Clearinghouse on Supervised Visitation

The Institute for Family Violence Studies

Florida State University

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QUESTIONS FROM DIRECTORS

What do I say to a father who says that "it doesn't' matter" whether he comes to the visit or not? It is true that he and his two children have an awkward relationship, but nothing dreadful has happened. Should we let him cancel the visits?

No. Encourage him to keep showing up. Remind him that you told him at intake that these things take time, and that it counts that he is dependable. His children will remember that he was there, waiting for them, no matter what. Acknowledge his persistence. Point out when things go well. ("Did you see Johnny's big smile when he won the game.")

Can I share the new handouts with foster parents who bring the children to visits?

Yes, you can share them, but I recommend that you also provide them with the information on the Protective Factors. Remember that the handouts are used in conjunction with building parental skills. Let the foster parent know that you are also using these forms with the parent, and explain why.

Our program has a new director. Who do we tell?

You are just in time for the new updated program listing. I sent out a notice to all directors last week, asking everyone to check their listing and tell us if anything needs to be changed. We also want to know who in Florida is providing parent education, mediation, and other important ancillary services. Send your information to koehme@fsu.edu.

Have you been called to provide information to a new program? Send them here, to the Clearinghouse. We have a list of Frequently Asked Questions that will help them understand the Minimum Standards.

Teaching Children to Express Empathy

By Elena Simonsen

Introduction

Research shows that empathy is related to positive outcomes, such as fulfilling relationships and success at work. Empathy is at the core of being human: it is what connects people to others and drives them to care about others. There are many different complex skills involved in empathy, and these skills begin to develop in early childhood and continue to grow throughout life. Thus, parents and monitors can play an important role in developing a child's ability to express empathy. This training is important for Protective Factor Six, children's emotional and social capacity.

Objectives

After reading this article, parents and monitors will:

- Understand what empathy is and why it is an important quality to have
- Know what an empathetic child looks like
- Recognize some of the key milestones in a child's development of empathy
- Be aware of ways to cultivate empathy in children

What is Empathy? Why is it Important?

Empathy involves the thoughts and feelings related to putting one's self in the position of another person. An empathetic person is able to take someone else's perspective and have compassion for that individual, and to understand and embrace other's differences. Many people believe that empathy is feeling sorry for someone, but that is a misconception. Feeling sorry for someone is called *sympathy*. For more on the definition of empathy and how it's different from sympathy, please see the Brene Brown video listed in the Resources section below.

Why is it important for children to be empathetic? The obvious answer is that everyone should treat one another with respect, kindness, and acceptance. Additionally, research has shown that empathy is one of the most important qualities for children to have in order to be successful in the future. Some other reasons why being empathetic is important include:

- *Acting ethically*- treating others with the kindness, compassion, and respect that all people seek
- *Having strong, positive relationships*- being empathetic is at the core of healthy relationships and communicating well with others
- *Success at work*- empathy helps people to get along and work with others and understand different points of view

What is an Empathetic Child?

How do you know if a child is empathetic? Empathetic children:

- Realize their own individuality
- Know that other children have thoughts and feelings that are different from their own
- Are able to recognize and understand feelings such as sadness, happiness, jealousy, etc.
- Can place themselves in the position of a friend, and imagine what might be an appropriate way to respond

Milestones in the Development of Empathy

Empathy is the result of the development of many other social skills. Some key milestones in developing these skills, and thus empathy, for children include:

- Establishing a strong, secure, positive relationship with a caregiver (usually a parent)
- At around 6 months of age, referring to others to decide how to react to new people and situations
- Between 18 and 24 months of age, realizing that others have their own thoughts and feelings that are different from their own. Children of this age can also recognize themselves in a mirror, signifying that they understand they are their own individual persons

Ways to Cultivate Empathy

There is an endless number of ways that parents and supervised visitation monitors can help children to become empathetic. Some helpful strategies include:

- *Empathizing with the child*
  - o When the child is scared, acknowledge his or her feeling of fear and offer comfort and support
- *Talking about others' feelings*
  - o Point out another child's sadness and talk about how the child would want to be treated if he or she was feeling sad
- *Talking about ways to show empathy*
  - o For example, a parent or monitor could suggest listening to someone talk when that other person feels sad
- *Reading stories about feelings*
- *Modeling empathy*
  - o This can be done by forming a secure relationship with your child, treating service workers with respect, or being welcoming to new neighbors

- *Using "I" statements*
  - o This helps the child to recognize you as a separate individual, and highlights the importance of self-awareness
- *Validating the child's emotions*
  - o It's natural to immediately attempt to fix others' negative emotions, but children can benefit from identifying and accepting these emotions so that they can learn how to handle them appropriately
- *Using pretend play to model empathy*
- *Being patient*
  - o Children won't become empathetic overnight; this is a skill that takes lots of time and effort to develop fully, and it's normal for children to have times where they do not express empathy
- *Expanding the child's circle*

- o Make sure he or she is caring about many different types of people, not just a select few that he or she is close to
- *Remove roadblocks to empathy*
  - o Sometimes, feelings or thoughts may prevent a child from being empathetic. By showing children how to express their own emotions appropriately, parents and monitors can help to remove these barriers to being empathetic

For more specific activities to do with children to encourage them to express empathy, please see the resource section below.

