



Dealing with Differences

Module: IV
Topic: Harmonizing Cultural Diversity
Type: Read and report (puzzle reading)
Group Size: Small groups
Time: 30-60 minutes (depending on discussions)

Purpose:

To help providers (and parents)

1. recognize and understand the types of issues/differences that may lead to conflict.
2. find ways to manage and resolve cultural and individual conflicts in infant/toddler caregiving.

What you will need:

Participant Materials	Trainer Materials	Equipment
<p>The following handouts: :: <i>When Parents and Staff Disagree Over Caregiving Routines</i>, Janet Gonzales-Mena</p> <p>:: Optional: <i>Why the Conflict?</i></p> <p><i>Acknowledging and Supporting Differences</i></p> <p><i>Acknowledge, Ask, Adapt Process in Communication</i></p> <p>The following materials: :: Optional (for small groups):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • easel paper • markers 	<p>:: Copies of all handouts given to participants</p> <p>:: Transparency: <i>4 Possible Outcomes</i></p> <p>:: Transparency: <i>Puzzle Reading Directions</i></p>	<p>:: Overhead projector</p> <p>:: Screen or blank wall</p>

Directions:

Setting the stage:

1. If the PITC topic, "Culture, Family, and Providers" has been covered with participants, the handout *Why the Conflict?* can be used as part of a review and lead into the topic of "Harmonizing Cultural Diversity."
2. The fourth key point on the handout, *Why the Conflict?*, could be used to transition into the topic/concept of working with parents when there are conflicts/differences around routines.
3. This concept could be supported with the two quotes at the top of the handout, *Acknowledging and Supporting Differences*.
4. Cover or review the "acknowledge, ask, adapt process." It can be applied to the strategies in the activity.
 - Point out that in this process, you are asking in order to gain understanding
 - Refer participants to "Ten Questions You Can Ask When You Disagree With a Family's Practice" in the handout, *Acknowledging and Supporting Differences* as a resource for gaining understanding.

ACTIVITY:

Understanding and applying conflict management and resolution strategies:

1. As a whole group, cover the first section of the first page of the handout, *When Parents and Staff Disagree Over Caregiving Routines*.
 - Choose the strategy you think will work best with your group (verbally give them a summary; ask volunteer[s] to read aloud; have participants read silently, etc.)
 - Show the list of 4 outcomes on transparency.
 - Invite discussion. Ask which one they think we have a tendency to use most.
2. Divide participants into 4 groups numbered 1-4.

Directions continued on the next page.

PITC ACTIVITIES

Directions Continued:

3. Show the activity directions on transparency and explain them.
4. Move around the room and provide support, as needed.
5. Have groups report back to the whole group.
6. Ask/discuss how the PITC process of “acknowledge, ask, adapt” fits with these strategies.

Variations:

- :: The handout, *Why the Conflict?* could be used to support concepts within other topics:
 - Topic: Culture, Family, and Providers; Concept: Supporting children’s culture and connection to family
 - Topic: Responding to Families in Culturally Sensitive Ways; Concept: Understanding Culture and It’s Impact on All of Us.
- :: After completing this activity, cover the last section of the handout, *When Parents and Staff Disagree Over Caeriving Routines* (Responding to conflict in sensitive, respectful ways)

Links to Head Start Program Performance Standards:

- :: 1304.21(a)(1)(iii) *“Provide an environment of acceptance that supports and respects gender, culture, language, ethnicity, and family composition”*
- :: 1304.21(a)(2)(i) *“Parents must be . . . invited to become integrally involved in the development of the program’s curriculum and approach to child development and education”*
- :: 1304.21(a)(3)(i)(E) *“Supporting and respecting the home language, culture, and family composition of each child in ways that support the child’s health and well-being”*

Activity Developed by:

Cheri and David Longaker, PITC Certified Trainers

Source Material:

Lally, J.R. (Executive Producer/Content Developer/Writer), Mangione P.L. (Content Developer/Writer), Signer, S. (Content Developer/Writer), Butterfield, G.O. (Producer/Editor), & Gilford, S. (Writer). (1993). *Essential connections: Ten keys to culturally sensitive child care* [Videotape]. United States: The Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers (Developed collaboratively by the California Department of Education and WestEd).

Mangione, P.L. (Ed.). (1995). *Infant/toddler caregiving: A guide to culturally sensitive care*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.

