

# Training Module 3

Module Three trainings are designed for **teachers**, encouraging them to examine how their own professional practice impacts the classroom environment, their communication styles and strategies, and the children they serve.



These trainings also provide an opportunity to review and integrate some of the themes and skills introduced in Modules One and Two; therefore, it is recommended that they should occur following the completion of the other two modules. It is **not** recommended that modules and training topics be delivered independently of one another or in a different order than presented.

The goals of Module Three are:

**Supporting Social-Emotional Growth:** learning how social-emotional development can foster resilience in children and how to promote social-emotional growth in the classroom.

**Strategies for Talking to Children about Difficult Issues:** learning how to talk to children about things that trouble them.

**Getting the Most Out of Circle Time:** identifying opportunities for communication during Circle Time and for strategies that utilize books to encourage conversation on social-emotional themes.

The individual or team committed to leading these workshops should understand that they may encounter potential obstacles and/or resistance from some participants to these trainings, as the topics to be discussed can inspire very strong emotions. Each topic is presented in a way that provides guidance for managing such situations by encouraging learning, open communication, and safety for participants.

The order of the trainings allows participants to build skills by first understanding key concepts, and then reflecting on what they bring to their program and work.

The ***Introduction to the Modules*** is a resource for Workshop Leaders, offering support in facilitating successful trainings. In addition, each training outlines goals, objectives, methods and content while also providing points of preparation and reflection for the individual or team responsible for leading the training. You will find a Workshop Evaluation at the end of each workshop along with a list of other Family Connections materials that can provide additional support to the workshop's topic and themes.



## The Training Modules

# Supporting Social-Emotional Growth

Supporting a young child’s social and emotional growth is one of the most positive contributions someone can make to a child’s well-being. We witness social and emotional behavior every day in our programs and have many opportunities to encourage positive development. One of our biggest challenges can be supporting children who exhibit “difficult” behavior, disrupting classroom activities and sometimes hurting other children. We might wonder, “Why can’t he control himself?” or “I can’t understand why she won’t stop hitting her friends.” One specific reason why emotional health is so important is that it largely contributes to a child’s resilience – the ability to develop and thrive despite difficult circumstances or challenging experiences. This workshop provides a stepping-off point for discussing how the classroom, curriculum, and one-on-one interactions all provide opportunities to encourage positive social-emotional experiences and growth for young children.

**Goal** To learn how social-emotional development can foster resilience in children and how to encourage social-emotional growth in the classroom.

**Objectives** Participants will:

- ▶ Identify behaviors they find challenging in children
- ▶ Learn how social-emotional development can be supported in the program, the curriculum, and one-on-one interactions
- ▶ Develop a framework for supporting social/emotional growth of children in their classroom

## Method and Content

This workshop has three distinct sections, each designed to build on the other.

- ▶ Exercise One: Discussing Challenging Behaviors
- ▶ Exercise Two: Strategies for Supporting Social-Emotional Development
- ▶ Exercise Three: Bull’s Eye—Putting Strategies into Practice

Exercise One encourages teachers to share honestly about the behaviors they find most challenging in children. The next two exercises work together to help teaching teams identify and develop strategies for encouraging social-emotional development. Teams will use the information gathered in Exercise Two to complete the diagram in Exercise Three. While the exercises are related, you will want to give directions and set time limits for each separately.

## Getting Started

**What You Need:**

- ▶ Time – this training should take 1.5 hours, not including Workshop Leader preparation. For more information on **Workshop Time Management**, see the **Introduction to the Modules**.
- ▶ A training space large enough to accommodate the members of the training to participate in large (e.g., 20 people or more) and small (e.g., 3-6 people) group discussions. For large groups, you may want to consider including 2 Workshop Leaders to help manage and respond to participant needs. For more information on considerations about **Group Size**, see the **Introduction to the Modules**.

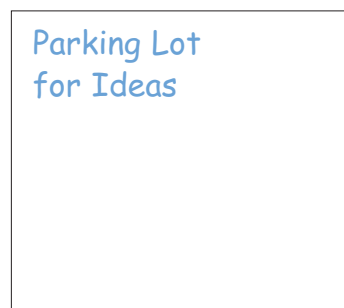
- ▶ Seating for the training group
- ▶ Prepare a training packet for each participant with the following materials:
  - Handout 1: Supporting Social-Emotional Growth: Challenging Behaviors
  - Handout 2: Supporting Social-Emotional Growth: Strategies
  - Handout 3: Bull's Eye — Putting Strategies into Practice
  - A Workshop Evaluation
- ▶ A pen or pencil for each participant
- ▶ Six large pieces of paper
- ▶ Four Markers – three for participants to use in Exercise One and one for the Workshop Leader

### Workshop Leader Preparation

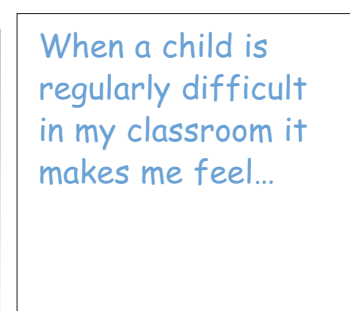
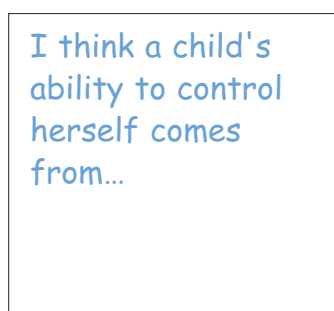
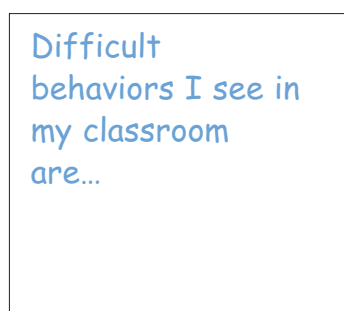
Read through all the workshop materials first. Take time to reflect on your own responses to the exercise questions. Be mindful of your own ideas about where a child's ability to control his/herself comes from. Feelings about families, culture and childrearing may surface and so it is important to acknowledge your own comfort level and biases with the subject matter. Before beginning the workshop, consider how these feelings influence your perspective and ability to facilitate, and prepare to hear participants' views that are different from your own.

#### Preparing the Workshop Space:

- ▶ Prepare the training space by positioning chairs so that the participants can begin as a large group, and then move easily into smaller groups.
- ▶ Place a training packet on each chair in the room.
- ▶ Prepare one large piece of paper, entitled “Parking Lot for Ideas.”



- ▶ Prepare three large pieces of paper with titles (see below). These will be used for Exercise One.



▶ On the last piece of paper, recreate the bull's eye diagram from Handout 3.

▶ Display the large pieces of paper so that the whole group will be able to see each and the Workshop Leader can write on them easily.

## Introduction to the Training

Workshop leaders are encouraged to use their own words to introduce the training. Some key points to consider are:

▶ Welcome the group and review logistics – general agenda, time frame, when to expect breaks, materials, sign-in sheet, etc.

▶ The topic of the training is “Supporting social-emotional growth in children.” Offer a description of what *social-emotional growth* means as well as a definition for *resilience*.

*For example, you might say:*

**“We are focusing on promoting social-emotional development today because it plays an important role in a child's level of resilience. Resilience refers to a child's ability to cope with a range of life's challenges. Social-emotional skills include behaviors like self-control, relationship skills with others, and responsible and appropriate decision making. By focusing on how to encourage these skills in children we can build resilience and contribute to how well the child does overall.”**

▶ Describe the objectives of this training:

- To identify behaviors that participants find challenging in children
- To learn how social-emotional development can be supported at the program level, through the curriculum, and in one-on-one interactions
- To develop a framework for supporting social-emotional growth of children in their classroom

▶ Let participants know that the training will give them an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings, as well as build on their skills as teachers.

▶ Explain the “Parking Lot for Ideas” sheet as follows: During the training, if a question, suggestion, or concern unrelated to the training exercise, but related to the topic is offered, the Workshop Leader will record it on the “Parking Lot for Ideas” sheet. Refer back to these ideas at the end of the training for further discussion as time permits.

▶ Review the *Training Ground Rules*, a short list of statements (listed below) intended to promote a safe, positive environment for all participants. These can be printed on a piece of paper for all to see, but reviewing the rules and asking for group agreement is the most important step before beginning the exercise.

## Training Ground Rules

**There are no right or wrong answers** in any of the activities we will be doing today. Everyone's opinions and feelings are respected here.

**One at a time.** We want to hear what everyone has to say, so it is important to remember that group discussion requires strong listening skills.

**Learning takes time.** We will not rush one another when trying to understand and participate.

**Maintain Confidentiality.** While sharing our experiences we do not need to use names of children, parents or staff.

## Workshop Leader Strategy: Encouraging the Communication of Diverse Viewpoints

Participants may have very different feelings from you and from each other depending on age, culture, training, etc. Such diversity creates an opportunity for individuals to share ideas and learn from each other. That said, managing so many perspectives can also be challenging. Sharing personal feelings and beliefs can feel intimidating.

When reviewing the training rules, you can emphasize how much you appreciate everyone's input. Agreeing to listen to and be respectful of each person's ideas, even if the ideas are different or new, is a necessity. You could also note that the teachers are already skilled at doing this, through their everyday communication with unique children and families.

## Exercise One: Discussing Challenging Behaviors

This exercise is intended to give participants a chance to identify behaviors they may find challenging in the classroom. Since this can be a sensitive topic, reassure the group that honest responses are encouraged and will not be shared outside of the workshop. This part of the training allows the group to identify challenges in a safe environment. In the exercises that follow, they will work together to develop positive and constructive strategies to address these challenges.

▶ Lead a brainstorming exercise to generate responses to the statements posted on the large pieces of paper in the room.

