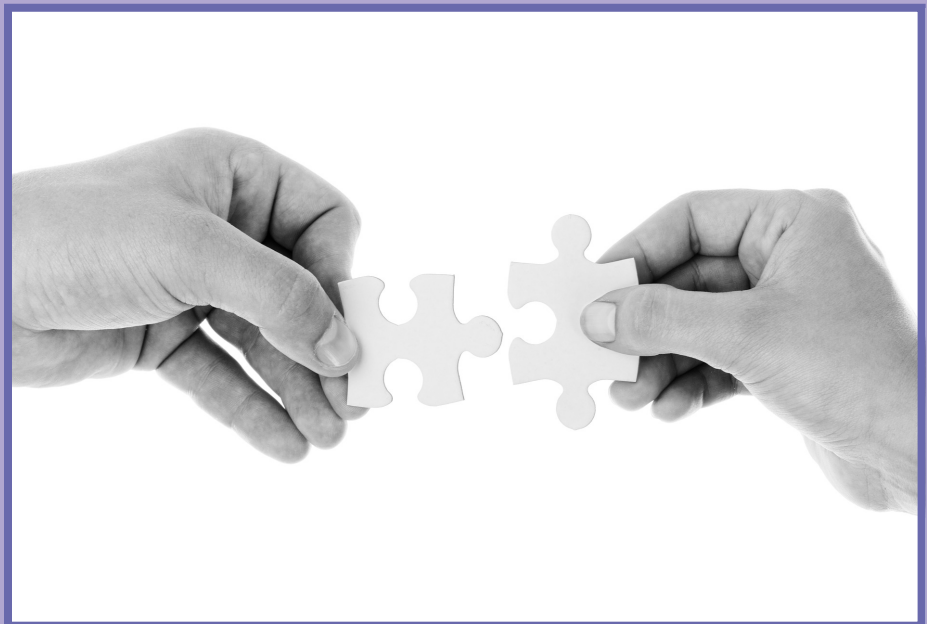


# Facilitator Guide

## Addressing the Needs of Parents with Cognitive Limitations

[Access Online Learning Modules](#)



**Note to facilitator:**

The online training module "Addressing the Needs of Parents with Cognitive Limitations" provides an excellent opportunity for home visitors who appreciate the flexibility of distance learning.

The pairing of the online training with a facilitated discussion (a proven more traditional method of education, whose efficacy is widely recognized) is innovative and provides for added value. The discussion allows for the sharing of personal experiences that help to illuminate the information in the module. It also provides opportunities to use the basic skills that are so essential for communication – “serve and return”, listening, facial expressions, vocal intonation, eye contact - things that are absent from today’s communication using technology. (In these days of emails, text messages, "selfies", and social media, it’s nice to meet face-to-face once in a while!) Also, laughter, stories, music, and role-plays as part of the discussion, injects an emotional component to the learning opportunity. These types of elements are incorporated into this Facilitator Guide.

Home visitors spend time with families that have an array of gifts, skills, cultures and many times challenges. The opportunity to share experiences, strategies, solutions, and successes with other family workers is much more powerful than completing the online education alone.

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This Guide provides some ideas for a trainer or supervisor wishing to facilitate a follow-up discussion with a group of home visitors who have completed the module. It assumes that the facilitator has also completed the module and is familiar with its contents and resources. You don't necessarily have to be a content expert to lead the activities and discussions. Feel free to adjust and add your own creative ideas.

We hope you enjoy the process!

## Introduction

Draw a parallel between the home visitors' personal experiences/ feelings and those of families they serve.

Prompt them to think about times when they might struggle:

- *Do you ever have trouble getting out of the door on time in the morning?*
- *Have you ever returned home from the grocery store and realized you'd forgotten the one thing you went there for?*
- *How do you feel when these things happen?*

Discuss as a group. Ask home visitors if their understanding of what it means to have a cognitive limitation changed after completing the module.

This session was developed to provide an opportunity to share their challenges and strategies with each other and explore some of the ideas presented in the module more deeply.

## Icebreaker

### Keeping balloons in the air

Invite participants to stand. In groups of 6 - 8, have each group face each other, forming a circle. Provide each group with an inflated balloon and instruct them to tap it back and forth keeping it afloat. While the balloons are being batted around, ask them to begin reciting the alphabet backwards. (When they reach A, have them begin again at Z and continue doing so.) After a short while, add another balloon to each group and keep increasing the number of balloons until the two tasks become difficult for them to accomplish.

