

# Observing Children



Good Practice Guidelines

# Aim: to understand the rules that underpin observing young children

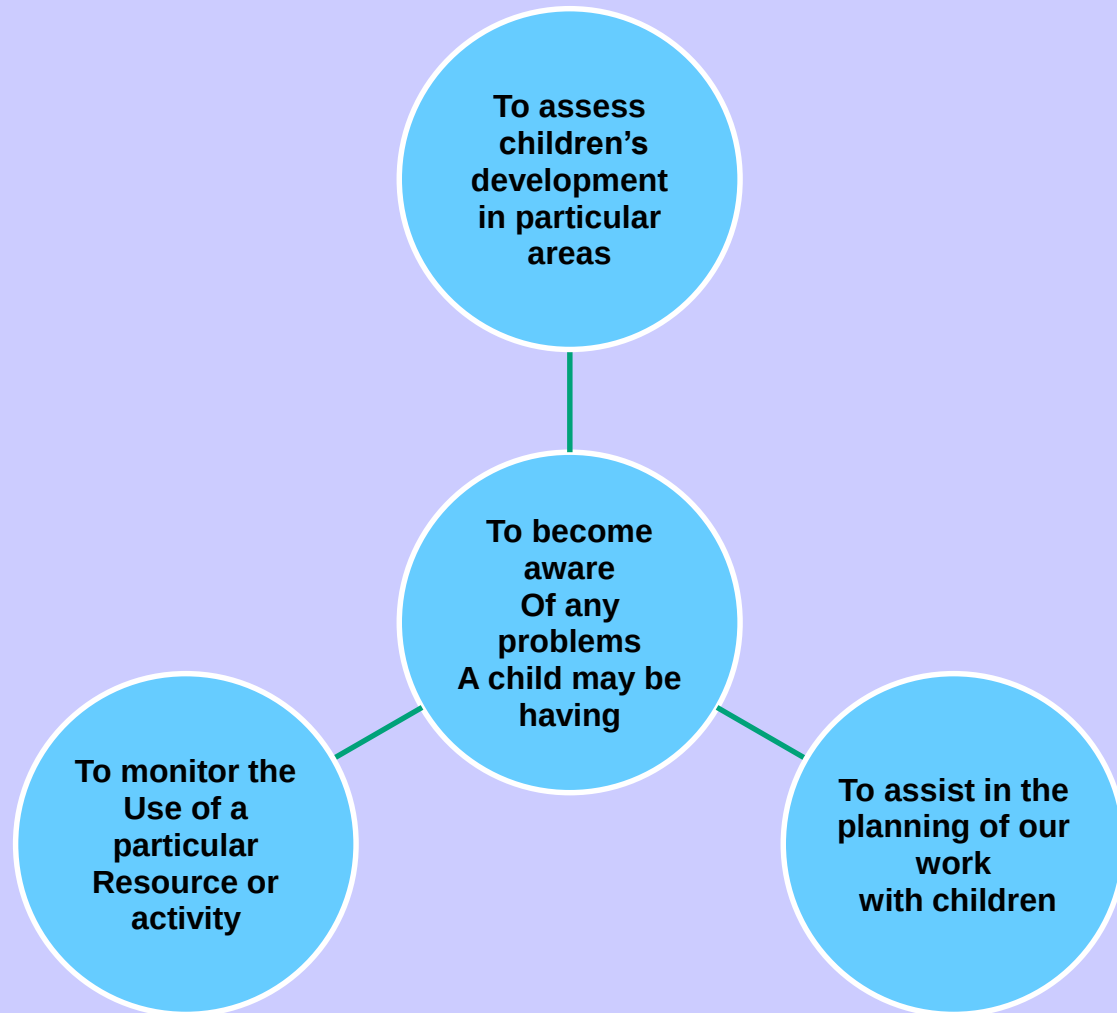
By the end of this session you will have

- Explored the rationale behind the rules that govern observing children
- Developed a checklist that will guide your practice regarding observations



# Revision question :-

## Why do we need to observe children?



- Observing the development of children can be fascinating.
- Each child is a unique individual.
- Children develop as they grow and learn new complex skills.
- The sequence of development is the same for all children.
- An individual's ability progresses at different rates depending on inherited characteristics and the nurturing the child receives.
- Growth and development will progress well when a child's basic needs for food, warmth, sleep, exercise, encouragement and love are met by reliable adult carers.



