

The Stranger's Role Minnesota Longitudinal Study

Generally the stranger is responsible for taking care of the toys and making sure the testing room is okay for the subject. That is, she is responsible for laying out the toys, checking the chair arrangement and the magazines to make sure all is in place. She should also be prepared to do the "intro" on videotape: introduce the child (by first name and last initial), the date of testing, the child's birthdate and the subject number.

For the strange situation to run without a hitch, it is **CRUCIAL** that the stranger stay out of the sight of the child and the mom prior to the testing. This means staying in the filming room probably 15 minutes before the mother's scheduled arrival. If the filmer is also the person who greets the mother and infant, the stranger should be sure the tape is running as soon as the filmer leaves the mother and the baby in the testing room. At that point the filmer will take over the rest of the videotaping.

General Guidelines for the Strange Situation

1. Gear your behavior to that of the child's. In other words, try to get a "feel" for each child's "personality." For example, if the child appears to be shy, but you are usually not, accommodate to the child and be less assertive.
2. There is a relationship between how upset the child is upon separation from her mother and the stranger's response to the child. The more upset the child becomes, the more intervention may be needed (such as talking to the child, picking up and holding the child, etc.). However, this doesn't work with every child/case.
3. During the separation episodes (mother from baby), allow the child to notice and possibly react to the separation by stepping back from the child (this is specifically advised by Ainsworth). Refrain at least for a short while, then, from initiating any interaction with the child. **AT ALL TIMES, AVOID PLACING YOUR BODY BETWEEN THE CAMERA AND THE BABY.** If possible, arrange toys or activities so that the child is facing toward the camera rather than having her back to it but don't move toys or baby during procedure unless absolutely necessary.
4. The stranger's behavior should be in the following order: a) calm the child down; b) get her engaged in the toys and c) as soon as the child is playing peacefully, return immediately to your chair. Keep an eye on the child, though, as you pretend to read your magazine.

STRANGER EPISODES

INTRODUCTION: Mother and baby are present and have been in the room alone for three minutes, to give them time to acclimate to their surroundings. Mother is seated in a chair directly opposite the stranger's. The child should be on the floor (approximately 3 feet away from the mother), playing with the toys.

STRANGER ENTERS. (6 minute episode total): Stranger opens the playroom door, enters, smiles at the mother and says “Hello, my name is _____ and I’m the stranger.” No more is said for one minute as the stranger takes her seat and begins to “read” her magazine. Ainsworth notes that at this point the “stranger may watch the baby, but should not stare at him if baby seems apprehensive of her.” At the end of this first minute (when the first knock is heard), the stranger will initiate a brief conversation with the mother. Usually this consists of saying hello again and of informing/reminding the mother of what will be happening next. Specifically, tell the mother that in one minute there will be another knock on the wall that will be the stranger’s cue to get on the floor and start playing with the child (use the child’s name). One minute later, another double knock will be heard and this will be the mother’s cue to get up and leave as “quietly as possible, leaving the magazine on the chair behind you.” This period of time is used to primarily reassure the mother and remind her of her role in the process. If there is any time left, the stranger can discuss “benign” topics such as the weather, or whether the mother had any trouble getting to the research site, how cute the baby is, etc.) So:

KNOCK ONE: Stranger converses with mother.

KNOCK TWO: Stranger gets down on the floor to play/interact with baby.

DOUBLE KNOCK: Mother leaves the room, with stranger and baby staying behind. Stranger allows the child to notice the mother’s departure (i.e., by not speaking to the child or otherwise diverting attention at this point). If the child gets upset, give her a little time (hopefully to settle down), then after a suitable time, try to comfort her and re-engage her in play. Once the child seems o.k., return to seat (to “read”). Be responsive to the child’s advances at this point, but do no more initiation than necessary.

NOTE: If the child is upset upon separation and calls out to Mom, it is OK for the stranger to respond with “Mommy will be right back.”, but the stranger should not dwell upon the mother’s departure but rather redirect the child’s attention to the toys as soon as possible.

During the next three minutes, the stranger is either calming the child or sitting in the chair “reading” and overlooking what the child is doing. At the end of this 3 minute interval, the mother returns, calling her child’s name from outside the door. The stranger now “slips out,” once the mother has reunited with the child. (Wait until the reunion is complete.)