WestEd. (1997). *The Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers’ Trainer’s manual, Module IV: Culture, family, and providers* (Rev. ed.). Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.



WHY THE CONFLICT?

“The culture you come from has taught you particular beliefs, values, rules, and expectations for behavior. And the way you learned those lessons, particularly in infancy, was through early interactions with your family members and caregivers, involving such basic activities as feeding, toileting and napping. One reason caregivers have a profound effect on the development of infants and toddlers is that caregivers engage in those everyday caregiving activities many times a day. While doing those routine tasks, caregivers pass on important cultural messages about how life should be lived. It is vital to understand that when you are caring for infants and toddlers, you are participating in a subtle form of teaching.

Equally important is understanding that the personal and cultural values reflected in the child-rearing practices of the parents of the infants and toddlers in your care may not agree with yours and that you may not be aware of parents’ values when they ask you to do a routine in a particular way.”

WestEd. (1995). *Infant Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Culturally Sensitive Care*, Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.

KEY POINTS

- **Caregivers have a profound effect on the development of infants and toddlers because they engage in basic activities such as feeding, toileting, and napping many times a day. While doing so, they pass on important cultural messages about how life should be lived.**
- **In child care, many diverse beliefs manifest themselves in different caregiving practices related to everyday, routine activities.**

Childrearing Differences May Include:

- The meaning of the child’s crying
 - The importance of the child’s exploration
 - The attitude toward the child’s anger
 - The use of language to talk about feelings
 - Gender differences between boys and girls
 - Children’s curiosity about their bodies
 - Physical punishment
 - Ways of carrying out routines such as feeding, toileting, napping
 - Approaches to learning
- **Diversity of beliefs and values often brings conflict.**
 - **Knowing that different values are reflected in how caregiving routines are carried out allows caregivers and parents to acknowledge, work with, and resolve cultural conflicts around these routines.**

WestEd. (1997). *The Program for Infant Toddler Caregivers Trainer’s Manual Module IV: Culture, Family, and Providers*, Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.

ACKNOWLEDGING AND SUPPORTING DIFFERENCES

“When you understand different values and beliefs, you will be able to collaborate with parents to develop culturally consistent care for infants and toddlers by supporting the culture of the home as much as possible. To give that kind of support, you need to find ways to adapt to parents’ requests and babies’ needs, even when they do not fit in exactly with your usual practices.”

WestEd. (1995). *Infant Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Culturally Sensitive Care*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education. (p.19)

“[With negotiation] it’s not a question of giving up everything we know. It’s a question of balancing what we know and what the parent knows, and figuring out together what would be in the best interest of the child.” Louise Derman-Sparks

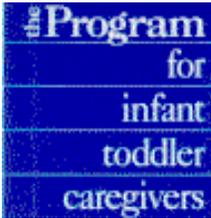
Mangione, P.L., Lally, J.R., & Signer, S. (1993). *Essential Connections: Ten Keys to Culturally Sensitive Child Care [Video magazine]*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.

TEN QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN YOU DISAGREE WITH A FAMILY’S PRACTICE

From an article by

Gonzalez-Mena and Bhavnagri, submitted for consideration by *Young Children*

1. What is the family’s cultural perspective on the issue?
2. How do the family’s child care practices relate to their cultural perspective?
3. What are the family’s goals for the child? How has the family’s culture influenced these goals?
4. In review of these goals, is the family’s practice in the child’s best interest?
5. Is there any sound research that shows that the family’s practice is doing actual harm?
6. Is the program’s practice or policy universally applicable, or is it better suited to a particular culture?
7. Did the family choose the program because of its particular philosophy, even if it is based on a different culture from their own?
8. Have program staff members attempted to fully understand the family’s rationale for its practices, the complexity of the issues, and other contributing factors?
9. Have staff member attempted to fully explain the rational for program practices? Have they looked at how their own culture influences their perspective?
10. What are some creative resolutions that address the concerns of both partners and the program?



ACKNOWLEDGE, ASK, ADAPT PROCESS IN COMMUNICATION

Step 1: ACKNOWLEDGE

How does the caregiver recognize the need for communication with the parent? How does the caregiver's attitude convey sincere interest and response? What can the caregiver say to the parent to communicate awareness that there is a problem they need to jointly solve?