Conclusion

Empathy is an important quality for all people to have. It allows one to place one's self in the position of another, and to feel what that other person is feeling. Empathy is a skill that begins to develop in childhood, and thus parents and supervised visitation monitors play an important role in helping children to cultivate this quality. There are many different ways that parents and monitors can help children to express empathy, including modeling empathy and discussing feelings. By helping children to become more empathetic, parents and monitors are setting up children for positive outcomes such as fulfilling relationships with others and success in the workplace.

References

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Lerner, C. & Parlakian, R. (2016, Ferbruary 1). Retrieved from https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/5-how-to-help-your-child-develop-empathy

Weissbourd, R. & Jones, S. (n.d.). How Parents Can Cultivate Empathy in Children [pdf]. Retrieved from https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/files/gse-mcc/files/empathy.pdf

Resources:

- Brene Brown on Empathy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw
- Exercises to try to cultivate empathy in children: https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/files/gse-mcc/files/empathy.pdf

More Materials for Custodians and Visitors to Develop the Protective Factors

We have heard your requests for more materials to give to parents and children at visits to help build the protective factors. Activity sheets are extremely popular, and they help provide an important opportunity for parents and their kids to interact, have fun together, grow, and bond.

All of the activity sheets that we have been developing will also be on the website.

Remember to provide the custodian with activities, too.

WORD RACE!

- How many words can you & your child come up with in a minute? Let's find out!

DIRECTIONS:

1. Cut the accompanying sheet in half. The parent will take one half and the child will take the other. The parent and child will each need a pen or pencil.
2. Set a timer for 90 seconds.
3. Once the timer begins, the parent and child each will write down as many words as possible on their sheets. (There are examples of words on each sheet to get you started.)
4. Whoever comes up with the most words at the end of 90 seconds wins!

*This activity is best suited for use with children aged 8-11

Word Race! 3 Letters!

How many 3 letter words can you write in 90 seconds?

Example: Cow			

How many words did you write? _____

✂ _____

How many 3 letter words can you write in 90 seconds?

Example: Ant		

How many words did you write? _____

Word Race! 4 Letters!

How many 4 letter words can you write in 90 seconds?

Example: Leaf			

How many words did you write? _____

✄ _

How many 4 letter words can you write in 90 seconds?

Example: Duck		

How many words did you write? _____

Word Race! 5 letter words!

How many 5 letter words can you write in 90 seconds?

Example: Brave		

How many words did you write? _____

✂ ───

How many can you write in 90 seconds?

Example: Mouse		

How many words did you write? _____

Word Race! Name Animals!

How many Animal Words can you write in 90 seconds?

Example: Tiger		

How many words did you write? _____

✂ _

How many Animal Words can you write in 90 seconds?

Example: Duck		

How many words did you write? _____

Word Race! Br- Words!

How many words that begin with Br- can you write in 90 seconds?

Example: Bring		

How many words did you write? _____

✂ _____

How many words that begin with Br- can you write in 90 seconds?

Example: Broom		

How many words did you write? _____

Word Race! Name States!

How many States can you write in 60 seconds?

Example: New York		

How many words did you write? _____

✂ -

How many States can you write in 60 seconds?

Example: Oregon		

How many words did you write? _____

The Alphabet Game

Here is a game you can play with your kids without any tools or material.

Choose a category, and take turns listing things alphabetically in that category.

An example of a "food" category: A parent might start off with "Apple." Then the child would say "Banana."

Once you and your child have gone through the alphabet then the game is over!

Here are some themes you can use!

- Animals (Ants, Bats, Cats…)
- Things at School (Alphabet, Baseballs, Coloring…)
- Thing you see outside while driving in a car (Airplane, Buses, Cars...)

Tougher Categories for Teenagers

- Places (America, Brazil, Canada...)
- Movies (Alice in Wonderland, Beauty and the Beast, Clue...)
- Famous Figures (Alexander III The Great, Barrack Obama, Charles Barkley…)

CHAPTER TWO

Train-the-Trainer: Information and Resources for Supervised Visitation Programs

Introduction

Ongoing training is an important part of ensuring a program's success. In many ways, training will help monitors and staff gain knowledge about their clients, the skills needed to work with those clients, and how to provide the best service to make the program succeed. The Clearinghouse produces large amounts of training and information that is available to all monitors and staff, but it is still important for program directors to offer in-person trainings for new staff and to provide ongoing training to keep monitors updated with new research and skills. This chapter will be used to help program directors learn the basics of effective training and how to best deliver information to all employees.

What will I learn in this chapter?

Upon completion of this chapter, participants will be able to:

- Demonstrate a basic understanding of Adult Learning Theory
- Identify some common barriers to training
- Understand the components of memory and retention
- Learn how to designate a trainer
- Learn how to become an effective trainer
- Minimize stage fright
- Understand the components of an effective training
- Understand the importance of evaluation

Part 1

Basics of Training

Although it is clear that training is essential for a program's success, there are times when directors or trainers may face resistance. This may be a result of the time commitment needed by staff to participate in training or even redundancy of the material being presented. In this case it is important for directors and trainers to demonstrate that training is a crucial part of their work and success in the program.