▶ Direct participants' attention to the prompts, listed both on the large pieces of paper and on Handout 1 in their packets.

Read prompts on each page aloud:

- “ ‘Difficult behaviors’ I see in my classroom are...”
- “I think a child’s ability to control herself comes from...”
- “When a child is regularly difficult in my classroom it makes me feel...”

▶ Invite participants to write their responses on the large pieces of paper. It is best to give participants time to come up with their own ideas. However, if individuals seem stuck or there is a particular aspect of child behavior you would like the group to pay special attention to you might provide some prompting questions such as:

**Think of a time you felt really challenged by a child or a group of children. What did they do that made it feel so hard to respond to them? Why did they behave the way they did? How did it make you feel?**

▶ Read the responses generated by participants aloud and highlight common themes. If participants give you a broad and/or limited response help clarify the specifics by prompting them to tell you more. Table 1 presents examples of participant responses that workshop leaders might develop. Encourage participants to record notes on Handout 1.

### **Workshop Leader Strategy: Facilitating Brainstorming**

Participants may believe that discussing child behavior is an opportunity to simply complain about the child. This may make some participants reluctant to talk about children and others only willing to talk about behavior as a child's responsibility. It is important for the Workshop Leader to maintain a workshop atmosphere in which all are encouraged to express the challenges and benefits of working with children, while reflecting on the goal of acknowledging each individual's contribution and the concrete ways the groups can work toward improving child resilience. Maintaining focus will build trust among the participants and encourage individuals to think beyond their personal reactions to positive professional action.

Strategies for maintaining a productive atmosphere:

- ▶ Make use of the "Training Ground Rules" by consistently referring to them.
- ▶ Encourage the group to think hard about:
  - their roles in encouraging positive growth
  - what they need in order to feel productive and comfortable in their classrooms

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# Handout 1

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## Supporting Social-Emotional Growth Challenging Behaviors

"Difficult behaviors" I see in my classroom/program are...

I think a child's ability to control herself comes from...

When a child is regularly difficult in my classroom/program it makes me feel...

**Table 1. Sample responses for Exercise One**

Initial statement prompt	Examples of potential responses	Themes for workshop leader to develop in the discussion
<p><b>“Difficult behaviors” I see in my classroom/program are...</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cursing</li> <li>• Hitting</li> <li>• Biting</li> <li>• Spitting</li> <li>• Knocking down other children’s work</li> <li>• Throwing toys</li> <li>• Lying</li> <li>• Not able to keep hands to self</li> <li>• Tantrums</li> <li>• Unable to transition</li> <li>• Leaving classroom</li> <li>• Running away from teachers</li> </ul>	<p>Some behaviors described as “difficult” can be physically dangerous (i.e. biting, running away, hitting).</p> <p>Other “difficult” behaviors are offensive and make it unpleasant to be in the classroom (i.e. spitting, cursing, lying).</p> <p>Still other behaviors describe the difficulty the child has with every day activities, and getting along in a classroom environment (i.e. knocking down another child’s work, unable to transition, not able to keep hands to oneself).</p>
<p><b>I think a child’s ability to control herself comes from...</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is learned from the parents</li> <li>• Inside of themselves</li> <li>• Watching what others get away with</li> <li>Rules</li> <li>• Understanding what the grown-ups want</li> </ul>	<p>Some believe children’s ability to control themselves comes directly from what they see around them and learn from the rules in their world.</p> <p>Others believe it comes from a child’s experiences with getting their needs met and the degree that they trust the adults around them.</p> <p>Others believe it may be a combination of both of these</p>
<p><b>When a child is regularly difficult in my classroom/program it makes me feel...</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frustrated</li> <li>• Angry</li> <li>• Worried for the child</li> <li>• Like I don’t want to come to work</li> <li>• Exhausted</li> <li>• Like I’m not a good teacher</li> <li>• Dumb</li> <li>• Isolated</li> <li>• Like I am going to get in trouble</li> </ul>	<p>These emotional reactions can be strong and definitely influence what we are able to do in response.</p> <p>We are called upon to separate our personal reaction from our professional reaction.</p>



## Transition to Exercise Two

This exercise can bring up powerful feelings for participants. Depending on what has been said and the general tone of the group at this point, you will need to find a way to finish the exercise without neglecting the feelings that have emerged. Take a few minutes to acknowledge the emotional reactions that have surfaced and thank the group for sharing so honestly. It is not uncommon for participants at this point to feel overwhelmed with the demands of their work. Others may feel energized by the opportunity to share their challenges with one another and discover that they are not alone in their feelings.

*For example, you might say...*

**"An important place to start in this exercise is to think about the children who challenge us. It can be overwhelming to think about difficult behaviors in your classroom. However, recognizing your feelings and sharing them with others can help you support each other and manage these feelings. Together, you can find ways to give attention to the social-emotional needs of all the children in your classroom."**

This is also a good time to remind teachers that they can seek support from colleagues and supervisors when they encounter difficult behaviors in the classroom. If the group seems reluctant to move on, see **General Guidelines for Effective Training** in the *Introduction to the Modules*.

## Exercise Two: Strategies for Supporting Social-Emotional Development

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Now that challenges have been shared openly, the group has the chance to problem solve together and come up with strategies for supporting social-emotional development.

- ▶ Bring participants' attention to Handout 2 in their training packet. Read the handout aloud.

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# Handout 2

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## Supporting Social-Emotional Growth: Strategies

Work in small groups to respond to the following

1. Classroom Environment Strategies:

How do we encourage positive social behavior for the whole group?

2. Curriculum Strategies:

How do children learn about positive social behavior?

3. One-on-one Interactions:

What do I do to help children get along with one another?

4. Other Interventions and Outside Services:

What options are available for the children who need more support?

- ▶ Direct participants to break into small groups by their teaching teams. This is done so that each small group can discuss a common classroom environment and group of children. It is also an opportunity to practice team work when building strategies. Once settled, ask them to review the questions on Handout 2 and discuss their responses with one another.
- ▶ After the teams have had time to discuss their ideas together, return their attention to the large group to share responses. Depending on what time allows, you may ask each group to select one response to share.
- ▶ Table 2 presents examples of participant responses and themes to develop.

**Table 2. Sample responses for Exercise Three**

Response Category	Examples of potential responses	Themes for workshop leader to develop in the discussion
<b>Strategies for the Classroom Environment (outer circle)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom rules</li> <li>• A furniture set-up that lets kids move around easily</li> <li>• Promoting a sense of community</li> <li>• Greeting kids and families</li> </ul>	Strategies at this level affect the whole group and the climate of the classroom. They help children understand what is expected of them and what they can expect from those around them.
<b>Strategies for the Curriculum (next circle in)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circle Time discussion about helping others</li> <li>• Activities that encourage sharing</li> <li>• Getting kids to work in teams or with a partner</li> <li>• Talking and reading stories about making and keeping friends</li> <li>• Pairing kids in activities so that they can build friendships</li> </ul>	Strategies at this level can encourage children to learn about their emotions, how people get along with one another, and healthy ways to express their feelings.
<b>Strategies for One-on-one Interaction (next circle in)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commenting to a child when he is doing well</li> <li>• Trying to talk to a child before they get out of hand</li> <li>• Checking in with a child to see how she is doing throughout the day</li> </ul>	Strategies at this level promote attachment between caregivers and children. They provide children with the opportunity to get individual guidance in their social-emotional development
<b>Strategies from Outside Services (circle around star)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health evaluation</li> <li>• Speech therapy</li> <li>• Play therapy</li> <li>• Hearing test</li> </ul>	Strategies at this level are in addition to what is available in the classroom

### Transition to Exercise Three

Once participants have shared their ideas in the large group, value and acknowledge the diversity of responses and the expertise of the group. Reinforce that sharing their ideas gives everyone a chance to learn new strategies. As group members give ideas and listen to others, they will likely feel enhanced as professionals. Because it is important to put ideas into practice, the next exercise gives them a chance to apply the range of strategies to a particular child.

*For example, you might say...*

“We have heard so many strategies that you are using with success already. Maybe you have heard some new ideas that you want to try. Let’s keep all of these ideas in mind as we move to the next exercise and apply these strategies to one particular child.”

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## Exercise Three: Bull's Eye—Putting Strategies into Practice

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Now that a list of strategies has been created, participants have the opportunity to apply them to a situation that is meaningful to them.

- ▶ Bring participants' attention to Handout 3 in their training packet. Read handout directions aloud.
- ▶ Ask the group if they are clear about how to proceed. Reinforce that this is an opportunity to apply the responses from Exercise Two to a real life challenge. Encourage the teaching teams to think of a child they truly want to understand in a new way, or with whom they would like to try a new approach.
- ▶ When the small groups have finished Handout 3, ask for and record group answers on the large piece of paper with the bull's eye diagram.
- ▶ If participants give you a broad and/or limited response, help clarify the specifics by prompting them to tell you more. Table 2 presents examples of participant responses that workshop leaders might develop.
- ▶ Review the variety of responses generated by participants and highlight common themes.

# Handout 3

**Strategies Worksheet:** Think of a child you want to support socially and/or emotionally in your program. Imagining that these circles (starting from the outer-most) represent the classroom environment, the curriculum, one-on-one teacher interaction, and (the center circle) outside services (such as counseling, early intervention, etc.), think about how each might be used to help that individual child (symbolized by the star in the center). As a guide, refer to the group responses from Exercise Two.



