

ACTIVITY: Practicing Skills for Cultural Sensitivity in Group Role Plays

1. SETTING THE STAGE

Provide participants with a description for writing their values. You can use the description in your PITC training binder. Tell participants they are going to practice the skills for cultural sensitivity that have already been discussed by role playing partnerships with parents. Explain that you are going to ask them to write down the three most important values they have in working with infants, including a behavior that illustrates each value. (Give an example – if respecting the infant is my value what kind of behavior would I observe?)

Explain that you are going to give them a context for writing their values. (Before you start the activity, count how many participants there are and divide them in half so that you have an equal number of parents and caregivers.) You can ask people to volunteer to be parents or you can assign them the parent role. Have participants who are parents count off until you have half of your total number. The remaining participants will be in a caregiver role.

Half of the participants write their values from the perspective of the parent. This is your baby you are putting in childcare. The rest of the participants write the values from the perspective of caregivers. Give participants time to think about and write down their values in their assigned role.

2. EXPLAINING THE PROCESS

After everyone has had time to write their values and behaviors explain that the focus of the activity is to practice partnering with parents. The task is to take the three values and behaviors that they have written and engage in talking about, clarifying, and discussing these between parent and caregiver. The goal is to come to a consensus on three values and behaviors that are representative of them as a couple. (They are reducing the original six values/behaviors down to three that represent both of them.) They need to rewrite the revised list of mutually agreed values/behaviors to be used again.

Ask parents to raise their hands so caregivers can find a parent to work with. Ask parents to visualize an infant that you care deeply about and imagine that they are putting this precious infant in a childcare program. If they can't think of an infant,

then think about a parent they have worked with who was a strong and outspoken advocate for their infant.

3. DEEPENING THE PROCESS; PRACTICING CULTURALLY SENSITIVE SKILLS

While partners are working together figure out how to arrange them into larger groups for the next part. Usually groups of six work best, but depending on the number of participants they may be larger or smaller or uneven. (When uneven numbers exist, I usually make these parents, so the larger number will represent parent voices.)

Give pairs time for discussion and check in to see how it is going. When it appears that most dyads are done (this first part doesn't usually take very long – there is often a lot of agreement in general), tell them that we are going to repeat the same process, but they are going to be put in larger groups to give them a chance to really practice the skills of partnering in a culturally sensitive way. Assign groups by combining the couples who have already been working together with other sets of partners.

THE TASK IN THE LARGER GROUP IS TO TAKE ALL OF THE VALUES AND BELIEFS FROM EACH OF THE PAIRS AND USE THEM TO DEVELOP A GROUP CONSENSUS OF THREE VALUES/BEHAVIORS THAT REPRESENT THEM AS A GROUP. REMIND PARTICIPANTS THAT THEY ARE STILL USING THE SKILLS OF AWARENESS AND SENSITIVITY TO PARTNER WITH PARENTS.

Remember: You are partnering with parents in the development of the overall values.

Remember: Parents try and stay in the parent role. This is your precious infant that is being put into childcare.

Beware of the early childhood “smooshing principle” that is instead of having hard discussions about what we really mean or believe we try to just include everything.

Let participants know that you will give them chart paper to write up the final three values and behaviors. (Writing it up is really important because often people think they agree until they try and put it into language and this is where the real challenge comes in.)

I give the groups a chance to get their discussions going before I hand out the chart paper. On the chart paper, I usually write:

Values	Behaviors
We believe...	We act ...

Ask groups to post their completed lists of values and behaviors.

4. FACILITATED DISCUSSION

Parents are asked to begin the discussion since they were the focus of the activity. Ask parents to describe what happened when it was just them and the caregiver. Did they feel heard? How did they know that they were being listened to during the discussion? How much input did they think they had in creating the final list? What happened when they got in the larger group? Were their words accepted and written down on the final chart? Ask the entire group about the degree to which parent's words were used and accepted. Look at the language on the charts – whose perspective does it represent? Why were these words more valued than other words? This usually elicits some defensiveness about the advantage of using professional language and educating parents. What was the purpose of the activity? It is helpful to remind participants that they come to this experience as an educated, competent professional. Is this true for the families they work with in their programs? Would parents feel confident participating in a discussion that used language that was unfamiliar or foreign to what they are trying to say? What difference does it make whose words we use? What do words represent? What happens when we change people's words?

I have done this activity hundreds of times, and what generally happens is that parents lose their voice as they get into the larger group (people also sometimes can't stay in the parent role and switch to caregiver), and the words that end up on the charts are those of the caregiver's language rather than the parent's language. It is important to encourage participants to use this experience as an opportunity to reflect on what it really means to partner with others. Where do issues of power, authority and expertise get balanced with humility, openness and genuine mutual conversation?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Think about your participation in the group activity and reflect on the following questions:

1. Who did the most talking? Was it the parent(s) or the caregiver(s)?
2. Who directed or lead the conversation?
3. Who words were modified or changed by the group?
4. Who words were finally used to describe the values for the infant(s)?