



PEDALS Tip Sheet: Observing SEL in Action in Infant Classrooms

(Connection , Reciprocity , Inclusion , Opportunities to Grow )

What to Notice During Observations

Connection: Building Safety and Trust

Between Caregivers and Infants:

- Responsive caregiving (comforting cries, responding to needs)
- Warm, nurturing voice, gentle touch, or mirroring infant cues
- Slowing down to match the infant's pace, even in busy routines

Between Adults:

- Greeting each other warmly at shift changes or throughout the day
- Small moments of emotional support ("I've got this, go take a breath.")
- Sharing laughter, quick check-ins, or affirming each other's efforts

With Families:

- Personal greetings that show recognition and warmth
- Acknowledging the child's growth ("She's been really working on sitting up!")

Reciprocity: Two-Way Interaction, Even in Simple Ways

Between Caregivers and Infants:

- Serve-and-return communication (sounds, gestures, facial expressions)
- Following the infant's lead in play or exploration
- Pausing to wait for infant responses during routines

Between Adults:

- Balanced teamwork (offering and accepting help naturally)
- Sharing ideas about a child's needs and adjusting care plans together

With Families:

- Listening carefully to family input and building plans together
- Valuing family knowledge about their child's cues and routines

Inclusion: Making Everyone Feel They Belong

Between Caregivers and Infants:

- Supporting participation in group time or floor play in flexible ways
- Adapting environments or routines for different developmental needs
- Respecting individual rhythms (some infants observe quietly, others dive in)

Between Adults:

- Welcoming new staff members or substitutes into the room intentionally
- Ensuring all team members' voices are heard in planning or debriefs

With Families:

- Inviting family involvement based on their comfort and interest
 - Ensuring communication methods honor different family languages, styles, and preferences
-

Opportunities to Grow: Supporting Emerging Skills

Between Caregivers and Infants:

- Creating safe moments of “stretch” (allowing problem-solving, safe frustration)
- Encouraging exploration (reaching, grasping, crawling)
- Naming emotions: "You seem excited!" or "It's okay to feel frustrated."

Between Adults:

- Celebrating small wins together ("Look how far he's come!")
- Supporting each other's professional growth through feedback and affirmation

With Families:

- Sharing strengths-based updates about children's growth ("She's communicating so much with her hands!")
 - Partnering with families around developmental milestones and next steps
-

Reflection Prompts for Leaders

 Where did I see Connection, Reciprocity, Inclusion, or Growth happening — between children, staff, and families?

 How are caregivers tuning into each infant's individual communication style and needs?

 How do adult-to-adult interactions model the community and emotional safety we want for children?

 Where can we intentionally deepen opportunities for belonging and emotional growth in daily routines?

Important Reminders for Infant Rooms

- Infants show SEL through cues — gestures, sounds, body movements — not always through eye contact or words.
- Adult relationships set the emotional climate children experience.
- Authentic SEL moments happen during transitions, caregiving routines, and natural play — not just "planned" activities.
- Inclusion and connection mean honoring all ways of engaging, communicating, and belonging.

"In infant rooms, SEL is not something you teach — it's something you live."