# Observation Skills

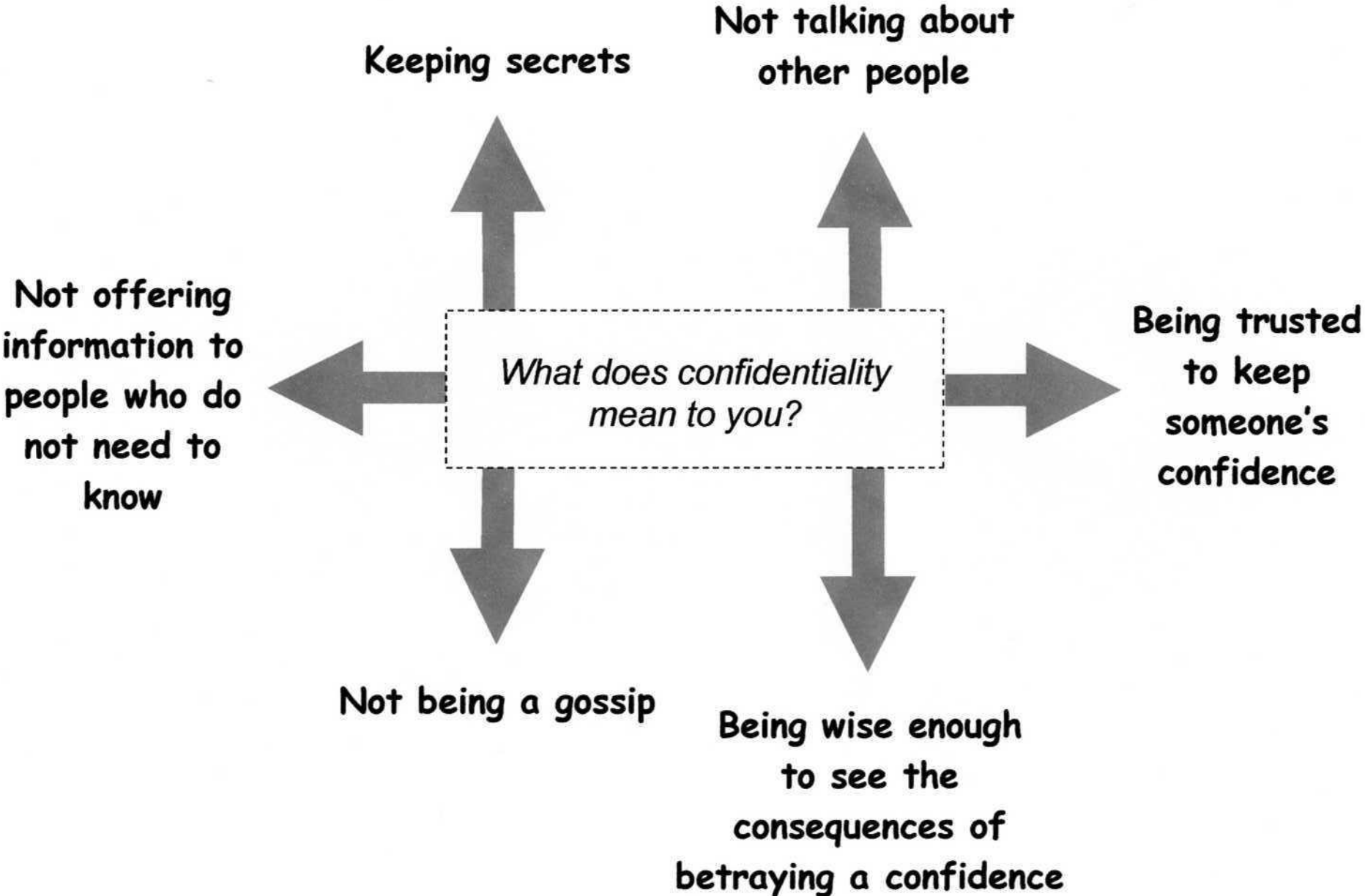
- Observing a child's unique development is a rewarding skill to learn.
- As with all new skills, observation requires practice.
- In this session we are going to examine some guidelines essential to developing observational skills.

# Rule 1. Maintain Confidentiality



What does confidentiality mean  
to you?