- Take time to think about how you feel about this issue and get clarity on the reasons behind your feelings.
- Listen carefully to the other person's concern. If you bring up the concern, do it respectfully with an attitude of wanting to understand the issues.

Step 2: ASK

What questions can the caregiver ask the parents to get information that will help her or him understand more precisely the parents' point of view?

- The next step is about data gathering, trying to get to the real sources of conflict or misunderstanding for the parent, the child or you. Ask questions that seek to clarify.
- Pay attention to verbal and nonverbal responses. Restate what you think is being said, take time to be sure you are meaning the same thing in the language you are using.

Step 3: ADAPT

How does the caregiver work with the parent to define the issues and boundaries of the problem? Does the caregiver seek "common ground" as the basis for negotiation? How does the caregiver open up a negotiation with the parent about what to do?

- Once the issues have been defined, seek out the common ground by stating your areas of greatest importance to each other. Listen carefully for areas of common agreement.
- Negotiate around the areas of important agreement and boundaries. Come to a resolution that addresses the real/major issues. Sometimes we have to agree to disagree.

WHEN PARENTS AND STAFF DISAGREE OVER CAREGIVING ROUTINES

Janet Gonzalez-Mena

Parents and caregivers sometimes hold very strong views about how babies are supposed to be cared for. These deep-seated ideas are embedded in each of us and remain mostly subconscious and nonverbal until challenged by someone with a conflicting view. We must find ways to manage and resolve conflicts, both cultural and individual, especially those conflicts relating to caregiving practices.

For several years now I've been examining areas of disagreement around infant routines such as diapering, feeding, toilet training, holding, comforting and "educating" babies. My aim is to help people find ways to manage and resolve conflicts so they can make a better match. The more the adults in their lives work at settling disagreements, the fewer inconsistencies in approach the babies will experience. My theory is that with adults working hard to manage their conflicts the child will be exposed to fewer culturally assaultive experiences.

So what do you do when you're a caregiver and you and a parent disagree about what's good for babies? I see four outcomes to cultural and individual conflicts in infant/toddler caregiving situations.

1. **Resolution through mutual understanding and negotiation.** Both parties see the other's perspective, both parties give a little or a lot.
2. **Resolution through caregiver education.** Caregiver sees parent's perspective. Caregiver changes.
3. **Resolution through parent education.** Parent sees caregiver's perspective. Parent changes.
4. **No resolution.**

*The worst "no resolution" scenario is that neither side see the other's perspective—neither changes. There is no respect and conflict continues uncontained or escalates. Sneaking around may occur, or underhanded fighting.

*The best "no resolution" scenario is that each has a view of the other's perspective, each is sensitive and respectful but unable, because of differing values and beliefs, to change their stance. Here conflict management skills come into play as both learn to cope with differences. The conflict stays above board – though perhaps not always in the open.

The fourth outcome is a fairly common outcome as people deal with diversity, while hanging on to their own cultures. Conflict management skills (as opposed to conflict resolution skills) are important for all of us to learn as we go through life bumping in to conflicts that can't be resolved. Handled sensitively and with respect, learning to manage these conflicts in healthy ways provide the challenges that make life interesting.

Here are examples of each of these outcomes.

1. Resolution Through Mutual Understanding And Negotiation. These conflicts involve "win-win" negotiations with movement from both sides.

Here's the scene: We have on the one hand a parent who hates to see her child messy. On the other hand we have a caregiver who provides messy sensory activities. At first, these two expressed angry feelings to each other. But they were developing a relationship at the same time they clashed over this one issue. They talked about their feelings and their perspectives regularly. Gradually they began to understand each other.

The caregiver educated herself. She went to some trouble to find out why being clean was so important to this parent. It took lots of talking before she understood that clean meant "decent" to this family. She found out that this family had an experience with Child Protective Services accusing a neighbor of neglect because her child looked dirty a lot. But it wasn't just a defensive stance this family took. They felt clothes show the quality of the family. They felt they were sending their child to "school" and when the child goes to school clean and well dressed it shows the parents respect for education. So naturally it was upsetting to them when the child was picked up with clothes full of grass stains, food, or finger paint. They couldn't accept the suggestion of sending their child in old clothes. It didn't fit in with their image of decency or "school."

