

Facilitator Guide

Communicating with Families to Foster Relationships

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Note to facilitator:

The online training module "Communicating with Families to Foster Relationships" 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, inject 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.

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. This topic is one for which you can expect home visitors to have considerable collective experience. There shouldn't be a need for much lecturing. You can provide the structure and occasional prompts and allow the participants to learn from each other - sharing their knowledge and favorite strategies. Feel free to adjust and add your own creative ideas.

We hope you enjoy the process!



Introduction/Icebreaker

“Getting to know you” ball toss

Either purchase a Thumbball or create your own by writing various questions on the spaces of a soccer or beach ball. With everyone standing, pass the ball around the room. When the ball is caught, that person answers the question nearest the right thumb. Some examples of questions might include, “What is your favorite pastime?” or “What is one item on your bucket list?” If the person does not feel comfortable answering a question they get, allow a “toss again” and the player can toss it up and re-catch it.

This is a strategy that could be used on a home visit or with a group of parents. It’s a fun way to get to know someone and invite communication.

Review Learning Objectives

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

- Understand the elements of a true partnership.
- Be aware of home visitor qualities associated with higher parent engagement.
- Recognize their own strengths and areas that may need strengthening.
- Reflect on the communication strategies they are currently using and those that might be useful to try.
- Examine the ways they are currently sharing information and take steps to broaden their repertoire to meet individual family's needs.
- Know what Motivational Interviewing (MI) is and understand its benefits for both families and home visitors.
- Address challenging topics with families by identifying common ground and working in partnership with them.

Review Vocabulary

In order to review some of the key concepts from this module, play a game of “Hot Seat.” Ask for a volunteer to sit in a chair placed at the front of the room facing the rest of the group. That person will have to guess the word. Write one of the vocabulary words on the board.

Those not in the hot seat can raise their hands if they have a clue to give. Choose someone to share their clue so the guesser can try and figure out the term. Continue playing until the word is identified or the person gives up – then get another volunteer to take the seat and begin again with a new word.

Include these terms from the Glossary:

- Active listening
- Affirmations
- Closed-ended questions
- Communication blockers
- Empowerment
- Open-ended questions
- Reflections
- Reframe
- Shared power
- Strengths-based

Whole Group Discussion

Prompt the group:

- *Why do relationships matter?*
- *What are some of benefits to developing trusting relationships with the families you work with?*

Small Groups

First impressions really do count. The initial visit is crucial - relationship-building starts there.

Ask:

- *How do you usually spend your first visit with families?*
- *In what ways do these strategies start to build trust?*

Invite home visitors to discuss their responses within small groups.

Have each group report out one idea with the large group.

Think-Pair-Share

Have each participant choose a partner. Within each dyad, ask one person to:

Share a statement describing a negative experience you have had at work. Then together try to find the silver lining in that experience. Maybe something good came out of it or a lesson was learned.

This activity requires home visitors to focus on the positive aspects of a situation even when it's difficult to do so. This is a necessary skill when taking a strengths-based approach.

Whole Group

Reinforce the idea that:

Using strength-based communication can help a parent to recognize his or her own potential. Additionally, it contributes to your developing partnership with the family.

Pass out the Tips for Effective Communication from the module.

Small Groups

Provide an opportunity for groups to practice reframing. Provide a few examples of messages home visitors might hear from parents such as:

- “My life’s not going the way I want it to.”
- “I can’t finish anything.”
- “I wish I were a better person.”

Invite them to:

Either choose one of these statements, or share a real-life example of a parent’s negative self-view comment. In your small groups, brainstorm ways that you might respond to such a statement by reframing and focusing on the family’s strengths.

Role Play

Invite one pair to role play a brief exchange for the group (one as the home visitor, and one in the role of parent) that demonstrates how their reframing conversation might sound.

Facilitate a large group discussion about some ongoing challenges and who they use for support.

Small Groups

Assign each group one of the following communication blockers:

- Interrupting
- Using “always” or “never”
- Changing the subject
- Excessive use of questions

Ask each group to:

Come up with an example for when this might occur. Then identify how a parent might feel when this happens and how that might affect your relationship. Finally, think of an alternate way to respond to the parent using a more respectful communication strategy.

Allow several minutes for this activity, then have each group report out.

Whole Group Discussion

Write the following sentence for all to read:

“Strong relationships between parents and home visitors contribute to better outcomes for children and families.”

Then use this prompt to invite conversation:

What are some ways that you demonstrate a respect for families' values and a belief that they are doing their best?

Self-Select Topics

Write each of the following items on separate papers and post on walls throughout the room. Allow participants to select the topic of most interest and gather around that question. Explain that the terms on their chart refer to one of the home visitor qualities that were described as important in the module. Provide instructions for their task:

First, work to define this term and write your description on the chart. Then, explain why it is such a crucial quality for home visitors to possess. Finally, list some examples of how a home visitor might demonstrate this.