- ▶ Ask small groups which strategies might be challenging to put into practice. Then ask what might be done to work through those challenges

## Workshop Leader Reflection

It is important to encourage the group to brainstorm about their own ways of working through the future challenges they predict. This is done in order to encourage the participants to acknowledge and use one another as resources. In this effort, consider the following steps when facilitating this part of the exercise:

- Listen carefully to the challenge described and then restate it to make sure you have captured the participant's concern.
- Ask the group what could be done in order to address the concern. For instance, "How could we work through that?" or "Does anyone have an idea of what you could do next if that problem came up?"
- Restate the suggestions from the group to make sure you have captured the strategy.
- Encourage the group to consider all strategies shared.

If the group does not share challenges, ask participants if this means they see no potential challenges in incorporating these strategies. Some participants may feel confident, while others may find it hard to imagine roadblocks to strategies they have never tried before. Rather than push this point, suggest that participants seek out support from teammates and supervisors if they do encounter unforeseen challenges.

## Wrapping Up

Pulling things together at the end of the training is an important step for everyone. As a workshop gets close to the end and people are feeling tired, it can be tempting to skip this part. Let people know that you will get them out of the workshop on time, but want to take a few more minutes to wrap up the time you've spent together.

### 1. Review Key Concepts

- ▶ Supporting social-emotional development is an important way we can foster resilience in children.
- ▶ Social-emotional development can be supported at many different levels: program, curriculum, one-on-one interactions, and through outside resources. By incorporating all these levels in our approach to building resilience in children, we are taking advantage of every opportunity to support the growth of the whole group, while keeping our eyes on the need of the individual child.
- ▶ In addition to these levels of support, the program's climate (discussed in an earlier workshop) can contribute to each child's social-emotional growth and general sense of well-being.
- ▶ Reflecting and working together, we have the opportunity to think about the social-emotional elements of our classrooms in different ways.
- ▶ Through this reflection, we can consider what else we might do to improve support in this area.

**2. End on a positive note.** Remind the group that this workshop is a first step in supporting the social-emotional development of the children served by the program. Encourage participants to use the exercises as a way to rethink their classroom practices and encourage supervisors to continue checking in with the teaching teams about the strategies proposed in the training.

**3.** If time permits, **review some or all of the comments written on the "Parking Lot for Ideas" sheet posted on the wall.** Consider responding to one comment, then asking participants which of the others they would like discussed in the time remaining. These comments should also be considered in preparation for the next training.

**4. Express your appreciation.** Let the group know how much you appreciate their time and hard work. Thank them for sharing their ideas and for being willing to think about change together.

**5. Make yourself available.** After the training, be willing to answer questions and respond to concerns on an ongoing basis. If a workshop leader cannot be available, an on-site staff member should be designated in this role and announced at the end of the training.

**6. Collect Attendance and Evaluation Forms.** Pass out evaluation forms. Ask participants to sign an attendance sheet and complete an evaluation form. Remind participants that these forms are anonymous and collected for the

purpose of improving future trainings. During this time, you might also want to title and date any large group work so you can save it for future reference.

## Extending Learning and Supporting New Skills

In order to extend the workshop's content to changes in professional skill and behavior, the Workshop Leader and administrators should consider these follow-up activities:

**Provide Supportive Supervision for Individuals and Teams.** Teachers need additional opportunities to discuss strategies for supporting social-emotional development in their classrooms with a mentor or their supervisor. Additional conversations about supporting social-emotional development will help staff and program leaders to understand their strengths and challenges. Such understanding can help them identify what they - as teams or individuals - want to target for improvement.

**Implement Classroom Observation & Social Service Support.** Staff supervisors can gain valuable insight by observing and reviewing teachers' efforts in their classrooms within the real day-to-day context. This need not involve large blocks of time, but should be done consistently over time in order to observe the challenges and successes of the staff. Ongoing supportive communication about observations is essential in order for teachers to translate this feedback to new practice.

**Create Action Plans.** Teachers can benefit from a follow-up discussion and a written action plan concerning the steps involved in achieving the goals they have set for themselves. Change takes time, so starting small and charting any changes or achievements can boost a staff member's confidence. This is also an opportunity to understand the resources required and

## Workshop Leader Reflection

The Workshop Leader should take some time to review the training experience once it is over, read through and tally the evaluation forms, and review the results. Some additional questions to consider are:

**Was I prepared?** Did I have all the materials I needed? Was the room adequate? Did I feel confident with the topic?

**Did the training go as I imagined it would?** Did the group respond the way I thought they would? Were there any surprises? Were there any elements of the training that went especially well?

**Were the participants engaged?** Did the group size seem appropriate? Who seemed comfortable enough to share their thoughts with the group? Who did not seem comfortable? Do I know why? Did I get the feeling that the participants understood the exercises and materials? Who was present and who was missing today? Is there anyone I need to follow up with immediately?

**What were some of the themes that people talked about in this training?** Was there a group of issues that the responses and discussion had in common? Are any of those issues a surprise? How can I use those issues in future trainings to make the exercises more effective?

**What would have made this training better?** In hindsight, what could I have done differently? Why? How can I use that information to make the next training even more successful?

**Did I gain new knowledge from this training?** What did I learn? In addition to new information on the training topic, did I gain any new knowledge about the training group or individuals in the training group? Did I learn something new about myself as a Workshop Leader?

# Workshop Evaluation

Title of the Workshop: Supporting Social-Emotional Growth

Location \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate how well the training met the objectives below:

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Not Good
Objective 1: Participants will identify the behaviors they find challenging in children.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Objective 2: Participants will learn how social-emotional development can be supported at the program level, through the curriculum, and in one-on-one interactions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Objective 3: Participants will learn a framework for planning social-emotional support for the children in their classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Overall rating of this workshop:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Usefulness of information presented:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Usefulness of workshop activities:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creativity of workshop activities:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trainer's knowledge of subject:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trainer's presentation style:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is there anything you would like to learn that was not presented in this workshop?

Would you like more trainings that expand on this topic? Yes No (Please circle one)  
I would like more training on:

Additional Comments:



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## Additional Resources

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**For more support on this topic please see the following Family Connections materials:**

**Short Papers for Staff:**

*Fostering Resilience in Families Coping with Depression: Practical ways Head Start staff can help families build on their power to cope*

*Better Communication with Children: Responding to challenging subjects*

*Better Parent Communication: What do I say when a parent tells me something difficult?*

*Encouraging an Expressive Environment: Supportive communication from the inside out*

*Self Reflection and Shared Reflection as Professional Tools*

**Short Paper for Parents:**

*The Ability to Cope: Building resilience in yourself and your child*

# Strategies for Talking with Children about Difficult Issues

Often in our work with families, we encounter difficult issues. A child may initiate a conversation about something that has happened at home that takes you by surprise. Or, you may see and hear children exploring a sensitive topic in their play. However it happens, topics such as death, divorce, loss of housing, illness, violence, substance abuse and domestic abuse are bound to emerge in early childhood programs. While it is natural to feel uncomfortable when these topics come up, there are strategies that can help us feel more skilled in our response. This workshop will give teachers an opportunity to share their challenges, explore strategies for supporting children, and look at ways to take care of themselves.

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**Goal** To promote an emotionally supportive environment for children by supporting the staff’s ability to respond to difficult topics that might occur in early childhood settings.

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**Objectives** Participants will:

- ▶ Reflect on a challenging conversation with a child
- ▶ Learn concrete strategies for better communication with children
- ▶ Learn about potential emotional/mental health impacts of these types of conversations
- ▶ Reinforce the importance of professional self-care

## Method and Content

This workshop has three distinct sections, each designed to build on the other.

- ▶ Exercise One: Remembering a Challenging Conversation with a Child
- ▶ Exercise Two: Strategies for Talking about Challenging Topics with Children
- ▶ Exercise Three: The Question and Answer Period

In Exercise One, the participants are asked to remember a difficult conversation with a child and think about what went well and what might have been challenging. Keeping in mind what is learned from these conversations, Exercise Two will focus on building strategies to make these conversations feel supportive. In the last exercise, the group will have the chance to ask the Workshop Leader and each other any questions that might still remain. Throughout the workshop, it is important to emphasize that one of the best ways for providers to support children and families is to practice self-care.

## Getting Started

### What You Need:

Time –this training should take 1.5 hours, not including Workshop Leader preparation. For more information on **Workshop Time Management**, see the *Introduction to the Modules*.

A training space large enough to accommodate the members of the training to participate in large (e.g., 20 people or more) and small (e.g., 3-6 people) group discussions. For large groups, you may want to consider including 2 Workshop Leaders to help manage and respond to participant needs. For more information on considerations with **Group Size**, see the *Introduction to the Modules*.

- ▶ Seating for the training group
- ▶ Prepare a training packet for each participant with the following materials:
  - A blank piece of paper
  - Handout 1: “What do I do when a child says something to me and I don’t know what to say in response?”
  - A Workshop Evaluation
- ▶ A pen or pencil for each participant
- ▶ Six large pieces of paper
- ▶ Two different colored markers for the Workshop Leader

### Workshop Leader Strategy

Read through all the workshop materials first. Take time to consider which strategy you will use to create small groups in Exercise One and to reflect on your own responses to all of the exercise questions.

Remembering and sharing memories of difficult conversations can be painful and uncomfortable for some. For others, it may feel empowering, providing a much needed chance to understand a past challenge. A good way to prepare for this variety of response is to complete Exercise One on your own and anticipate the possible responses that might surface during the workshop (see examples of responses in the description of Exercise One, Table 1).

We can always learn more and improve our skills, but sometimes it's hard to admit that we don't feel good about something we did. As the Workshop Leader, remember to give attention to the positive (e.g. What worked well? What did you feel good about?) as well as the challenges. This will help the group feel valued and safe, making them more likely to open themselves to change.

#### Preparing the Workshop Space:

- ▶ Prepare the training space by positioning chairs so that the participants can begin as a large group, and then move easily into smaller groups.
- ▶ Place a training packet on each chair in the room.
- ▶ Prepare one large piece of paper, entitled “Parking Lot for Ideas.”