While the caregiver was getting educated, she was also educating the parents about the importance of sensory experiences that involve messes. Finally they came to an agreement that the caregiver would change the clothes of the child during messy play, or at least make sure she was covered up, so that when the parents returned they would find their child as they left her. The parents were not completely convinced that messy experiences were important but they said it would be okay as long as their daughter's clothes weren't involved. The teacher continued to feel they were overly concerned with appearances. Neither side completely gave up on reforming the other side, but both felt okay about the arrangement.

2. Resolution Through Caregiver Education. Caregiver sees parent's perspective. Caregiver changes.

Here's the situation: The caregiver believed that babies should sleep alone in a crib – tucked away in a darkened, quiet spot (the naproom). Licensing agreed. But along came a baby who couldn't sleep alone. He cried and got very upset when put in a crib by himself.

At first the caregiver thought he would get used to the center's approach, but he didn't. He became distraught and refused to sleep when he was put in to a crib in the naproom. So after talking to the parents, the caregiver discovered the he had never slept alone in his life and the parents didn't even have a crib. He came from a large family and was used to sleeping in the midst of activity. The caregiver had already discovered that he went to sleep easily in the play area on a mattress with other children snuggling or playing around him. She had no objection to letting him nap in the play area, but that approach to napping was against regulations, so going along with what the parents wanted presented a problem. Instead of trying to convince the parents (and the baby) to change she went to work to convince licensing. She was able to get a waiver once she convinced them that she was only able to fulfill the spirit of the regulation – that each child has a right to quiet undisturbed sleep – if she didn't isolate the child in a crib in the naproom. In this case the caregiver made the changes – accommodated the wished of the parent and the needs of the child. You might not agree that she should have done what she did, but she felt quite comfortable about what she considered a culturally sensitive decision.

3. Resolution Through Parent Education. Parent sees caregiver's perspective. Parent changes.

Here's the story. The caregiver kept putting babies on the floor to move around and explore toys. She found out that most of the parents in the program wanted their babies to be held all the time. Although they complained to the caregiver, instead of stopping the practice, she started a series of discussions – both individual and group. She educated the parents about the value of freedom of movement. She knew that safety issues were a big concern, as well as dirt, germs, drafts. She knew that in their own home the floor wasn't a safe place for babies. She discussed the subject more than once. She didn't resolve the conflict with all the parents, but she continued to work at it. Once she helped them clarify their goals for their children they realized that freedom to move was vital to their children's development! Because she had a philosophy that babies should not be confined either by being held all the time or by being in infant swings, high chairs, infant seats, she didn't compromise. She showed the parents how their children would be safe on the floor by having the immobile ones fenced off from the mobile ones. She practiced in the open what she felt was so important, and after she convinced a few parents they began to convince the others. This caregiver was of the same culture as the parents, so she wasn't an outsider coming in telling them what to do without understanding their culture. She was an insider who had a different perspective and was able to help them see that their goals and their practices were in conflict with each other. You may not agree with what she did, but she felt very strongly that she was right in changing the parents – in educating them to another view.

4. Conflict Management When There Is No Resolution.

The caregiver in this example was uncomfortable when a new parent told her that her one year old was toilet trained. She didn't believe it and felt that parent was trained, not the baby. She and the parent started a series of conversations about this subject. Even though the caregiver didn't change her approach to toilet training, through the discussions the caregiver was able to quit feeling critical of this parent as she was eventually to see where she was coming from.

The caregiver came to understand that toilet training means different things to different people. To the caregiver it meant teaching the child to go to the toilet by herself, wipe, wash hands, etc. The child must be old enough to walk, talk, hold on to urine and feces, let go after getting clothes off, and wash hands. In other cultures, where interdependence is important, adult and child are partners and the adult reads the child's signals and as well as trains the child to let go at a certain time, or to a certain signal, even though the child is only a year old, or perhaps even younger. This approach works best without diapers or complicated clothing like overalls. Although this caregiver did not change her own approach to toilet training she was respectful of someone who does something different from what she did. She was accepting of the difference and quit feeling angry or superior to the parent.

The parent came to understand the caregiver's perspective, too, though she still wanted her to give it a try. The very few times the caregiver did try, it didn't work because she didn't have the time, or the relationship, or the techniques, or an understanding of the interdependence point of view.