- *Conscientiousness*
- *Empathy*
- *Acceptance and sociability*
- *Understanding parent values and motivation*
- *Availability during a crisis*

Provide ample time for the groups to discuss their topic, then signal for their attention and ask each group to share an idea with the whole group for consideration. Facilitate a large group discussion.

Individual Reflection

Self-Care

Hand out a copy of “Mapping My Relationships” to each participant. Invite them to spend a few minutes using this tool to identify their own supports as well as any relationships that might cause them stress.

Might then engage the whole group in brainstorming how they could function as supports for each other.

Whole group Discussion

Home visitors may be perceived by families as being in a position of power. We want instead to work in partnership with them.

Facilitate a discussion about ways they build partnerships.

Then ask them to consider:

How do you feel when you share information with families about something you think is important and then they don't follow-through?

While it may feel important to try and persuade parents to do things a certain way, that is not consistent with a "shared power" approach.

Through the following activity, we will explore an alternative to persuasion.

Activity

Provide this list to all participants and allow a minute for them to privately indicate yes or no for each item.

Health and Safety Habits

- Do you eat breakfast every day?
- Do you always wear a seat belt in the car?
- Do you always drink plenty of water?
- Do you always obey the speed limit while driving?
- Do you always take exercise breaks throughout the day?
- Do you always wear a helmet when riding a bike?
- Do you avoid cigarette smoke?
- Do you change your passwords regularly?
- Do you sleep at least 7 hours every night?
- Do you keep your home and car doors locked?

Prompt each participant to discuss with a partner:

Were there any items on this list that you responded "no" to? If so, why do you think that is? With a partner generate a list of reasons why we all sometimes fail to do things that we know we should.

Invite a few teams to share with the group.

Encourage them to:

Try to remember this if you feel frustrated when a family isn't following through on something or exhibiting behaviors that you feel might not be good for them.

Practice

Encouragement, an alternative to persuasion

Organize participants into groups of about four.

Prompt them:

Do you ever find yourself telling a parent what you think they should do?

This work is not about trying to persuade someone to see things your way. Even if you believe you recognize a clear path that would be the best, let's avoid telling and instead try to encourage the parent to come to their own decision.

In order to practice the difference, work in your groups to complete this chart.

Hand out the “Encouragement vs. Persuasion” worksheet (found on the next page).

Provide ample time for this activity. If you have a willing group and time allows, you could invite a role-play of each scenario. Debrief with each group and invite them to share their insights.

Additional topics for discussion

Motivational Interviewing

MI is a collaborative interaction style that supports a person's own motivation and commitment to change.

If someone in the group has been trained in this approach, ask if they would be comfortable to answer any questions others may have. Alternatively, ask all participants to share what they gleaned about this from the module and talk about any strategies that they've tried, or plan to try, in their work.

Culture

Show the video “Understanding Family's Culture” from Part 4 of the module. Invite comments about the featured home visitor's approach to this aspect of her work with families.

Encouragement vs. Persuasion

Parent comment that indicates an interest in change:	Home visitor giving advice and trying to <i>persuade</i> a parent to take a particular action:	Home visitor providing <i>encouragement</i> might sound like:
"I'd like to get my daughter to sleep better. She's so cranky by mid-morning!"	"Why don't you put her to bed at the same time every night after reading a bed time story, so she'll be more rested."	"It sounds like you would like to make a change in her sleep habits to ensure she gets plenty of rest. Would you like some support to accomplish that?"...
"My son is such a picky eater. I just wish mealtimes weren't such a struggle."	"You should encourage your son to help to prepare his meals. That will get him more actively engaged and may help him be more open to trying new things."	
"She keeps having accidents at night. I don't want to put her back in diapers but all of these accidents are going to ruin her mattress."	"If you limit her liquid intake a few hours before bed she'll be less likely to wet the bed. You could also try putting a pad underneath her sheet to absorb any accidents."	
"I know we need to get rid of his pacifier soon but he really likes it and I hate seeing him so upset when we take it away."	"Ease him out of using his pacifier little-by-little. Only let him have it when he's going to sleep and in the car. Then, slowly ween even more from there."	

Personal Reflection

Revisit these questions from the journal:

- *How might your personal background or upbringing influence your thinking about families?*
- *Consider a time when your values and beliefs conflicted with those of a family enrolled in your program. How might their personal background and life experiences have influenced their thinking?*

If anyone is comfortable doing so, invite them to share with the group.

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

Acknowledge that home visiting is challenging, but can be very gratifying. Encourage participants to refer back to the module and utilize the resources and to practice the strategies ongoing.

Show this video from Part 2 of the module. “Focus on the Conversation”

Summarize:

Open, two-way communication and the development of respectful relationships are the heart of this work.

As you continually refine your communication skills, and utilize the help of your colleagues and supervisors, you will become more confident and effective in this role.

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.