The point of this exercise is to have the home visitors experience how difficult it is to think clearly while the brain is being taxed. Remind them that all people have diminished cognitive ability when under stress.

## **Review Learning Objectives**

After having completed this module, home visitors should be able to:

- Recognize how their values and beliefs impact the success of parents who have cognitive limitations
- Be able to describe cognitive limitations from a functional perspective
- Gain knowledge of the needs of parents with cognitive limitations
- Utilize strategies and techniques to increase engagement and valuable service delivery for parents with cognitive limitations

## **Review Vocabulary**

Display this definition:

Executive functioning includes the higher-level thinking abilities that enable people to get things done. They allow people to plan and organize and to link past experiences to the present.

In order to review the cognitive processes related to executive functioning, provide copies of the "Executive Functions Worksheet" (found on page 9). Have partners work together to match the terms with their definitions. Then hand out the printable chart "Supporting the Executive Functioning of Parents with Young Children" (found in the module) to each group. Ask them to consider how they might utilize this tool in their work.

## **Think-Pair Share**

Home visitors were asked in the module to “Consider a time at home when you had a really bad day – and weren’t at your best as a parent. How do you think you would have been evaluated on your parenting skills in that moment, particularly if you knew that the person observing you was expecting you to fail?”

Ask each participant to choose a partner taking one minute each to share their responses to this question.

Then, show this quote from the module:

"I'm pretty sure that none of us feel like we're perfect parents on every single day that we parent. We all have days we feel better at it than others, and so we have to be careful about the judgments that we make about these parents, especially when we're seeing them for a very short period of time during a very stressful point of their lives."

- Barbara Nadeau, Trainer

### **Whole Group Discussion**

Provide an opportunity for home visitors to consider the impact of poverty on efficient thinking. Share this information:

Socioeconomic scarcity can increase negative emotions such as depression and anxiety. Being in a negative state of mind can affect people's thought processes which then impact their decision-making and behaviors.

Ask them:

In what ways might scarcity be affecting the thinking and decision making of some of the families you are working with?

Next, show the video of Craig from part 2 of the module - "Growing up Around Caseworkers."

Prompt discussion with the following questions:

- *Do you realize the power you have to impact the families that you visit – for better or worse?*
- *Were you surprised to hear that Craig's memory of his home visitors has remained with him into adulthood?*

Ask about reactions to the idea that their presence in a home could be causing stress thus affecting the parent's ability to think clearly.

## Personal Reflection

In the video “Changing Your Approach” from part 4 of the module, Chelsea comments that “...we tend to be a little “judgey” as providers and we tend to be a little rigid sometimes when we think of the way we’re supposed to do things...”

Ask home visitors:

*Do you agree with the speaker that home visitors can sometimes be “judgmental?”*

Have them reflect on their personal standards for cleanliness and parenting. Prompt them to consider how their personal beliefs influence the way they think about the families they work with.

## Walkabout Activity

Write each of the following four items on a chart paper and provide markers. Post each chart on walls throughout the room. Divide the group into 4 and have each group begin at a different paper. Allow 5 – 10 minutes for each discussion then rotate. Have each group add their responses/ideas to the paper as they go. Do one final rotation so the groups end up at their initial question. Allow a few minutes for them to read the list of responses. Then ask each group to choose one idea to report out on.

- *How do you learn about how parents learn best?*
- *Do program expectations help or hinder parents with cognitive limitations to be successful? In what ways have you adjusted your approach to meet parents where they are at?*
- *What does strengths-based home visiting look like? In what ways is this approach especially important for families with cognitive limitations?*
- *Share a personal example and/or generate strategies for how to maintain positivity with parents with flat or negative affect.*

## Think-Pair-Share

In the module there are examples given for reframing judgmental reactions to a parent's behavior such as:

- "I think you're lazy,"
- "I think you don't care," or
- "I think you aren't paying attention."

Have home visitors work in pairs to come up with their own ideas for turning one of those into a more respectful and constructive statement.

Invite a few teams to share with the group.

## Individual Reflection

### Self-Care

Ask participants to take a few quiet moments reflecting on their ability to maintain an optimistic belief that with the right supports, families will succeed.