This conflict was unresolved but was managed by both parties. The mother continued to "catch" her child at home, and put diapers on when she was in day care. Neither parent nor caregiver felt entirely satisfied, but both parties managed to cope and weather it through until the child was old enough to become independent about her toileting.

Responding to conflict in sensitive, respectful ways.

It's much easier to do parent education (if that is appropriate) if you are of the same culture as the parents. You can see their perspective better. You can work from the inside. Working from the inside of the culture is very important.

Is it ever okay to go along with something you don't feel good about? I can't tell you if it's okay or not. It depends on your bottom line and how flexible you are above that. It's not okay from my point of view to go along with sexism, oppression, or abuse, even if you are told that it is cultural.

Below are some tips about allowing cultural conflicts to rise and responding in sensitive, respecting ways.

- **Know what each parent in your program wants for his or her child.**

Find out their goals. What are their caregiving practices? What concerns do they have about their child in your program? Encourage them to talk about all this. Encourage them to ask questions. Encourage the conflicts to come to the surface – to come out in the open.

- **Become clear about your own values and goals.**

Know what you believe in. Have a bottom line, but leave space above it to be flexible. When you are clear you are less likely to present a strong defensive stance in the face of conflict. It is when we are ambiguous that we come on the strongest.

- **Become sensitive to your own discomfort.**

Tune in on those times when something bothers you, instead of just ignoring it and hoping it will go away. Work to identify what specific behaviors of others make you uncomfortable. Try to discover what exactly in yourself creates this discomfort. A conflict may be brewing.

- **Build relationships**

You'll enhance your chances for conflict management or resolution if a relationship exists. Be patient. Building relationships takes time but they enhance communications and understandings. You'll communicate better if you have a relationship. And, you'll have a relationship if you learn to communicate.

- **Become an effective cross cultural communicator.**

It is possible to learn these communication skills. Learn about communications styles that are different from yours. Teach your own communications styles. What you think a person means may not be what he or she really means. Do not make assumptions. Listen carefully. Ask for clarification. Find ways to test for understanding. This is a complex subject but it has to do with reading body language, along with verbal content. It has to do with how feelings are expressed. It even has to do with such basic things as your sense of timing, and perception of space, including how close you stand. Even tone of voice can be grossly misinterpreted. All of these are to some extent culturally determined and influence the messages we send and receive. If you are in a conflict, try to determine whether the conflict is a difference in communication styles or process or if it is about content or motives.

- **Learn how to create dialogues – how to open up communication instead of shutting it down.**

Often if you accept and acknowledge the other person's feelings you may encourage him or her to open up. Learn ways to let others know that you are aware of and sensitive to their feelings. Notice when your own expression of feelings gets in the way of continuing the dialogue – or perhaps it's a judgmental attitude that's keeping you from listening to the other person in a conflict situation. Keep at it. Use gently firm persistence. Don't give up. Keep trying to see their point of view and make your own known. It helps if you listen at least as much as you talk.

- **Use a problem solving approach to conflicts rather than a power approach.**

Be flexible when you can. Negotiate when possible. Look at your willingness to share power. Is it a control issue you are dealing with?

- **Commit yourself to education – both your own and that of the parents.**

Sometimes lack of information or understanding each other's perspective is what is keeping the conflict going.

I am concerned that each infant find the kind of consistency between his or her care at home and that in child care that will allow him or her to become a solid member of his or her own culture. Culture is learned unconsciously and carried on most unconsciously for the rest of one's life. Those with too varied an input in the early years may wind up to be cultural chameleons – which may be a good thing – but they may also end up being marginal people who never feel that they fit anywhere. Babies who encounter constant cultural assault may develop low self-esteem. I believe we need a lot more studies and thought about exposing infants to cultural assaults in the early years.

Puzzle Reading Assignment

Group 1:

Resolution through mutual understanding and negotiation

Group 2:

Resolution through caregiver education

Group 3:

Resolution through parent education

Group 4:

Conflict management when there is no resolution

As a small group:

1. Read your assigned section
2. Discuss when you have used, or could use, this approach.
3. Prepare a way to summarize your section to share with the whole group.
4. Create and include at least one example in addition to the example given in the article.



Based on the article:

WHEN PARENTS AND STAFF DISAGREE OVER CAREGIVING ROUTINES, by Janet Gonzalez-Mena.

Activity developed by Cheri & David Longaker. WestEd, The Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers.

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