

Engaging Youth and Those Around Them In The Process of Permanence

A Train-the-Trainer Program Introduction

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What is the goal of the training program?

The goal of this Training Project is to educate everyone involved in caring for you on the value of permanence and how they can work collaboratively to create a “permanency oriented” environment for all youth in care. This train-the-trainer component of the training program provides both the philosophical under-pinning of a permanency oriented practice, an opportunity for discussion and exploration of permanence for teens as well as practical strategies for implementation.

Who is the intended audience?

The audience for the curriculum will include staff at all levels: management, supervisory, caseworkers and, where applicable group-home or residential care staff. In addition, implementation will be more successful if training can be expanded to include allied helping professionals such as therapists and teachers working with the youth, the youth themselves and members of their support system. Finally, this curriculum can be beneficial for recruiters and home-finders, legal staff, CASA workers and others in the court and legal system and post-adoption agencies.

Who should present the curriculum components?

The curriculum can be presented at any venue by a team that could include a trained trainer, a representative of the agency being trained, a trained young person, and/or a foster or biological parent. This presentation strategy is an excellent opportunity to illustrate that agencies, families and youth are all partners in creating and implementing nurturing, lifetime family connections for youth in care. Each member of the training team can help engage participants by sharing their own unique viewpoints, first hand experiences and the wisdom gained from time and experience. As each training team comes together, they can review the curriculum and train-the-trainer materials to determine roles and responsibilities based on their unique strengths and needs. Obviously, this is a model that will not always be possible. There will be times when a single facilitator will present the entire training. Whatever presentation model is utilized, the most important ingredient is the “permanency oriented” and “can-do” attitude of the facilitator or team.

Expectations of the Facilitator(s)

The lead facilitator should have significant experience working with a variety of birth, foster, kin and adoptive families and/or youth as well as with the child welfare system. The facilitator should be “Permanency Oriented” – that is share a strong conviction that permanent family connections are important for all youth and that there is both hope and a reasonable likelihood of achieving permanence for all youth before discharging them from care.

What is in the curriculum package?

The curriculum package provides the following:

- **Train-the-trainer facilitator’s guide** – This is a detailed, annotated guide designed for the facilitators and includes teaching points for each slide, examples that illustrate the teaching points, discussion questions, group exercises, case studies, hand-out materials with instructions for their use and supplemental bibliographic or resource information
- **Slides (PowerPoint Presentation)** – Slides which can be used as a PowerPoint presentation or printed out and used with an overhead projector are provided

What is included in the training program?

The training program consists of 2 components, designed so that they can be presented together as a very full days, or broken into two separate training sessions:

- **Talking with Youth** – This session provides a context and practical tools with which to engage youth in conversations about and planning regarding permanence in their lives
- **Preparing Everyone** – This session provides a context and practical tools with which to engage professionals, Para-professionals, family and friends in conversations about and planning for permanence in the lives of youth they care about

Customizing the Curriculum for Particular Needs

Training teams are encouraged to customize the curriculum to meet the unique needs of a particular audience. They can make specific decisions about how materials will be presented based on the participants familiarity with the issues and concepts addressed, as well as their specific role or “vantage point” within the system. In addition, wherever possible, when individual cases are used for illustrative purposes, it is recommended that participants discuss specific cases on their own caseload or with which they are familiar (while protecting the confidentiality of all information shared).

PRE-TRAINING PROGRAM PREPARATION

This section is designed to help facilitators reflect about the participants and the best way to present the training materials to them.

How Adults Learn

Adults learn differently from children, and youth are beginning to learn in adult-like ways as well. As a trainer for this program, you are less “THE” expert as you are a facilitator whose job it is to help draw out the life experiences and expertise from the participants. Each participant brings a host of past experiences, expertise and lifelong learning into these sessions which can become valuable sources of enrichment for all. The role of the teacher is to facilitate learning by:

- Setting a positive climate for learning,
- Clarifying the purposes of the learner(s),
- Organizing and making available learning resources,
- Balancing intellectual and emotional components of learning, and
- Sharing feelings and thoughts with learners but not dominating.

