

## **CHEERS Check-In (CCI)**

### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

#### **1. *It seems like there is some subjectivity in decision-making and ratings. How do we ensure we are using the tool with reliability?***

- The best way to ensure the CCI is being used with reliability is by coding with others and participating in the four training video practices offered through HFA (there are also two Spanish videos that are available for coding). Objectivity is improved by participation in solid training opportunities. Of course, when you complete your annual or semi-annual observation with each family using the CCI, someone cannot always be with you. A follow-up conversation with your supervisor can help to clarify ratings. We also recommend using videotapes and sharing the positives only with families.
- You are correct that there will be some subjectivity when making any observations. We always view the world from our own perspective, which is based upon past experience and is anchored to how what we observe makes us feel. To become more objective, after observing a parent-child interaction session, take a moment to consider what you, personally, are feeling and to reflect on how these feelings could impact what you are observing. How you are feeling often leads to interpretations, which sometimes seem to turn into facts, when indeed they are not. This is why we encourage you to focus as best you can on the facts. What do the parents actually do? It is also important to remember that what the parent *says* is not as important as what a parent *does* to a baby.
- Additionally, what we are observing also depends on the depth of our knowledge about attachment and our experience in observing CHEERS in the past. The more we understand the power of infancy and how it impacts us for life, the easier it will be to develop ratings.
- **Ask yourself, is the baby getting what she needs from the interactions observed.**

#### **2. *How do you use the tool when there are siblings present?***

- When siblings are present, it can be helpful to bring other activities for them and encourage them to play without engaging the parent for 8-10 minutes. That said, we know that siblings may join in with the parent-child observation while you are using the CCI (the parent-child dyad). Focus your ratings on how the parent responds to the parent-child dyad you are observing, noting in the comments section how siblings might have impacted the rating.
- Share with your supervisor what you noticed and how the parent was present for both the target child and the siblings. This observation may allow you to point out the strengths of how the parent's responses to both show love and caring and can also offer ideas for how to support the parent in being more available to both (or more) children by using the Reflective Strategies.
- When siblings are target children as well, you will want to conduct the CCI on separate dates.

### **3. *What do we do with the score and what do we document? How do we use the final ratings?***

- There are three ways to use the scores: *individual item*, *domain score*, and *total score* (minimal application at this point in time).
- Individual item scores:
  - Share with parents their strengths for any 6- to 7-point ratings. These are solid strengths and ATP would be a great strategy. Do not hesitate to use ATP multiple times during a visit.
  - Anything less than 5 (4 or below) is an area for intervention, also using the Reflective Strategies.
    - The first Reflective Strategy of choice is always Strategic ATP when you see the behavior you want to increase.
    - When you don't see the parent responding to the child in a way that is nurturing and responsive, Explore & Wonder (E&W) is the strategy of choice. Wondering together with the parent about what the child's behavior might mean still keeps the parent in the "driver's seat" and encourages parental reflection about the intent of the child's behavior, which can carry over into other interactions when you are not present.
    - Problem Talk is also a great strategy to use. Be sure to leave the questions wide open. Here are a couple of samples:
      - What do you think it means when...?
      - How do you know when...?
      - What do you enjoy most about being with your child?
- Domain scores:
  - Use these to determine the CHEERS domains to address. Generally speaking, any scores less than a 5 (4 or less) should be addressed using the Reflective Strategies.
  - Discuss these with your supervisor and strategize which Reflective Strategies could be used (in-the-moment interactions).
- Overall scores: At this time, the CHEERS Check-In does not have a "cut-off" score, which would require additional research. The overall score can be reviewed over time to see if there are major changes in interactions over time (we would hope the scoring would increase).

### **4. *What if the parent-child interaction we observe on a regular basis is not the same as when using the CHEERS Check-In? Sometimes the parent and the child act differently for this observation.***

- This is something we are still learning about. We would recommend discussing this in supervision and focusing on what was different. It is important to consider what might be happening for the parent.

- Is the parent nervous (the validation study told us that after three minutes of observation, the “video effect” disappears)?
- Is the request for us to be quiet while we just let the parent & child interact together making the parent feel “forced” to interact differently?
- Are we feeling uncomfortable implementing the tool (are we feeling forced, or feel like we are being judgmental)? If we are feeling uncomfortable it is important to share in supervision to help us manage our own feelings.
- It would be important to document any differences in what you observe normally during CHEERS and the CCI in the notes section.

**5. *Do we need to tell the family we are scoring this interaction? Some parents get nervous.***

- No, we do not recommend that you tell the parent that you are scoring this interaction. We just want them to know that we are going to let the parent play with their child for 10 minutes and that you will just be quiet and let them be together. When the 8-10 minutes is over, let the parent know of their special gifts to their child.
- Parents we serve do want to be the best parents they can be. In all of the CHEERS Check-In videos, it is very clear that parents want to love their babies and want their babies to love them. When they interact with their infant, baby, toddler, they truly want to connect—but they just may not have any memory of their parents doing that for them. They have nothing to anchor to. In all of the CCI videos, you can see how hard they are working to let their babies know they love them. They would so appreciate having your support to help them be the parents they want to be—without judgment or needing you to teach or coach them. What will work the best for parents is for you to be present and to use the Reflective Strategies that keep them in the empowerment place, and which may be unique for them.

**6. *What should we do when the child shuts down within the first 5 minutes?***

- It is totally fine to postpone the CCI until the next visit. Babies and toddlers are like that. Conduct the CHEERS Check-In at a later date, just like you would do with an ASQ. For this reason, we are encouraging that sites schedule the CCI tool at least a month before it is due.

**7. *Can you explain the NA option for the vocalization and give us a specific situation where that would be appropriate to enter? Do we still assign a rating? Do we still assess how the parent responds to sounds and cooing, not necessarily full-on words?***

- If the baby does not vocalize, it is hard for the parent to respond to a baby’s vocalization. That said, if baby/toddler, does not vocalize during a 10-minute observation, and this matches with your regular CHEERS documentation, you might be curious about what is going on.

- Vocalizations for infants can be small vocal utterances such as grunts (disengage), coos (engage), “aahs” (engage), etc.
  - No sounds from infants at all could be something for you to develop interventions around (Reflective Strategies).
- Vocalizations for toddlers can include single words or single sounds that mean a word to a parent (very positive sign).
- The rating that you assign is an “NA.” When you calculate the Domain Score for Expression with an NA, you add the 2-ratings you have and divide by 2 (rather than 3).
- It is important to assess how the parent responds to all vocalizations including sounds or cooing. Social-emotional development is strongly correlated to the conversations that parents have with their children. In fact, language capacity does not appear to increase without a connection or conversation with a “special adult” (e.g., parents/caregivers). Digital programming, which has no social-emotional connection, does not seem to make a difference.

**8. *What follow-up do I need to do as a supervisor?***

- Any item ratings less than 5 should be considered as intervention points, as well as some 5s, depending on FSS observations. These can be added to the Service Plan, especially if the Domain score is 4 or less.
- Compare the CCI to the CHEERS documented each visit. What do you notice? Does the CCI match? Why not? What are you thinking might be happening for parent, for FSS, for you?

**9. *Are we allowed to split scores like 4-5 or should we just pick one number?***

- Choose a specific score. Add comments in the notes section.

**10. *Is it ok for us not to rate an area and then explain why we did not rate it in the comments?***

- In order to follow validation requirements, you will need to rate each item. If there is a difficult situation that impacted your rating, please list it in the notes section. HFA would also appreciate hearing from you more about items that you do not feel comfortable rating, so that we can add them to potential improvements to the tool.