**Board Plan 2.1**



# Confidentiality is both a professional requirement and a legal requirement

- With reference to the above statement explain why we must maintain confidentiality during observations ?
- How did you (or can you) maintain confidentiality during your observations ?

# Data Protection Act 1998

- Covers only personal data relating to a specific living individual who can be identified from information held on records or information combined from several different records.
- Sets out the terms under which that data is processed, how it can be used and distributed, as well as how it should be stored.

# **The Data Protection Act 1998**

## **What is the Data Protection Act 1998?**

It is a law that protects personal privacy and upholds individuals' rights.

## **Does the Act affect you?**

Yes. The Data Protection Act applies to anyone who handles or has access to information about individuals. The Act also gives rights to the people the information is about. By law, everyone in the workplace must follow the rules set out in the Act and help protect individuals' rights.

## **What are your responsibilities?**

The Act helps make sure that the information held on computers and in some paper based systems is managed properly. You must protect personal information by following the eight principles of good practice.

## **Why do you need to know about the Data Protection Act (DPA) ?**

Anyone who handles personal information as part of his or her job must be aware.

# The Eight Principles

The Act is based on eight data protection principles, or rules of good information handling.

In summary, the data must be:

1. Processed fairly and lawfully.
2. Obtained only for one or more specified purpose.
3. Adequate relevant and not excessive.
4. Accurate and up to date.
5. Not kept for longer than necessary.
6. Processed according to the individual's rights.
7. Kept secure
8. Not transferred to other countries that do not have suitable data protection controls.

# Data Protection Act 2018

- Legislation revised and updated in May 2018
- General Data Protection Regulations replace the UK's existing data protection laws to keep them up to date for the digital age in which ever increasing amounts of personal data are being processed.
- It sets new standards for protecting personal data, in accordance with recent EU data protection laws, giving people more control over use of their data. The Act also helps prepare the UK for a future outside the EU.
- Explanatory Notes Available from
- [https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/12/pdfs/ukpga\\_en\\_20180012\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/12/pdfs/ukpga_en_20180012_en.pdf)

# Rule 1. Maintain Confidentiality

- Ensure you have permission for making an observation from parents/carer, supervisor (signature) before undertaking any observations.
- Use codes, initials or alternative names rather than children's given names to refer to the individuals involved.
- Understand and abide by the setting's policies and procedures.

# Rule 1. Maintain Confidentiality

- Taped and photographic evidence can reveal identities so take extra care e.g. storage.
- Do not discuss observations /children / families/staff from work setting as others may identify individuals.
- Ideally observation recrds should be kept in locked cupboards.

## Board Plan 2.2

Sensitive information about the child and the child's background is being recorded.

The acquisition of information on the child's progression and development.

The child's identity must not be revealed to outsiders.  
The acid test is that members of staff should be able to read the observation and not be able to identify the child in question.

### **Why it is important to keep confidentiality when recording observations and assessments**

There may be chance for discrimination.

We are discovering personal information on the child's strengths and weaknesses. This includes education and health matters.

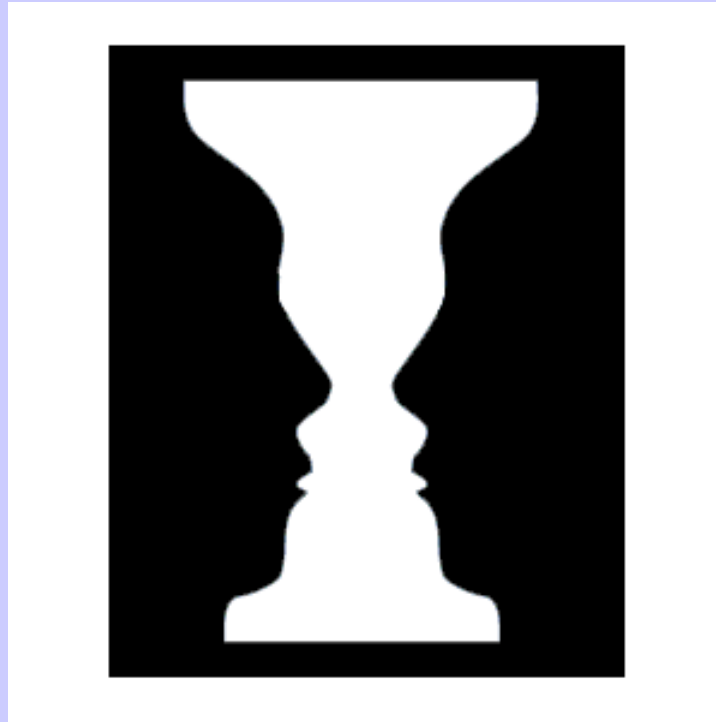
Child may become labelled.