Training is crucial because it:

- Ensures best practices from all employees;
- Promotes safety and health among employees;
- Creates opportunities for career development and personal growth;
- Helps programs comply with Supreme Court standards and Clearinghouse recommendations;
- Improves productivity and profitability.

Considering the multitude of benefits that come from training in the workplace, it is essential for directors to consider how to train effectively. Training in the workplace includes working with adults, which is very different from teaching children. Other factors include working with groups rather than individuals, and creating compelling material. In the case of training staff, trainers must understand adult

learning theory, barriers to training, and the components that make for beneficial training.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult learners are a unique group who learn in unique ways. As such, it is crucial that program directors understand the basics of adult learning, or **andragogy,** so that they might facilitate successful learning to their adult cohort. Here are the fundamentals:

(1) Adults need to know **why** they need to learn something

(2) Adults need to learn **experientially**

(3) Adults approach learning as **problem-solving**

(4) Adults learn best when the topic is of **immediate value**

(5) Adults have a need to be **self-directing**

Keeping these basic principles in mind, here are some tips for would-be trainers charged with training adults:

Mix it up: Employ a combination of learning strategies (auditory, visual, tactile, participatory) to keep your audience engaged, help them retain information, and appeal to different learning styles.

Define your Purpose: Adults respond best to a program that is clearly defined. Knowing why the training is needed, and how they can apply it, is crucial.

Be organized and well-paced: Information should be presented in an organized, concise manner, so the learner can create their own flow of understanding. Optimal pacing should challenge adult learners just beyond their current ability or knowledge to avoid boredom and create an intellectual challenge.

Material: Adults prefer information that will focus heavily on the application of the concept to relevant problems.

Be relatable: Adults need to learn experientially. As such, it is helpful to anchor information to existing knowledge. Encourage participants to voice their opinions, and relate the material to past experiences and knowledge. The use of open-ended questions helps foster open discussions and draw out relevant knowledge and experiences.

Create a comfortable learning environment: Be sure to avoid long lectures and periods of interminable sitting with the absence of practice opportunities, as this is not conducive to learning.

Motivate: If the participant does not recognize the need for the information it will not be of value to them. You can motivate participants by enhancing their reasons for learning.

Challenge: Adult learners prefer to be self-directing. Allow them the opportunity to break into groups or work through the material on their own to engage in problem-solving.

Barriers to Training

There are several barriers to effective trainings that exist on multiple levels. Being cognizant of them helps directors, trainers, and trainees to overcome them. Barriers may exist in the following areas:

- Organizational Barriers
- Personal Barriers of Trainer
- Barriers to Retention

Organizational Barriers

Some organizational barriers that may arise when attempting to facilitate a train-the-trainer session include limited funding to carry out the training(s), staff/managerial resistance, scheduling issues, and high turnover rates. Each of these factors present some impediment to successful trainings, but they may be overcome if they are addressed in a timely fashion in preparation for proposed training.

Personal Barriers of Trainer

In addition to organizational hurdles, there may also be several individual barriers for chosen trainers. These may include: lack of confidence in speaking/training, resulting stage fright, time/scheduling limitations, personal relationship barriers among staff, and credibility. Most of these barriers can be overcome by selecting the right staff member to carry out trainings and allocating time/funding for them.

Barriers to Retention

The final area in which effective training and learning may be hindered has to do with engagement of trainees and their capacity for memory retention. As will be discussed in more detail, adults retain information more readily when they are able to engage in the material. Information about adult memory retention and tips for how best to train them will follow. Armed with this information, would-be trainers can make a concerted effort to train others so that they are able to retain the majority of the information they acquire through the training.

Components of Memory

There are *six components* of memory. Each component means different things to a trainer. Adults tend to remember things that:

1. **Stand Out** – Make your information dynamic!

2. **Link to the known** – "Anchor" the information. Provide information that builds on what the learner already knows.

3. **Are written down or recorded** – Use handouts. Make it easy for participants to take notes.

4. **Are reviewed** – Periodically reviewing information will increase learner retention. Quizzes at the end of each unit, group activities, and closing exercises will help review information with participants, thereby increasing retention.

5. **Use primacy** – People tend to remember beginnings and endings and are more likely to forget what happens in the middle. Plan accordingly and make your key points early and at the end of the presentation. (The training manuals written by the Clearinghouse are structured in this fashion).

6. **Are recent** – Remember that newly gained information, such as that at the end of the training, will be more easily recalled than earlier information.

Memory Retention

How do you help adults retain the information you are giving them? The graphic shown demonstrates the average retention rates for various learning methods.

When adults are able to teach others the skills they have learned, or otherwise use them immediately, they retain 90% of the information!

Adults Remember:

Lecture	5%
Reading	10%
Audiovisual	20%
Demonstration	30%
Discussion	50%
Practice	75%
Immediate Use	90%