Encourage them to read the article within the module about hopefulness. Not only is a positive outlook good for the families being served, but has benefits the home visitor. People who are more hopeful also tend to be more resilient, healthier, and have greater job satisfaction.

## Role Play

Divide participants into groups of 4.

Begin with small group discussions:

What did they think of the idea that their attitudes and reactions to families have a powerful impact on their success? Do they believe that their positivity and hopefulness can actually affect a family's outcomes?

Then pass out copies of the Family Story from the module (Natalie's Story) to have groups role play that scenario. Identify the strategies the home visitor Lauren utilized in the story. Do they believe that this is a realistic outcome? (It was taken from a true experience – only the names were changed.)

After providing ample time for this activity, debrief with each group and invite them to share their insights.

## **Whole group Discussion**

Ask participants:

*What are Natural Supports? Why are they important for all parents?*

Prompt them to:

*Think about your own natural supports. Visualize what your life would be like if you had nobody you could count on.*

Invite conversation:

*Why are parents with cognitive limitations less likely to have these supports?*

*What might happen to parents with cognitive limitations when home visitors are no longer there to support them?*

Show the video “Natural Supports” from part 5 of the module. Then ask:

*What are some things that you are currently doing or can begin to do that can help transition families to using natural supports when your services end?*

Pass out the printable document “Mapping My Relationships.” This may be a useful tool to record a parent's network of supports.

## **Action Plan**

Have participants develop an Action Plan:

- *What 3 things from this session will you try?*
- *Also, set one goal for your own self-care.*

## **Closing**

Show the video “The Rewards of This Work” from the end of Part 5 of the module.

Commend home visitors for all they do to support the varied needs of all of the families they work with. Encourage them to get the continued support they need to do this challenging but very important work.

## Executive Functions Worksheet

Term	<i>Definition #</i>
<b>Attention and Concentration</b>	
<b>Impulse Control</b>	
<b>Emotional Control</b>	
<b>Integrating Memory</b>	
<b>Planning and Organization</b>	
<b>Cognitive Flexibility</b>	
<b>Abstract Thinking</b>	
<b>Judgment</b>	
<b>Problem-Solving</b>	
<b>Execution of Complex Behavior</b>	
<b>Social Behavior</b>	
<b>Self-Monitoring</b>	

1. Efficient storing of information in the brain so that it can be accessed when needed. The ability to manipulate and sequence time, tasks and materials.
2. Recognizing a problem, determining multiple possible solutions and acting. The ability to draw logical conclusions.
3. Having the ability to stop and think before acting or speaking.
4. Being able to monitor and evaluate one's performance.
5. Adapting to change; switching gears and moving from one thought or activity to another. Having the ability to alter plans if something isn't working.
6. Using emotions effectively to inform thinking; making connections between thoughts and feelings.
7. Awareness of the environment and the ability to focus on the task at hand. This includes ignoring distractions to stay on task as well as switching back and forth between tasks.
8. The ability to generalize information. To learn one thing and be able to apply it to others. (e.g., learning to plan time at home and using that ability to plan at work.) Also the understanding of non-concrete, complex concepts.
9. Reading the cues of others and adjusting own behaviors and language to engage in socially acceptable ways. Adapting to various circumstances.
10. Holding facts in mind while manipulating information; remembering to perform a planned action at some future point in time.
11. A learned ability based on past life experience.
12. Getting started; paying attention; and completing a task. Doing multi-step tasks with each step in proper order.

Instructions:

Match the terms in the column on the left to the definitions in the column on the right using the numbers next to the definitions.

## Additional small group activities

### “People First” language

Give examples of inappropriate labels for people, and have home visitors restate positively. Utilize the CDC resource “Communicating With and About People with Disabilities” (linked to from the module) for ideas. Pass out copies of that handout for their reference after they complete the exercise.

### Executive Function

The module provides an analogy – likening executive function to a conductor of an orchestra. Another useful example is an air traffic controller. Have home visitors work in small groups to pick one of these concepts (either conductor or air traffic controller) and identify the ways that it compares to executive functioning. Encourage them to think creatively. Provide a large sheet of paper and markers so each group can create a visual representation of their ideas. If time allows, ask each group to report out and/or hang their posters around the room for all to see.

*This document was created for the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood by the Center for Early Childhood Education at Eastern Connecticut State University with contributions from Doug Edwards. The document is meant to support facilitated discussion groups for home visitors who have completed the online learning module.*