Parking Lot  
for Ideas

- ▶ Prepare a piece of large paper with the questions from Exercise One:

What did the child say?

When did the child say it to you?

How did you handle it? What did you say or do in response?

Was there something you said or did that you felt good about?

Is there something you would have done differently?  
How did you feel while the conversation was going on?

Why was that conversation hard for you?

- Prepare the three large pieces of paper with the following titles:

Where or in what part of the day did the conversation happen?

How did these challenging conversations make you feel?

What are some strategies you used that were helpful?

- ▶ Display the large pieces of paper so that the whole group will be able to see them and the Workshop Leader can write on them easily.

## Introduction to the Training

Workshop Leaders are encouraged to use their own words to introduce the training. Key points to consider are:

- ▶ Welcome the group and review logistics – general agenda, time frame, when to expect breaks, materials, sign-in sheet, etc.
- ▶ The training will focus on “Strategies for Talking with Children about Difficult Issues.”

*For example, you might say...*

“Today we will focus on those times when a child says something that leaves us at a loss for a response. We simply don’t know the right thing to say or we are not sure what they really need us to say or do. We want to think about how to prepare ourselves for these times - what can we do to be ready? We’ll reflect on some past experiences and then work together to come up with strategies to help us prepare for the times when those conversations happen again.”

- ▶ Describe the objectives of this training:
  - To reflect on a challenging conversation with a child
  - To learn concrete strategies for better communication with children
  - To learn about potential emotional/mental health impacts of these types of conversations
  - To reinforce the importance of professional self-care
  
- ▶ Explain the “Parking Lot for Ideas” sheet as follows: During the training, if a question, suggestion, or concern unrelated to the training exercise, but related to the topic is offered, the Workshop Leader will record it on the “Parking Lot for Ideas” sheet. Refer back to these ideas at the end of the training for further discussion as time permits.
  
- ▶ Review the *Training Ground Rules*, which are a short list of statements (listed below) intended to promote a safe, positive environment for all participants. These can be printed on a piece of paper for all to see, but reviewing the rules and asking for group agreement is the most important step before beginning the exercise.

### Training Ground Rules

**There are no right or wrong answers** in any of the activities we will be doing today. Everyone's opinions and feelings are respected here.

**One at a time.** We want to hear what everyone has to say so it is important to remember that group discussion requires strong listening skills.

**Learning takes time.** We will not rush one another when trying to understand and participate.

**Maintain Confidentiality.** While sharing our experiences we do not need to use names of children, parents or staff

## Exercise One: Remembering a Challenging Conversation with a Child

The first step toward improving our skills in talking with children is to reflect on a time we felt challenged. It helps to identify what we thought we did well and remember what made the experience especially difficult. Keep in mind that this exercise can bring up a range of powerful feelings, all of which should be honored.

- ▶ Ask participants to take a moment to remember a time when a child brought up something in conversation that left them feeling unable to respond. Ask them to isolate one such conversation. Encourage them to focus on an experience that they feel safe reflecting on and sharing in a small group discussion.
  
- ▶ Once the participants have picked a memory to reflect on, ask them to consider:
  - What did the child say?
  - When did the child say it to you (i.e. circle time, a walk, in the bathroom, when they greeted you in the morning, naptime)?
  - How did you handle it? What did you say or do in response?
  - Was there something you said or did that you felt good about?
  - Is there something that you would have done differently?
  - How did you feel while the conversation was going on?
  - Why was the conversation hard for you (e.g. it was during a tough time of the day, the topic upset me, etc.)?

## Workshop Leader Strategy: Keeping the workshop environment safe

Inviting participants to share challenging experiences makes each participant vulnerable. Some will feel supported in this exercise without question, but for those who do not trust their co-workers or the workshop environment, this exercise can be unsettling. Ways in which you can support the emotional safety of the workshop environment include:

- ▶ Review guidelines of confidentiality with participants, emphasizing that the scenarios discussed in the workshop are considered confidential.
- ▶ Remind participants that the purpose of the exercise is to think about new ways to manage difficult situations with children and families.
- ▶ Monitor participants' behavior and reactions by glancing around the room. Take note of those who seem uncomfortable. Consider ways to quietly check in with these individuals in order to find out what support they might need.

▶ Ask participants to use the blank piece of paper in their packet to record some thoughts about their experience in a drawing or a short paragraph. Assure them that these will not be collected, but should be created for their own personal reference and use.

▶ Once people have had enough time to record some thoughts ask them to break into small groups of 3 or 4 participants.

## Workshop Leader Strategy: Creating Smaller Groups

Here are some options for creating smaller groups. You can:

- **Allow the participants to create their own groups.** This works well if you feel participants work well together overall, demonstrate trust and respect for each other, and will engage in the activity easily.
- **Assign participants to groups you have devised ahead of time.** Before the workshop begins, review your participant list and decide who might work well together. This strategy is especially useful for individuals who could benefit from interacting with less familiar colleagues. Assigning groups may also be useful for keeping participants on task or to enhance the conversation through new combinations of viewpoints.

▶ Ask participants to share their responses to Exercise One in the small groups. Encourage focused small group discussion by directing participants' attention to the posted questions:

- How did this challenging conversation with a child make you feel?
- Where and when did the conversation take place?
- What are some strategies you used that were helpful?

▶ It is important at this point to remind the group that guidelines of confidentiality should be observed when sharing their reflections. Participants should be asked to abstain from using names or should change any names or details about the experience that may identify a family.

► Reconvene small groups into the larger group. Ask participants to share what was discussed in the small group. Depending on what time allows, you may want to ask groups to choose only one response from their group.

► Record responses on large sheets of paper. Table 1 presents examples of participant responses and themes to develop.

**Table 1. Sample responses for Exercise One**

Response Category	Examples of potential responses	Themes for workshop leader to develop in the discussion
<p><b>How did this challenging conversation with a child make you feel?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uneasy</li> <li>• Scared</li> <li>• Angry</li> <li>• Frustrated</li> <li>• Surprised</li> <li>• Worried</li> <li>• Dumb</li> <li>• Inadequate</li> <li>• Flustered</li> <li>• Vulnerable</li> <li>• Thankful that the child shared it with me</li> <li>• Confused</li> <li>• Awkward</li> <li>• Protective</li> </ul>	<p>These conversations can catch us by surprise and contain details that are very unsettling. It is understandable how this could leave us angry at parents, doubting our own skills, or remembering unpleasant personal experiences.</p> <p>You might also feel a greater sense of responsibility because the child shared this information with you instead of someone else.</p>
<p><b>Where or in what part of the day did the conversation happen?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circle Time</li> <li>• In the bathroom</li> <li>• On a walk</li> <li>• Right before nap</li> <li>• When the child arrived</li> <li>• While the child was coloring</li> <li>• When I asked the child what was wrong</li> <li>• When we read a book about a mommy</li> </ul>	<p>These conversations can happen at times of 1:1 contact, but may also happen in group settings, during transitions, and can seem to have either a logical prompt or no prompt at all.</p>
<p><b>What are some strategies you used that were helpful?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gave the child a hug</li> <li>• Talked to other members of my team</li> <li>• Asked the child to wait until I could talk about it in private</li> <li>• Brought it to my supervisor</li> <li>• Told the child s/he is safe at school</li> <li>• Asked the child for more detail so that I could understand it better</li> </ul>	<p>Some strategies help us feel more in control in the moment, others help us focus on the comfort of the child, and still others address what to do after the conversation is over. All are important to consider.</p>

### Transition to Exercise Two

This exercise can be powerful for participants. Remembering a time when you felt unprepared or upset can be unsettling. You may find that some participants feel pleased about how they handled the situation while others may feel less confident and question their choices. Take a few minutes to acknowledge the feelings that have come up and thank the group for sharing so honestly. Emphasize that the next two exercises will focus on developing enhanced strategies based on the reflection of these experiences. Making this connection can help all participants feel empowered moving forward.

*For example, you might say...*

“You have all shared important stories with each other in this exercise. Sometimes remembering a past experience is helpful in learning what we do well and what we can improve. Remembering those experiences together reminds us that everyone is challenged at times. It also gives us a place to begin the conversation about which strategies we find most useful when talking with children about difficult topics. In the next exercise we will use this information to continue the conversation and build on our skills.”

## Exercise Two: Strategies for Talking about Challenging Topics with Children

This activity is designed to help the group develop strategies for having conversations with children about difficult topics. The provided handout gives the Workshop Leader the opportunity to highlight any strategies already mentioned by the group. This exercise is likely to be more meaningful when participants feel ownership of these strategies.

- ▶ Begin by reviewing the strategies discussed in the large group, and then bring the participants' attention to Handout 1 in their training packet.
- ▶ Looking at Handout 1 together, pay special attention to the strategies already shared by the group and how these strategies can also be used when talking to parents. Let participants describe their own examples.



# Handout 1

## “What do I do when a child says something to me and I don’t know how to respond?”

When a child shares something with us that is upsetting or involves a complex issue it can be difficult to know what to say or do in response. A child may tell you something you did not know about his/her home life, something that raises your concern over his/her care or safety, or perhaps something you aren’t sure you completely understand. **Remember that when children share their thoughts, questions, and feelings with you, they are letting you know that they trust you.** Keeping this trust in mind can help you stay focused on the child, and the good that may come from this interaction.

The following strategies may help you in these challenging moments.