Expectations may be lowered and the child may be written off.

# Principles of Good Practice

- Points to consider:
- Who, how, what and where?
- Permission sought
- Access
- Authenticity
- Storing Privacy and Data Protection

# Rule 2: Remain Objective



# What do you see?



# Child playing hide and seek?????

**Friendly  
can play  
with  
others**



**popular**

**Clever can count**

**Happy enjoys  
company**

# Child crying ??????

**Sad  
needs a  
cuddle**



**Frightened needs  
protecting**

**Lonely  
Withdrawn  
Needs friends**

**Naughty -  
A whiney  
child- ignore  
her**

# Being punished ???



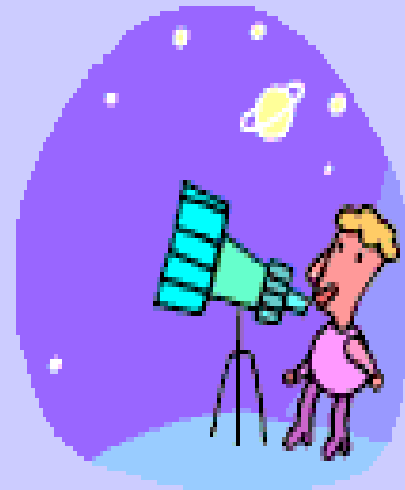
Needs to be  
Punished  
and taught  
manners

Mischievous

Undisciplined  
Needs to be  
Set limits

# If we are subjective.....

- We see things from our own perspective

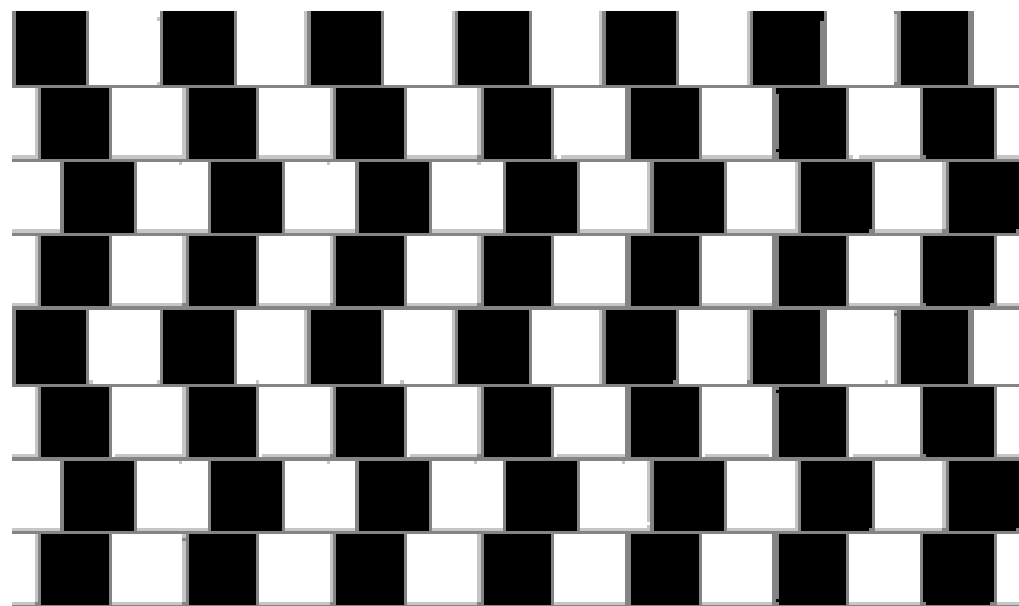


People's perception are coloured by their past experiences, expectations, desire to please, possible fears and anxieties, and even last night's television viewing.

