Staff Reflections on Implementing Circle of Security with Luke, Denise and Annie

Luke is a participant in the Growing Together Parenting Program at PACT and he attends class with his 17 month old daughter. Luke does not live with his daughter, Annie, and her mother. He typically sees her once a week at class and sometimes has an additional visit with her at another early intervention program. Luke tends to defer physical care to Annie's mother and he does have some physical limitation in the use of one arm. Annie's development is delayed and she has just recently begun to crawl. Annie's mother, Denise, is delighted in her daughter's recent progress with movement and is pointing out to staff that her daughter is "going out on the circle". Luke tends to take a protective stance on his daughter's exploration. He is looking to see what danger lurks.

What we observe is Denise being excited and proud about Annie's new found movement. What we don't observe is Denise narrating Annie's play and engaging in more intimate dialog with Annie about what she is doing and this is not unusual in our work with parents with ID. Denise has an engaging personality, is connected with other family support programs, and has a strong support system with her grandmother.

What we observe with Luke is some hesitation to engage in playfulness and simply being with his daughter and attachment to his view of himself as the protector even though he is not his daughter's primary caregiver. He reports that his own father was frequently absent in his childhood and is critical of his daughter's living arrangement with her mother, great grandmother, and other extended family.

How can COS help with this family?

Denise can continue to receive praise, support, and coaching to enhance her daughter's exploration in both the center and on home visits.

Luke can be supported to engage more actively in play sessions with his daughter while at the center and learn to enjoy "being with" his daughter exactly as she is and perhaps learn to let go of some of his ideas about how he thinks things should be.