**Stay calm and think about the message you want the child to receive:** If a child catches you off-guard by what he or she says, you may feel unprepared and perhaps also worried that you don’t have the “right answer” to share in response. It is important to take a deep breath and try to stay calm. This will help you think more clearly and will also give the child the message that even if he or she is upset, you are under control. Take a moment to think about the message you would like the child to receive. Here are some ideas about the messages children could benefit from:

- I care about what is on your mind
- It is a good idea to share your feelings and worries with a grown-up who cares about you
- The grown-ups at school are here to help make sure you are safe
- The classroom is a safe place to share your questions, feelings, and worries

**Listen and make sure you let the child know you heard him or her:** Sometimes in these challenging moments, it can be hard to stay focused. If you are thinking about how to respond while the child is still talking, you may miss important information. Focus on listening to the child and then make sure the child knows that you heard him or her. You can do this through eye contact, by nodding to them, and by repeating what you heard them say. This last strategy can also help you check if you heard what you think you did.

**Reassure the Child:** There are many ways to reassure a child in these moments, depending upon the child, the situation and your style. The first step is to remain in control of yourself. Young children read as much into your emotional and physical presence as the words you say. It is common to remain focused on words alone, but touch and other physical gestures and affection may be just as important to a child. There is no one “right answer.” Whatever your strategy, your goals are to let the child know that he or she was right in sharing what was on his/her mind, and to pay close attention to the kind of response that seems to reassure the child.

**You are not alone:** Sometimes a child will ask or tell us something that tests our limits mentally and emotionally. If the child brings up something you cannot address, seek help from your co-workers while reassuring the child that you are going to help. While some might worry that this is a sign of weakness or lack of skill, seeking help and feedback are important parts of professional development.

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**Reflect on the experience and followup with your team members and supervisor:** Reflection is an essential element of quality childcare practice that is often over-looked. By discussing these challenging moments with your co-workers, especially your supervisor, you are helping yourself learn from them and feel more prepared for the next time it happens. If the child has told you something that has concerned you, it is also important to document the interaction and share this information with your supervisor as soon as possible. If your concern is over the child's health or safety you should contact your supervisor immediately.

Reflection can also provide an opportunity for self-care. Often so eager to help others, childcare providers can sometimes forget to take care of themselves. Acknowledge the challenges that working in childcare present and be sure to accept praise and positive feedback for the hard work you do. Self-care is essential to your health and well-being!

**Remember:**

- ▶ Take a deep breath, and remember that this can be a positive interaction.
- ▶ If you are not sure you understood the child, repeat words to confirm what he/she said.
- ▶ Reassure the child with your words and touch.
- ▶ Document and share what the child said – with other teachers, case managers, supervisors, and parents.
- ▶ If there is a concern about safety or health, communicate concerns immediately.
- ▶ Take care of yourself.

- ▶ Ask participants how they feel about getting suggestions and new strategies. Do they find them helpful? What resources would they need to use them? (e.g., more training, opportunities for practice, regular discussion with their team or supervisor). What are some reasons they wouldn't use them? Do these strategies leave them with any questions?

### Transition to Exercise Three

The group has now had the chance to share their own ideas and talk about new ones. This is a good time to remind the group that in order for them to support families, Head Start staff must devote energy to their own self-care. In the next exercise, the group will have a chance to discuss questions that may be leftover from this discussion.

*For example, you might say...*

"We've discussed a lot of different strategies for approaching difficult conversations with children. Sometimes we feel worn out from our work with families, especially when children are going through difficult times. In addition to caring for ourselves, one of the most important resources we have is our co-workers and supervisors. Even though we are around people all day, sometimes this can be lonely work. Remember to ask for help when you need it, and to offer help when you see another staff member struggling. We all need each other to do our best. Now we're going to think about all of the work we've done and whether there are some burning issues left to address."

## Exercise Three: The Question Answer Period

The training ends with a Question and Answer session about the topics discussed in Exercises One and Two, and an opportunity to revisit ideas in the "Parking Lot for Ideas." In the wrap-up, take a few minutes to get the group thinking about the next training, appropriate opportunities for using what they've just learned, and to look at the classroom environment as a whole.

- ▶ Ask if there are lingering questions.
- ▶ Revisit the "Parking Lot for Ideas."

### Workshop Leader Strategy: How to manage a question and answer period

**Participants may ask questions that can be understood in a number of overlapping categories, including those that:**

- ▶ Ask for guidance about a challenge related to a specific child, family or co-worker
- ▶ Ask for clarification of a principle or element of what has been presented
- ▶ Represent either doubt about or resistance to what has been presented
- ▶ Have nothing to do with the issue at hand

**Points to consider in responding to such questions:**

- ▶ Listen. Model careful and respectful listening even when the question seems outrageous. Ask for clarification if the point isn't clearly made. Restate the question to confirm your understanding and to help clarify it for the entire group.
- ▶ Maintain a balance between being a knowledgeable leader and utilizing the resources in the room to respond to these questions.
- ▶ Model Collaboration and Reflection. The question and answer period is an opportunity to model collaboration and reflective group problem solving. The leader should use the group itself as much as possible in responding to questions. The readiness to have a real discussion is more important than answering individual questions.
- ▶ Avoid Leading as the "Expert." The leader should avoid getting trapped into being the expert who has all the answers, or being perceived as "selling" a particular approach. This can be avoided, again, by seeing the question and answer exercise as an exploration of ideas as opposed to a time for getting the "right answers." When appropriate, Workshop Leaders should answer specific questions about the approach for which they have clear answers, but remember to ask the other participants if they have responses to the questions posed, and remind staff of mental health resources when concerns go beyond the expertise in the room.
- ▶ Avoid defensive responses, especially when the question seems more about resistance to the approach than about improving practice.

Pulling things together at the end of the training is an important step for everyone. As a workshop gets close to the end and people are feeling tired, it can be tempting to skip this part. Let people know that you will get them out of the workshop on time, but want to take a few more minutes to wrap-up the time you've spent together.

### 1. Review Key Concepts and Introduce the Next Training

#### *Key Concepts*

- ▶ Talking with children about difficult issues is an important way to promote healthy social-emotional development
- ▶ Strategies such as remaining calm, reassuring children, listening carefully and seeking help are important when faced with difficult circumstances
- ▶ One of the best ways to be prepared is to take care of ourselves
- ▶ All providers working with families need support from colleagues

#### *Objectives for the Next Training: Using Reading and Circle Time to Promote an Expressive Environment*

- ▶ Reinforce the importance of building an expressive environment in the classroom and the program as a whole
- ▶ Emphasize the value of Circle Time as an important opportunity for conversations around social-emotional issues and growth

**2. End on a positive note.** Remind the group that this workshop is a first step in supporting the social-emotional development of the children served by the program. Encourage participants to use the exercises as a way to rethink their classroom practices and encourage supervisors to continue to check in with teaching teams about the strategies proposed in the training.

**3. Express your appreciation.** Let the group know how much you appreciate their time and hard work. Thank them for sharing their ideas with you and being willing to think about change together.

**4. Make yourself available.** After the training, be willing to answer questions and respond to concerns on an ongoing basis. If a workshop leader cannot be available, an on-site staff member should be designated in this role and announced at the end of the training.

**5. Collect Attendance and Evaluation Forms.** Pass out evaluation forms. Ask participants to sign an attendance sheet and complete an evaluation form. Remind participants that these forms are anonymous and collected for the purpose of improving future trainings. During this time, you might also want to title and date any large group work so you can save it for future reference.

## Extending Learning and Supporting New Skills

In order to extend the workshop's content to changes in professional skill and behavior, the Workshop Leader and administrators should consider these followup activities:

**Provide Supportive Supervision for Individuals and Teams.** Teachers may need additional opportunities to discuss the experiences they remembered during Exercise One, and the strategies from the hand-out. Be patient with this need and remember that reviewing scenarios and approaches can lead to valuable professional self-reflection. Staff may also need reminders to take care of themselves when they are anxious or worried about a child.

**Implement Classroom Observation & Social Service Support.** Workshop participants may need extra support in order to feel comfortable trying these new strategies. Supervisors and mentors should be available to spend time in the classroom in order to offer support to the staff who are trying to cultivate new skills.

**Create Action Plans.** These discussions and observations can result in requests for additional training or new opportunities to reflect on the conversations staff have with children. Use these requests and suggestions as an opportunity to generate group goals and discuss possible steps toward those goals. Change takes time so starting small and charting any changes or achievements can boost a staff member's confidence. This is also an opportunity to understand the resources required.

## Workshop Leader Reflection

The Workshop Leader should take some time to review the training experience once it is over, read through and tally the evaluation forms, and review the results. Some additional questions to consider are:

**Was I prepared?** Did I have all the materials I needed? Was the room adequate? Did I feel confident with the topic?

**Did the training go as I imagined it would?** Did the group respond the way I thought they would? Were there any surprises? Were there any elements of the training that went especially well?

**Were the participants engaged?** Did the group size seem appropriate? Who seemed comfortable enough to share their thoughts with the group? Who did not seem comfortable? Do I know why? Did I get the feeling that the participants understood the exercises and materials? Who was present and who was missing today? Is there anyone I need to follow-up with immediately?

**What were some of the themes that people talked about in this training?** Was there a group of issues that the responses and discussions had in common? Are any of these issues a surprise? How can I use these issues in future trainings to make the exercises more effective?

**What would have made this training better?** In hindsight, what could I have done differently? Why? How can I use that information to make the next training even more successful?

**Did I gain new knowledge from this training?** What did I learn? In addition to new information on the training topic, did I gain any new knowledge about the training group or individuals in the training group? Did I learn something new about myself as a Workshop Leader?

# Workshop Evaluation

Title of the Workshop: Strategies for Talking to Children about Difficult Issues

Location \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate how well the training met the objectives below:

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Not Good
Objective 1: To practice reflecting on a challenging conversation with a child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Objective 2: To learn concrete strategies for better communication with children.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Objective 3: To learn about potential emotional/mental health impacts of these types of conversations and the importance of self-care.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Overall rating of this workshop:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Usefulness of information presented:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Usefulness of workshop activities:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creativity of workshop activities:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trainer's knowledge of subject:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trainer's presentation style:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is there anything you would like to learn that was not presented in this workshop?