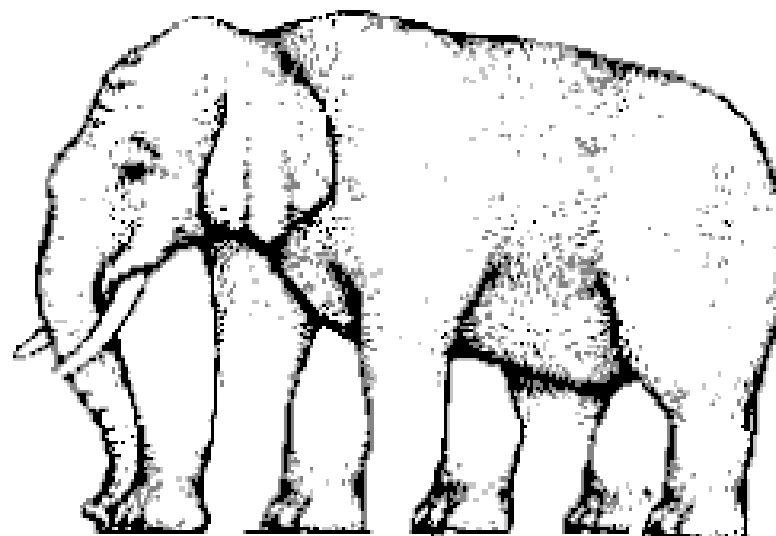
Look at the following images; what do you see?

It's not easy to always rely on our eyes. Do we sometimes introduce things from our own imaginations?





Are the horizontal lines parallel or do they slope?



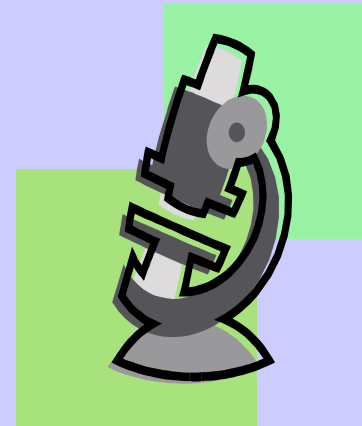
How many legs does this elephant have?

# Class Activity



# If we are Objective we.....

- Must try to stand back from our own viewpoint and look at the world in a less personal way.



# Rule 2: Remain Objective

It is important that you take steps to make observations as objective as possible:

- Build up pictures of development if possible. Try and see the child in different situations with different people.
- Why would this be particularly important when observing behaviour for example?

# Rule 2: Remain Objective

- Keep an open mind.
- See yourself as a collector of information and **record only what you see and hear.**
- How might your judgment be influenced by ;
  - *a child with a label e.g. a child with language difficulties*
  - *a child that you know outside the setting e.g. the vicar's daughter*
  - *a child from a different cultural background*
  - *a child who has suffered a trauma that you also have experienced*

***Be open to the possibility that your assessment might be biased and seek advice if needed.***

# Rule 3: Consider Factors that Might Influence the Observation

Children and observers are not robots and a number of factors might influence what you might see and record.

