

Sensitivity and responsiveness

Parental sensitivity and responsiveness refer to the degree to which a parent successfully reads cues (verbal, physical, and otherwise) from the child and responds effectively. This rating should reflect the extent to which the interactions between parent and child are synchronous.

High Scores (4-5): Indicators of a highly or mostly sensitive parent

- Were the parent's responses to the child generally well-timed and effective?
- Was the parent able to *anticipate* the child's signals and/or reactions and respond or intervene effectively before, e.g., the child became upset?
- Was the parent able to anticipate problems and skillfully redirect the child before problems arose?
- Did the parent's interactions with the child seem to be tailored to the needs and characteristics of her/his particular child?
- Was the parent generally available (emotionally and physically) to the child?
- If needed, did the parent put the child's needs over the needs of the experiment - e.g., engaging in more interactions than instructed, but ones that successfully allowed the child to successfully engage in the experimental tasks?
- When the parent and child were interacting outside of the context of the child being distressed, was the parent focused on the child (e.g., if the child was bored, the parent changed pace; if the child was confused, the parent provided an effective explanation; the parent allowed the child to direct the general pace of the play instead of being overly directive or focused on what the parent wanted to do, etc)?
- Was the parent generally accepting of the child?

Parents who score a 5 are flawlessly sensitive and responsive during the session. Parents who score a 4 are quite sensitive but may have one or two lapses or missed opportunities during the session, may misinterpret their child's cues once or twice, or may be slow to respond on a task where we asked them to avoid interaction.

Middle Scores (3): Indicators of a parent who is average in sensitivity/"good enough"

- The parent showed behaviors characteristic of a 4 or 5, but not consistently. S/he missed some clear signals and/or ignored some of the child's signals of distress or need for comfort and/or assurance. This can be scored even if the parent is ignoring the child because "we told them to" because a "sensitive" parent would bend the rules in order to be supportive of his/her child.
- Were the parent's responses not entirely effective with the child or effective at times but not at others? This parent might do well when the child is not bored or otherwise needing to be redirected.
- Were the parent's responses not entirely sensitive to this particular child or sensitive at times but not at others? This parent might do well when we only ask her to attend to the child (e.g. free play) but have trouble with sensitivity when her attention is divided or she must get the child to do something the child is uninterested in or does not want to do.
- Did the parent include the child in play, but at times fail to acknowledge or incorporate the child's ideas into the play?

Low Scores (1-2): Indicators of a somewhat or highly insensitive parent

- Did the parent miss or ignore multiple or most of the child's signals?
- Were the parent's responses or lack of response largely ineffective in calming the child?
- Did the experimenter step in to soothe or interact with the child/ respond to the child's cues or signals because of the parent's failure to respond?
- Was the parent rejecting of the child (e.g., bids for attention, distress signals, ideas during play)?