Before beginning to prepare your presentation, it is useful to review some basic principles of adult learning theory¹:

1. Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities.
2. Adult learning is problem-solving-centered rather than content-oriented. Strategies such as case studies, role playing, simulations, are most useful.
3. Material must be designed and presented to accommodate different modes of learning – some are visual learners, others are more auditory, while others need hands on or experiential opportunities to assimilate information.
4. Adults are most interested in learning about subjects that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life: Adults need to know why they need to learn something.
5. Adult learners are self-directed and expect to take responsibility for decisions.
6. Learning which is perceived as threatening to the self (e.g., new attitudes or perspectives) are more easily assimilated when external threats are at a minimum.

A useful tool for structuring how time is spent in a learning session was created by Gagne, Briggs & Wager, (1992). They outline nine key instructional events that benefit adult learners, some of which include:

- gaining attention
- informing learners of the objective
- stimulating recall of prior learning
- presenting new, stimulating material
- providing learning guidance
- providing feedback (reinforcement)
- enhancing retention and transfer (generalization)

These training materials are organized and designed to incorporate each of these instructional events into each session.

¹ Knowles, Malcolm, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*. Chicago, IL: Follett Publishing, 1980.

Being Familiar with the Material

Facilitators should go through the facilitator's manual carefully and become familiar with each section and what it is intended to accomplish. In addition, it is valuable to practice conducting the experiential exercises with other facilitators prior to engaging an audience of participants.

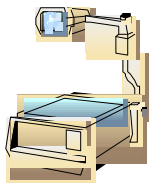
Interacting with the Audience

There are many opportunities throughout the curriculum to interact with the participants. The material is organized so that it can be presented in an interactive manner. There are a number of opportunities presented to discuss provocative questions, case studies or participate in small group experiential exercises. Tips for engaging participants include:

- Vary how you use the slides. Sometimes you may wish to engage in discussion about a key point before showing the slide that makes that point, other times, the slide itself may help inspire conversation
- When you pose a question, do not be intimidated by a few moments of silence and do not rush to fill the gap. Participants often need a few moments to reflect upon and process a question before offering a response
- If, after a period of silence no one volunteers a response, try to draw out a particular participant by asking them to share a particular experience that relates to the question at hand
- Always provide positive feedback to people who participate in the dialogue even if they do not provide exactly the responses you were hoping for. You can always re-direct the conversation to ensure that key points are made
- Draw out participants who do not volunteer, but do not put anyone on the spot. When you ask someone to share, if they decline or resist, you can respond neutrally by saying, "Not at this time? Perhaps later."

Symbols and Their Meanings

Throughout the facilitator's manual are various symbols to help the facilitator – the symbols used and their meanings are as follows:



Equipment needed to present this portion of the material



Time: The amount of time this section of material is expected to take



Slide: There is a slide corresponding to this part of the presentation



Teaching Point – A key thought or idea that should be emphasized to participants. This also gives facilitators an opportunity to relay relevant personal experiences.



Question – A question is posed to generate discussion



Pencil and Paper Activity or Refer to Hand-outs



Pairs – Break into pairs for a discussion or activity



Small Group - Exercise or activity for small groups



Large group discussion



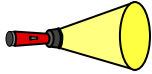
Lecture format



Music – Play a piece of music to set the tone for discussion



Video – Show a video clip



Spotlight – Highlight a real case, practice or policy that exemplifies the concept being discussed



References – Additional suggested reading or other resources

Learning Environment

Of course, the environment will depend to some degree on the number of participants expected and the room capacities. Within these parameters, an ideal room arrangement consists of a “U” shaped seating plan which fosters communication and interaction. Cafeteria-style seating with participants seated in smaller groupings around tables is also effective.

It is important to pay attention to small details such as the temperature of the room, access to rest rooms and water, etc. In addition, be sure to provide all of the supplies participants will need in order to fully benefit from planned activities including extra pencils, pens, highlighters, etc.

Typical Equipment and Supplies Needed:

- LCD projector or overhead projector and screen
- Flip chart with pad and markers
- CD player or cassette tape recorder
- VCR and Television set
- Paper, pencils, pens, highlighter markers for all participants
- Name tents and/or name tags
- Participant’s set of all instructional materials and handouts
- Annotated materials for facilitators
- Water and water glasses
- A few more chairs than the number of anticipated participants
- Extra extension cords or other technology needs

Remember – sleep well the night before, have a healthy breakfast and come to the training prepared to have a good time and learn something new!

Good luck and enjoy!