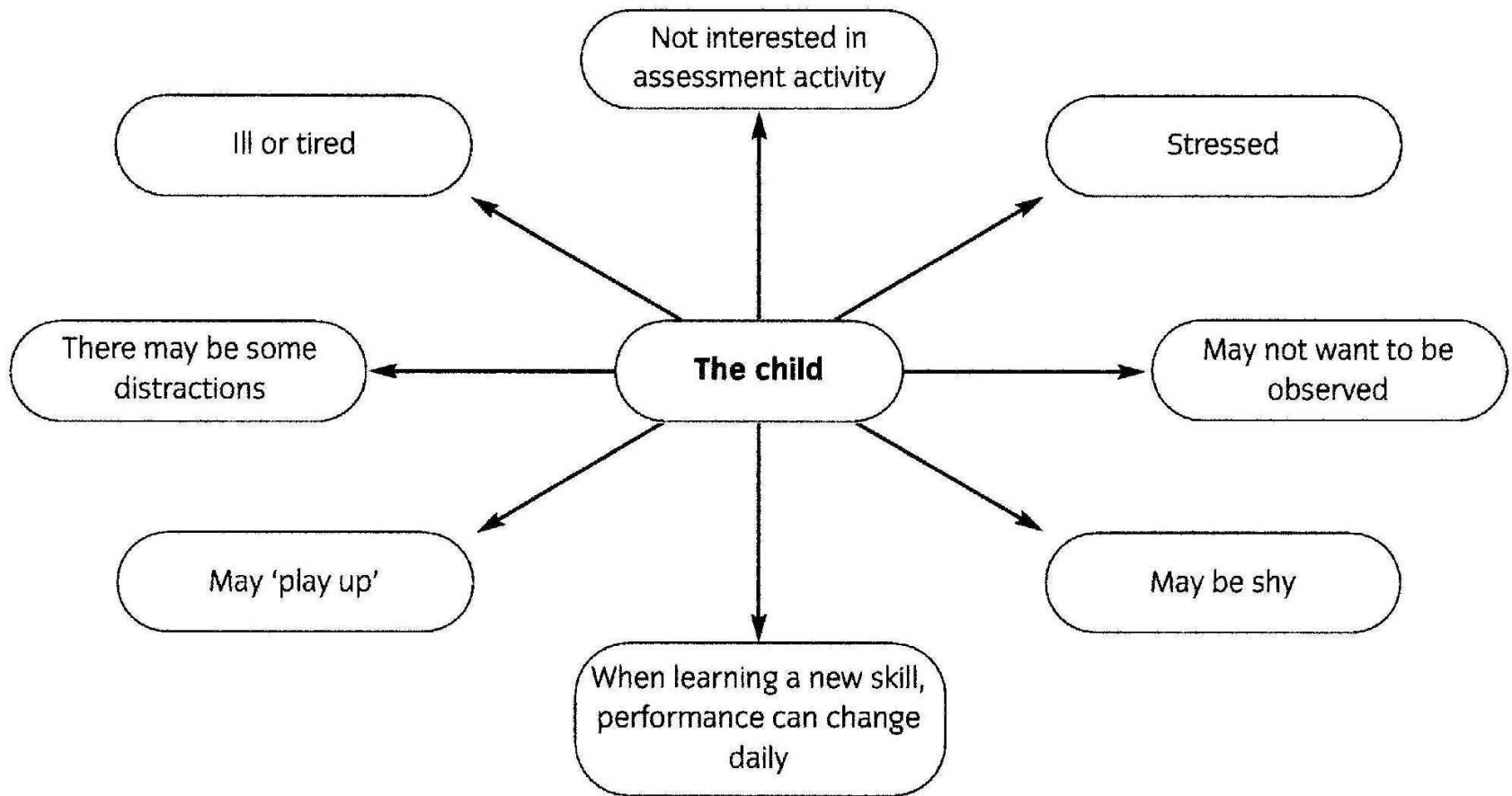
You should always include possible influential factors in your assessment.