INTERMEDIATE TIME: During the next two episodes, the stranger waits in the room with the filmer while the mother and the baby are in the playroom together (for the first 3 minutes), and then when the mother leaves and the baby is left alone (for the second 3 minutes). This second separation from the mother is more likely to be more upsetting for the child, so that the episode may be cut short either at the mother’s request, or if you feel that the child is not going to be calmed down. We don’t want the child to be TOO stressed out!!

STRANGER RETURNS: The child is quite often upset by now. The stranger should enter very cautiously because the child is usually right near the door, pause for a second and then respond to the child in the way it appears the child wishes to be responded to (i.e., if the child is upset, this often involves picking her up). Calm the child down, and if possible, reengage her with the toys and then return to sit and “read”, while overlooking the child’s activities. (If the child is not distressed at this point, smile at or otherwise acknowledge the child and return directly to your chair.) After a total of three minutes, the mother will return and the stranger should “slip out” as before.

The stranger's role is now "officially" finished, although she should remain until the testing is completed in case the filmer needs assistance. She is also responsible for cleaning the toys after each visit and any other odds and ends which need to be wrapped up while the filmer takes the mother and child to the car. Usually this involves making sure the tape is labelled and put away, and ensuring that all equipment is shut off and the doors are locked. Also, it is best to have the room set up for the next visit at the conclusion of the current visit.

Guidelines for the filmer

Since the filmer for any given child will be doing the majority of “rapport building” with the mother, it will probably be easier to have the camera equipment set up and ready to run well in advance of the mother’s arrival. (The stranger should be able to get the equipment ready to work in a pinch!) Probably the best way to insure a smooth filming episode is to check the equipment a couple of hours before the scheduled visit to make sure nothing is horribly wrong; and in case there is, there may still be time to get it up and running. **[NOTE: For filming purposes (if we use the one-way mirror), the filmer should wear dark clothing, to avoid reflections through the window on the tape.]**

The filmer is usually responsible for greeting the mother and the baby and bringing them to the testing area. She or another experimenter will do the brief “acquaintance,” demographic interview prior to the actual filming and will be responsible for answering the mothers’ questions about the procedure. Following the conclusion of the interview, she will lead the mother and baby into the testing room and go to the filming room where the camera should already be running (as started by the stranger).

Filming:

Remember that the whole point of the strange situation is to assess the relationship between the mother and the baby. The stranger, therefore, should be present in as little of the picture as possible. Since we’re not using the zoom lens, it is inevitable that the stranger will be in the frame for part of the time, but the idea is to concentrate on the mother-child dyad. During the episodes when the baby and the stranger are together and in the episode where the baby is alone, keep the camera focused on the child and her movements. During the separation episodes, try to include in the frame the fact that the mother is departing, (even catching her feet in the camera shot) as long as the baby is still in the picture. What people will be coding for is the baby’s reaction to the mother’s departure rather than to the mother’s actual movements, so that needs to be the focus of the filming.

During the reunion episodes, it is ideal to have both the mother and the child in the frame at all times. Preference, though, should go to the baby’s reaction. When the mother returns to the chair, keep the focus on the baby. Again, it is good to have both members of the dyad in the frame, but it is most important to never lose sight of the child.

Probably the most difficult job as filmer will be the “dual role” you must play as videotaper and “instructor” to the moms when they’re not in the testing room. In addition to providing instructions should the mother need them, the filmer should be prepared to respond to the mother’s concerns with the Strange Situation. (HOWEVER, IT IS BEST IF CONVERSATION IS KEPT TO A MINIMUM, AND THAT VOICES ARE KEPT LOW, SO AS NOT TO DISTRACT THE CHILD UNNECESSARILY!!) Most of the mother’s questions will have been addressed during the “pre-interview.”

Since the camera will be stationed on the tripod, it should not be too difficult to keep track of the child’s movements without too much effort. The key thing to remember, as you are filming, is which episode we are on and what happens next, so you can inform the mother of what to do at each step. The timer which will appear (hopefully) on the camera will serve as an aid for when each succeeding episode should begin. (In the beginning, we will be using a stopwatch to assess the timing.)