Would you like more trainings that expand on this topic? Yes No (Please circle one)  
I would like more training on:

Additional Comments:

## Additional Resources

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**For more support on this topic please see the following Family Connections materials:**

**Short Papers for Staff:**

*Better Communication with Children: Responding to challenging subjects*

*Better Parent Communication: What do I say when a parent tells me something difficult?*

*Self Reflection and Shared Reflection as Professional Tools*

*Fostering Resilience in Families Coping with Depression: Practical ways Head Start staff can help families build on their power to cope*

*Encouraging an Expressive Environment: Supportive communication from the inside out*

# Getting the Most Out of Circle Time

As early childhood teachers, we are in the unique position for children to tell us about themselves every day. Through play, drawings, story-telling and many other activities, we invite children to express their feelings and ideas. In addition, as children observe parents and providers having conversations, they learn that school is a safe place to try out their new communication skills. With time and practice, children learn that school is a not only a place to talk with others, but to express their feelings with words; to be listened to and understood.

In your programs, you already have two important tools for encouraging an expressive environment – books and Circle Time. As you know, exposing children to books at an early age will encourage literacy and give them a chance to learn from pictures and stories. Books can also open up discussions about almost any subject, including some of the more challenging topics we encounter as teachers. Circle Time is a standard fixture in early childhood classrooms and usually involves a group of children sitting in a circle, responding to the teacher’s questions, or participating in daily routines such as calendar or sharing. Often, Circle Time also includes the teacher reading a story to the children. In this training, we will ask teachers to consider the unique challenges and benefits of Circle Time as an environment in which books and story-telling can promote important conversations with children.

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**Goal** To identify opportunities for positive communication during Circle Time.

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**Objectives** Participants will:

- ▶ Recognize the unique opportunities that Circle Time offers for communication in the preschool classroom
- ▶ Learn strategies to support Circle Time as an expressive environment
- ▶ Learn strategies for sharing books in Circle Time

## Method and Content

This workshop has three distinct sections, each designed to build on the other.

- ▶ Exercise One: Teachers and Reading
- ▶ Exercise Two: What We Know About Circle Time
- ▶ Exercise Three: Making Circle Time Even Better
- ▶ Exercise Four:: Circle Time Action Plan

In Exercise One, we encourage teachers to explore their own feelings about reading and books. This gives the Workshop Leader a chance to learn about how each participant in the workshop relates to books, while encouraging the group to reflect on their own relationship to the subject of reading. The next step, “What We Know About Circle Time,” is designed for an honest discussion about the challenges and importance of this daily preschool activity. Exercise Three, “Making Circle Time Even Better,” provides an opportunity to discuss strategies for encouraging communication and engagement in Circle Time. Finally, Exercise Four, “Circle Time Action Plan,” is devoted to setting goals and considering next steps for improvement of Circle Time in each classroom.



### What You Need:

- ▶ Time – this training should take 2 hours, not including Workshop Leader preparation. For more information on **Time Management**, see the *Introduction to the Tell Me A Story Workshops*.
- ▶ A training space large enough to accommodate the members of the training to participate in large group discussion. For workshop groups larger than 20 participants, you may want to consider including two Workshop Leaders to help manage and respond to participant needs. For more information on considerations with **Group Size**, see the *Introduction to the Tell Me A Story Workshops*.
- ▶ Seating for the training group (e.g. semi-circle for more interactive exercises)
- ▶ Prepare a training packet for each participant with the following materials:
  - Handout 1: What We Know About Circle Time and Books
  - Handout 2: Making Circle Time Even Better
  - Handout 3: Circle Time Action Plan
  - A Workshop Evaluation
- ▶ A pen or pencil for each participant
- ▶ Seven large pieces of paper
- ▶ Five colored markers: Four for the participants to use in Exercise Two, one for the Workshop Leader

### Workshop Leader Preparation

Read through all the workshop materials first. Take time to reflect on your own responses to the exercise questions, focusing especially on your own preconceived notions about what effective Circle Time sessions should include.

Consider the fact that workshop participants may have different feelings about the workshop's themes, including expectations for how Circle Time is run, why Circle Time can be challenging, and the appropriateness of discussing certain topics with a group of children. Think ahead of time about the elements of the workshop that are most important to stress and how you can remain flexible in order to hear where your participants are beginning with this subject matter. For instance, if you have a participant who reports that certain strategies offered will never work in her classroom, ask "Why?" before coming to your own conclusions. That participant may be concerned with keeping the group under control, or may simply be uncomfortable with trying new things. **Everyone should approach this subject matter at their own level of challenge for making Circle Time a more expressive experience.** For example, if running smaller Circle Time groups seems like too big of a change, perhaps a first step would be to see how an additional staff member might be able to sit with the whole group during Circle Time.

**It is also strongly recommended that you observe your workshop participants in the classrooms during Circle Time before presenting this workshop.** These observations will give you an opportunity to understand what the real experience looks like, the unique qualities of each group of children, and the strengths and challenges each teaching team has. Of course, you would only do such observations with the teacher's full permission and support. Teaching teams should be involved in planning these observations, and be reassured that they are not being rated, but are merely providing you with a chance to plan a more effective training.

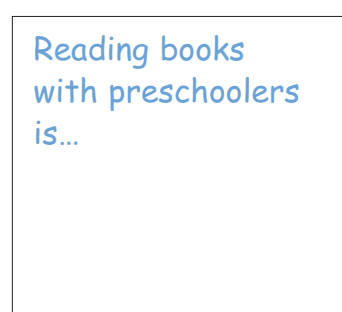
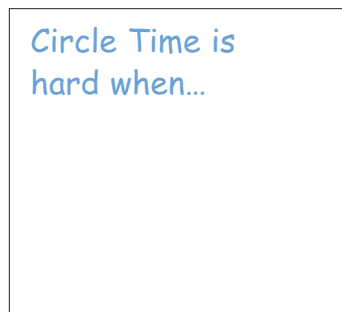
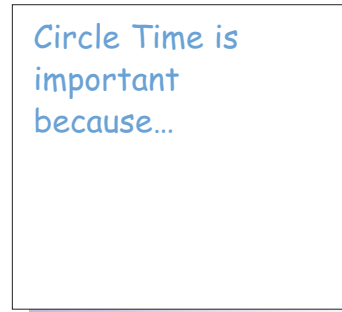
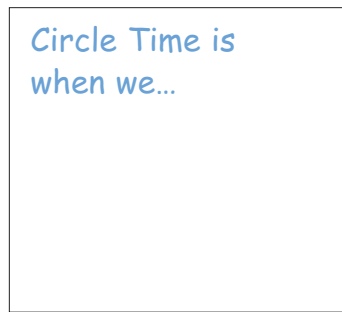
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Preparing the Workshop Space:

- ▶ Prepare the training space by positioning chairs so that the participants can begin as a large group, and then move easily into smaller groups.
- ▶ Place a training packet on each chair in the room.
- ▶ Prepare one large piece of paper, entitled “Parking Lot for Ideas.”



- ▶ Prepare four large pieces of paper with titles listed below. These will be used for Exercise Two (What We Know About Circle Time).



- ▶ Prepare two large pieces of paper for Exercise Three Making Circle Time Even Better, with the following headings from Handout 2.

### Making Circle Time Even Better

Preparation is Key:  
Choose the book carefully  
and read it ahead of time.

Consider your group size  
and how to make it work.

- Whole Class  
(10-20 children)
- Small Group  
(3-6 children).
- Individual Child.

### While Reading the Book and Leading Group Discussion:

Draw attention to illustrations  
Use your voice, body language,  
and facial expressions

All staff members in the room  
should work as a team to  
support Circle Time.

Productive conversation needs  
practice and encouragement

Model the behavior you would  
like to see in the children

Use open-ended questions to  
promote conversation

## Introduction to the Training

Workshop Leaders are encouraged to use their own words to introduce the training. Key points to consider are:

- ▶ Welcome the group and review logistics – general agenda, time frame, when to expect breaks, materials, sign-in sheet, etc.
- ▶ The topic of the training is “Getting the Most Out of Circle Time.” *Last time we discussed how to feel prepared for challenging conversations with children. Today we will turn to group discussion. The exercises will specifically focus on the importance of Circle Time and how to use it in order to promote discussion and conversation with the children. By reading books, asking questions, and giving children a chance to share their ideas, we can encourage expression and have a unique opportunity to create a community of children interested in reading.*
- ▶ Describe the objectives of this training. Let participants know that the training will give them an opportunity to:
  - Recognize the unique opportunities that Circle Time offers for communication in the preschool classroom
  - Learn strategies to support Circle Time as an expressive environment
  - Learn strategies for sharing books in Circle Time
- ▶ Explain the “Parking Lot for Ideas” sheet as follows: during the training, if a question, suggestion, or concern unrelated to the training exercise, but related to the topic is offered, the Workshop Leader will record it on the “Parking Lot for Ideas” sheet. Refer back to these ideas at the end of the training for further discussion as time permits.

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- ▶ Review the *Training Ground Rules*, which are a short list of statements intended to promote a safe, positive environment for all participants. These can be printed on a piece of paper for all to see, but reviewing the rules and asking for group agreement is the most important step before beginning the exercise.

### Training Ground Rules

**There are no *right* or *wrong* answers** in any of the activities we will be doing today. Everyone's opinions and feelings are respected here.

**One at a time.** We want to hear what everyone has to say, so it is important to remember that group discussion requires strong listening skills.