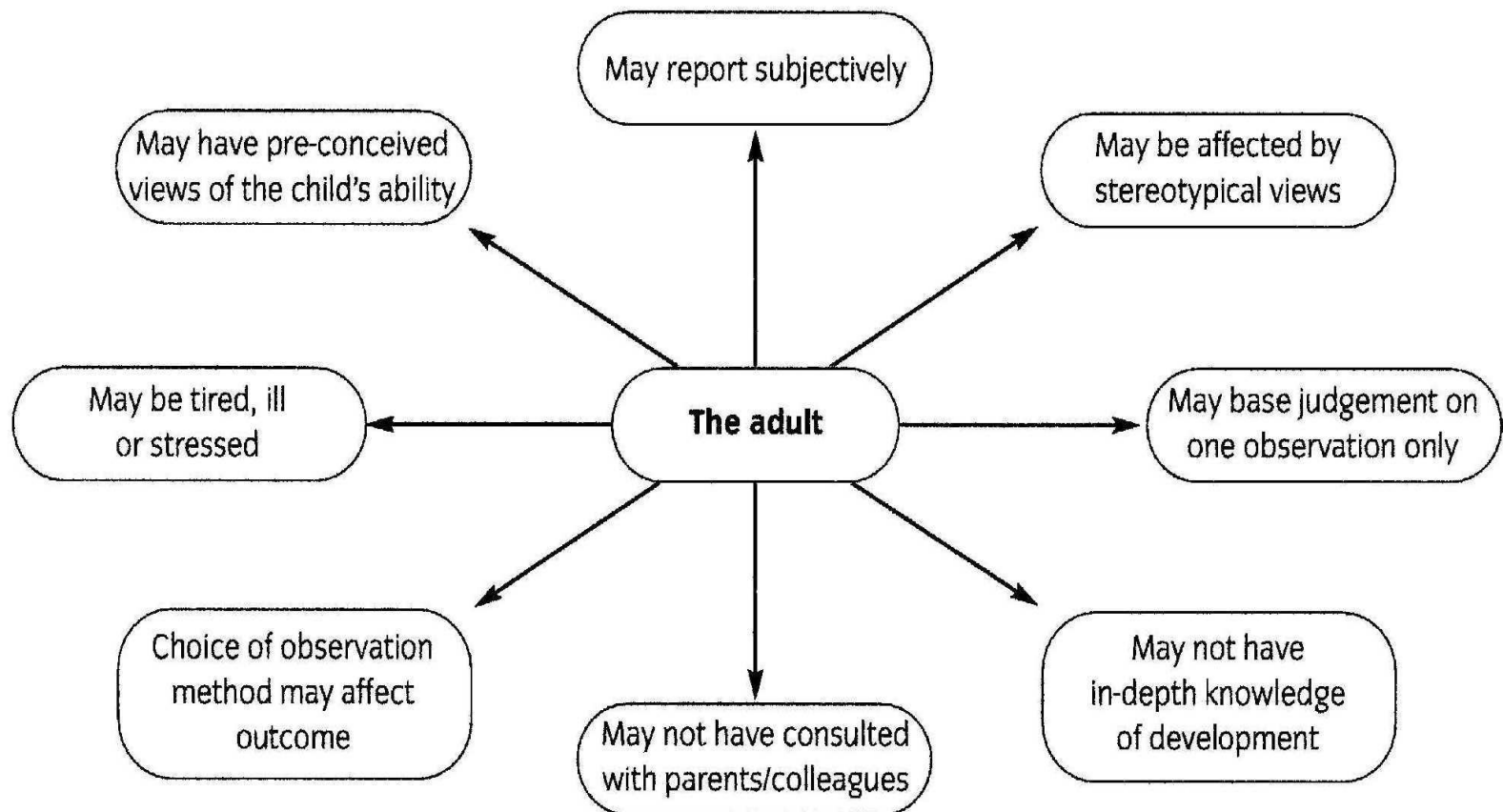
# Consider Factors that Might Influence the Observation

- Environmental
- Physical
- Other factors
- Emotional

# Factors affecting the child



# Factors affecting the adult



# Rule 4: Use the Language of Observations



## Rule 4: Use the Language in Observations

- Always write the observations in the present tense.
- Do not include interpretation e.g. “the child has a headache”. Instead record what you see “the child is holding her head in her hands.”
- Do not identify individuals – use child A/ Nursery Nurse X
- Include as much detail as possible BUT remain focussed on the aim e.g. if the aim is to observe fine manipulative skills you may not need to record all language used.

# Rule 5: Remain as Unobtrusive as Possible

The term observer implies an onlooker, someone who is not directly involved in what is going on.

- You should try and be as unobtrusive as possible because your presence can affect the way the children behave.
- Position yourself away from the activity but close enough to see and hear. Try not to make eye contact with the child/children you are observing.
- If you do become involved record this as part of the observation.

# Planning an Observation



- Always seek permission from your placement supervisor and ensure that your observation permission is signed in ink by your supervisor or child's parent.
- Plan a suitable time of day to carry out your observation.
- Choose a 'good spot' to carry out the observation.
- Be clear of your aim – what area of development are you observing ?

## **Board Plan 4.1**

### ***Factors to consider when setting up a policy on observation and assessment***

**Where will it be carried out?**

**How will it be stored, filed away or password protected? Remember confidentiality.**

**What are the setting's policies for a child who becomes distressed during an observation or who simply cannot carry out the assessment?**

**Why is the observation/assessment being done? Is it being carried out in the child's best interest?**

**When will it take place?**

**Will there be a follow-up recording?**

**What action will be taken?**

**Who will be consulted  
- parents, manager,  
room senior?**

**Remember that observation and assessment is an on-going process.**

**Who has access to observation/assessment?**

**Who will do the observation/assessment?**

**How will it be evaluated?**

**Which method will be used - written record, tick chart or something else?**

**Are parents able to view and make comments on recommendations and action plans for their children?**

# In conclusion



- Observations provide the information you require in order to plan and implement high-quality, positive environments for babies, children and young people.
- From your observations you will learn about all aspects of the child's development and when you need to support, encourage, review and plan for the future.

# References

Beaty, J. (2006) Observing Development of the Young Child. Seventh Edition. Harlow: Pearson Education Inc.