**Learning takes time.** We will not rush one another when trying to understand and participate.

**Maintain Confidentiality.** While sharing our experiences we do not need to use names of children, parents or staff.

## Exercise One: Teachers and Reading

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This exercise will give your participants a chance for an informal way to share how they feel about reading and books. While reading is a part of every teacher's experience, they may have very different feelings about reading, both personally and professionally. You may have some participants who love to read and others who only read when they must. Some participants may be very comfortable reading aloud to groups of children, while others may only enjoy reading to one child at a time. Still others may be uncomfortable with the level of their own reading skills, especially in regards to first and second languages, and therefore do not read for pleasure and avoid sharing books with children as much as possible. As the Workshop Leader, you can set the tone by saying that all responses to reading are welcome and will not be judged as good or bad. It is important that participants are assured that they should "start where they are" in terms of their feelings about books.

- ▶ In the large group, facilitate a discussion about reading. You might begin, "Before we think about how reading books can support children, let's think about reading in our own lives."
- ▶ Ask participants to give a show of hands for the following questions:
  - Who spends time reading?
  - Who reads for pleasure?
  - Who reads for work or school?
- ▶ Ask participants to think for a moment about the following questions:
  - What do you read?
  - When do you read?
  - Where do you read?
  - How are you most physically comfortable when you read?

The Workshop Leader may ask for volunteers to share their responses to the last three questions. It is important that everyone feels valued no matter what their response may be.

## Transition to Exercise Two

Use the discussion from the first exercise to inform the next one. Highlight which aspects of the reading experience are most meaningful and positive (e.g. content and story, where you read, the time of day you read, whether you sit or lie down, how reading makes you feel, etc.) to the group. Were there common themes? Did everyone feel the same way or were there a variety of responses? Acknowledge that a variety of responses is natural. Just like the children we serve, we do not all feel the same way about books or reading. The participants should be encouraged to think about their own reading preferences as they progress through the reflective exercises in this workshop.

*For example, you might say...*

**"Let's reflect on what we've shared about our own reading experiences. Many of you mentioned that personal reading is the only time you set aside to be alone. Others see books as a place to escape the stress of daily life. Some of you only have time to read what is required by work or school. Let's remember our own experiences when we think about creating positive reading opportunities for children. One of the places in the classroom where we do the most reading is Circle Time. In the next exercise, we'll think about Circle Time and reading."**

## Exercise Two: What We Know About Circle Time and Books

The goal of this section is to give participants the chance to share how they really feel about Circle Time and reading. Again, this may vary from person to person. You will get positive and negative feedback. Be aware that there are some challenges that you cannot address in this particular training. Still, getting everyone to share ideas will allow the group to discover and clarify what makes Circle Time and reading such unique and powerful tools.

This exercise will be used as a jumping off point to discuss the real challenges and benefits of Circle Time. Themes will be discovered within the responses in order to shift discussion to the benefits of an expressive environment overall and to advocate for the use of books as a tool to inspire and focus conversations at Circle Time.

► Direct the group's attention to the four statement prompts on the large pieces of paper, reading them aloud.

### 1. Circle Time is when we (activities)...

Make it clear that this question is asking the participants to describe what is happening in the circle during Circle Time and in the rest of the room (e.g. set-up for lunch).

### 2. Circle Time is important because...

### 3. Circle Time is hard when...

### 4. Reading books with preschoolers is...

- ▶ Ask participants to move around the room and write responses to each prompt directly onto the large pieces of paper.
- ▶ Stress to the group that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers to the prompts. This is a chance to discuss the real experience of Circle Time – so their honesty is essential.

**Table 1 presents examples of participant responses and themes that might be developed.**

Initial statement prompt	Examples of potential responses	Themes for workshop leader to develop in the discussion
<p><b>Circle Time is when we (activities)...</b></p>	<p>In Circle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greet each other</li> <li>• Read books</li> <li>• Sing songs</li> <li>• Talk about activities for the day</li> <li>• Do the calendar</li> <li>• Go over the rules</li> <li>• Do a word activity</li> <li>• Talk about how to treat our friends</li> <li>• Take attendance</li> <li>• Play a game</li> </ul> <p>In the classroom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up for lunch</li> <li>• Clean up from breakfast</li> <li>• Take kids to the bathroom</li> <li>• Set up art projects</li> <li>• Clean up from Choice Time</li> <li>• Help kids get into their coats</li> <li>• Talk to the Educational Coordinator</li> <li>• Deliver attendance to office</li> <li>• Have kids wash their hands</li> <li>• Set out cots/mats for naptime</li> <li>• Write notes from the morning for afternoon teachers</li> </ul>	<p>A lot of things are going on in the classroom during Circle Time.</p> <p>Lots of things need to be considered if any changes are going to be made to this time of day.</p>
<p><b>Circle Time is important because...</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It encourages a feeling of community</li> <li>• We have to do it</li> <li>• Singing and sharing books is an important part of the curriculum</li> <li>• It helps the kids settle down before lunch</li> <li>• It promotes early literacy</li> <li>• It gets kids ready for kindergarten</li> </ul>	<p>Circle Time is important because of activities in the circle, and because of what needs to be done in the classroom during circle time.</p> <p>As a fixture of the day, it is a consistent opportunity to connect with the children.</p>

**Table 1 presents examples of participant responses and themes that might be developed. continued**

Initial statement prompt	Examples of potential responses	Themes for workshop leader to develop in the discussion
<p><b>Circle Time is hard when...</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other staff come into the classroom or ask me questions while I'm leading Circle</li> <li>• You pick a book that is too long</li> <li>• The kids think the story is boring</li> <li>• The kids can't sit still</li> <li>• Kids are fighting</li> <li>• The group is too big</li> <li>• There is only one teacher in the circle</li> <li>• There are too many other things going on in the room</li> <li>• There are lots of younger kids in your group</li> <li>• There are a lot of boys in the group</li> <li>• The kids won't listen</li> <li>• The kids won't leave each other alone</li> <li>• A child says something about his/her personal life in circle that is scary or upsetting</li> </ul>	<p>Circle Time is often not honored as a time when the classroom is left uninterrupted – and yet it is seen as a mandatory, important activity. That can be a frustrating contradiction.</p> <p>How the kids behave in Circle is often directly related to what activities we offer in Circle. The level of preparation can make a difference, though we may sometimes have to let go of a preconceived vision of how it will look.</p>
<p><b>Reading books with preschoolers is...</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important</li> <li>• A way to teach them English</li> <li>• A way to help them learn about other kids</li> <li>• The first step in learning how to read</li> <li>• Hard to do in a big group</li> <li>• Hard when you don't have many good books in the classroom</li> <li>• Hard when English is not your first language</li> <li>• Not my favorite thing to do</li> <li>• Wonderful</li> </ul>	<p>Sharing books is another mandatory activity that may hold a range of comfort levels for teachers.</p> <p>Book selection and prep are important.</p> <p>Tie to opening exercise, pointing out that preschoolers may have their own preferences about what, where, how, and when they hear books.</p>

- ▶ Once participants have had a chance to record their responses, reassemble the group in their seats for a discussion of the responses.
- ▶ Read responses aloud, identifying themes and developing themes for discussion (examples of discussion themes are provided in Table 1).
- ▶ Encourage participants to record notes on their own and others' responses on Handout 1: What We Know About Circle Time and Books.
- ▶ Listen for themes that might lead you into the next exercise where the focus is setting the stage for a better Circle Time.

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# Handout 1

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## What We Know About Circle Time and Books

Work in small groups to respond to the following

1. Circle Time is when we (activities)...

2. Circle Time is important because...

3. Circle Time is hard when...

4. Reading books with preschoolers is...



### Transition to Exercise Three

Use the discussion from Exercise Two to inform the next one. Acknowledge the strengths in current practice indicated from the responses and from examples gleaned from your classroom observations. Then highlight the areas that seem to indicate challenges for the participants. These challenges provide opportunities for change and improvement. Explain to the group that the next exercise will shift towards a discussion of strategies designed to make Circle Time even better. Remind them of the reasons they shared concerning why Circle Time is important.

*For example, you might say:*

**"Now we're going to shift our Circle Time discussion from observations to strategies. How can we make Circle Time an inviting place for the kids? How can we make it a time for conversation and, as you said in the earlier exercise - a place to build community? Let's look at some suggestions about how to make Circle Time even better."**

## Exercise Three: Making Circle Time Even Better

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This exercise provides the opportunity to share and discuss strategies for improving Circle Time. The goal here is to consider a range of strategies in order to respond to the range of participants' professional needs. Some teachers may be highly skilled and have a special interest in Circle Time or sharing books effectively. Others may be uneasy or lack confidence in leading Circle or planning a discussion. It is important to consider the range amongst your workshop participants while encouraging them to support each other.

- ▶ Direct the group's attention to Handout 2. Introduce it as a resource for addressing some of the challenges of leading Circle Time and encouraging group discussion.
- ▶ Ask participants to consider each one of the suggestions and open the group to a discussion about how the suggestions apply to their classrooms.
- ▶ Encourage participants to share any additional strategies they have found useful.
- ▶ Using the large pieces of paper prepared with the headings from Handout 2, record additional suggestions.

# Handout 2

## Making Circle Time Even Better

### Preparation is Key:

- ▶ **Choose the book carefully and read it ahead of time.** Take some time to think about your group of children, their developmental abilities, interests, and needs. Try to anticipate what the story might help them learn. Think about your own comfort level with the subject, vocabulary, illustrations, and length.
- ▶ **Consider your group size and how to make it work.** Is this a book, discussion, and/or activity you want to bring to Circle Time? Or would it be better to present it to a small group or one-on-one with a child? What are your goals for the activity? Here are some things to consider while planning the presentation of the book and encouraging conversation:
  - **Whole Class** (10-20 children). If you are reading to a large group, consider breaking out of the circle formation, so that children can move closer to you and all face the book. This may help each child to see the illustrations and print more clearly, and in turn, cut down on the number of children frustrated or fidgety. If you like, you can reform the circle after the story is finished.
  - **Small Group** (3-6 children). You may be more comfortable encouraging a conversation with a smaller group. Plan which children might benefit most from being together.
  - **Individual Child.** Consider sharing books with individual children before or after large group Circle Times. Some children enjoy listening to a story again immediately upon hearing it the first time. Other children are reassured by more personalized attention right before or after being in a large group experience.

### While Reading the Book and Leading Group Discussion:

- ▶ **Draw attention to illustrations**, especially facial expressions of the characters. Encourage children to use these elements as a way of better understanding the story. For instance, “What happened here?” or “It says she is surprised. Does she look surprised to you?”
- ▶ Use your voice, body language, and facial expressions to help the kids stay engaged and keep the story interesting. Try using a range of volume and emotion in your voice, as well as a variety of expressions and gestures.
- ▶ **All staff members in the room should work as a team to support Circle Time.** If it is not possible for other classroom staff to sit with the group during the book, they can still support the effort. Let your teammates know in advance that you’ll want the children’s full attention and may need help if the conversation gets challenging. Other staff can do their work quietly, listening to the story from across the room and prompting children to focus on the story through eye contact or verbal prompts.

## Handout 2: Making Circle Time Even Better

Page two

- ▶ **Productive conversation requires practice and encouragement:** Consider how much experience your classroom group has had with group discussion. Good conversation practices, such as listening while another person is talking, or allowing others to share different opinions, may seem simple, but can in fact be difficult rules to understand and follow. Do the children understand your expectations for how they must behave during a group discussion? For instance, are they allowed to share their thoughts about the story while it is being read or are they expected to hold their questions and comments until the end? Are the children expected to raise their hands if they want to speak? In order to follow such expectations, children will need opportunities to practice and your patience while they are learning. Expect group discussions to get better over time.
  
- ▶ **Model the behavior you would most like to see:**
  - Be focused on the book and the discussion. Circle Time can be a busy time in the classroom. Avoid becoming distracted by other activity or conversations.
  - Direct your attention to the child speaking and gently remind others to do the same. For example, one might redirect one child interrupting another by saying, “I hear you Richard, but Ellen is talking right now and I am listening to her. Let’s give her our attention.”
  - Make sure a variety of children get to speak. Nothing is more frustrating than attempting to wait one’s turn, only to have the turn missed.
  - Be prepared for some children to remain quiet. Try to provide these children with the opportunity to have one-on-one conversations.
  
- ▶ **Use open-ended questions to promote conversation,** such as: “What did you like about the book?” “What was your favorite part?” “Did you like the pictures?” Feel free to share your own responses to these questions after children have had a chance to share theirs.

### Transition to Exercise Four

Now that the group has discussed strategies, shift the focus to making some plans for next steps. Encourage the group to begin thinking about how today's discussions applies to the work in their classrooms.

*For instance, you might say:*

**"It's time to start plugging these ideas into the work in the classrooms. This last exercise is going to be about making an Action Plan in order to plan our next steps to improving Circle Time."**

## Exercise Four: Circle Time Action Plan

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In this final exercise, participants will combine their own reflections with the strategies discussed in order to devise Circle Time Action Plans for their classrooms. You will need to first divide the participants into small groups for this exercise. Allowing them to work with the other members of their teaching teams is strongly encouraged, if possible.

- ▶ Direct participants' attention to Handout 3.
- ▶ Ask them to consider today's reflections on what makes reading enjoyable, what is important and challenging about Circle Time AND the strategies that have been discussed in the previous exercise.
- ▶ Direct participants to consider their own classrooms, and, through small group discussion:
  - Agree on a **Focus of Improvement** for Circle Time in their classrooms. Ask them to consider what the overall end result to this improvement effort would be? What would you like to be able to observe in the end?
  - Describe the **Goals** necessary to achieving this improvement. Ask them to consider what steps they will need to take in order to improve in this way?
  - Set some **Strategies**. What are some strategies you could use in order to reach these goals?
- ▶ Keep in mind that the participants may be new to the process of creating an Action Plan. Be sure to move amongst the small groups in order to offer support and make sure participants are on task.

# Handout 3

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## Circle Time Action Plan

Date:

Classroom:

Focus of Improvement:

Goal(s):

Strategies:

**Table 2 presents examples of responses Circle Time Action Plan**

Action Plan Sections	Examples of Potential Responses	Workshop Leader Guidance in Developing the Action Plan
Focus of Improvement	Better organized Circle Times	What would be the overall end result to this improvement effort? What would you like to be able to observe in the end?
Goals	Be more prepared for Circle everyday Share a variety of books	What are the steps you will need to take in order to improve in this way?
Strategies	Organize classroom team to make weekly plans for Circle Time, who will lead, etc. Review a variety of books	What are some strategies you could use in order to reach these goals?

## Wrapping Up

Pulling things together at the end of the training is an important step for everyone. As a workshop gets close to the end and people are feeling tired, it can be tempting to skip this part. Let people know that you will get them out of the workshop on time, but want to take a few more minutes to wrap up the time you've spent together.

### 1. Review Key Concepts

- ▶ Circle Time is a vital part of the classroom schedule and a golden opportunity to encourage discussion about social-emotional themes.
- ▶ Circle Time has to be supported by the whole teaching team and the program in order to be productive and fruitful.
- ▶ Experimenting with how you do Circle Time can help fine-tune this activity and encourage a more supportive climate in the classroom.

**2. End on a positive note.** Encourage teaching teams to continue this examination of Circle Time in their classrooms and team meetings. Suggest that they refer regularly to the Action Plans they created today to remind them of their goals and strategies. Remind them that groups of children (and adults) respond best to change when it is taken one step at a time.

3. If time permits, **review some or all of the comments written on the “Parking Lot for Ideas” sheet posted on the wall.** Consider responding to one comment, then asking participants which of the others they would like discussed in the time remaining. These comments should also be considered in preparation for the next training.

**4. Express your appreciation.** Let the group know how much you appreciate their time and hard work. Thank them for sharing their ideas and for being willing to think about change together.

**5. Make yourself available.** After the training, be willing to answer questions and respond to concerns on an ongoing basis. If a workshop leader cannot be available, an on-site staff member should be designated in this role and announced at the end of the training.

**6. Collect Attendance and Evaluation Forms.** Ask participants to sign an attendance sheet and complete an evaluation form. Remind participants that these forms are anonymous and collected for the purpose of improving future trainings. During this time, you might also want to title and date any large group work so you can save it for future reference.

## Extending Learning and Supporting New Skills

In order to extend the workshop's content to changes in professional skill and behavior, the Workshop Leader and administrators should consider these follow-up activities:

**Provide Supportive Supervision for Individuals and Teams.** Teachers need additional opportunities to discuss integrating books and discussion into Circle Time with a supervisor or a mentor. Reviewing the current list of Circle Time responsibilities is a useful way to decide what tasks can be rearranged in order to support Circle Time more fully. Teachers may also need more discussion in order to ask questions about how to employ the strategies shared in Handout 2: Making Circle Time Even Better.

**Implement Classroom Observation & Social Service Support.** Consider making Circle Time a regular activity for observation. Take notes in order to keep track of change over time and the outcome of new strategies. Make time to follow up with discussion of these observations with the teacher teams.

**Create Action Plans.** In order to target Circle Time as an activity for improvement, teaching teams and supervisors must agree on the steps to be taken in that effort. Make sure to set a variety of short-term and long-term goals in order to acknowledge all levels of growth and success.

## Workshop Leader Reflection

The Workshop Leader should take some time to review the training experience once it is over, read through and tally the evaluation forms, and review the results. Some additional questions to consider are:

**Was I prepared?** Did I have all the materials I needed? Was the room adequate? Did I feel confident with the topic?

**Did the training go as I imagined it would?** Did the group respond the way I thought they would? Were there any surprises? Were there any elements of the training that went especially well?

**Were the participants engaged?** Did the group size seem appropriate? Who seemed comfortable enough to share their thoughts with the group? Who did not seem comfortable? Do I know why? Did I get the feeling that the participants understood the exercises and materials? Who was present and who was missing today? Is there anyone I need to follow up with immediately?

**What were some of the themes that people talked about in this training?** Was there a group of issues that the responses and discussion had in common? Are any of those issues a surprise? How can I use those issues in future trainings to make the exercises more effective?

**What would have made this training better?** In hindsight, what could I have done differently? Why? How can I use that information to make the next training even more successful?

**Did I gain new knowledge from this training?** What did I learn? In addition to new information on the training topic, did I gain any new knowledge about the training group or individuals in the training group? Did I learn something new about myself as a Workshop Leader?

# Workshop Evaluation

## Title of the Workshop: Getting the Most Out of Circle Time

Location \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate how well the training met the objectives below:

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Not Good
Objective 1: To recognize the unique opportunities that Circle Time offers for communication in the preschool classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Objective 2: To learn strategies for sharing books effectively in Circle Time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Objective 3: To learn strategies to encourage discussion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Overall rating of this workshop:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Usefulness of information presented:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Usefulness of workshop activities:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creativity of workshop activities:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trainer's knowledge of subject:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trainer's presentation style:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is there anything you would like to learn that was not presented in this workshop?

Would you like more trainings that expand on this topic? Yes No (Please circle one)  
I would like more training on:

Additional Comments:



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## Additional Resources

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**For more support on this topic please see the following Family Connections materials:**

**Short Papers for Staff:**

*Encouraging an Expressive Environment: Supportive communication from the inside out*

*Fostering Resilience in Families Coping with Depression: Practical ways Head Start staff can help families build on their power to cope*

*Better Communication with Children: Responding to challenging subjects*

