RESOURCE

FACILITATION TIPS FOR LEARNING

This resource provides tips for effective facilitation of job-embedded professional learning routines to build trust, ensure productivity and advance learning.

Emotional Supports Build Trust

Trust helps people feel safe by allowing them to share their practices, challenges, hopes and ideas in order to learn from each other—even though it may feel uncomfortable at times.

1. **Be trustworthy yourself**—Ensure that meeting dates/times are adhered to. When meetings will take place no matter what, staff know you value their time and the purpose of the meeting. If a change is necessary, communicate the reason for the change and the new date/time.
2. **Model self-regulation**—We build cultures of trust and learning when we model the behavior we want to see.
3. **Practice active listening**—Demonstrate and believe you will learn from others. Set aside preconceived ideas and assumptions. Listen to understand. Listen to learn. Listen to plan any support needed by those who talk with you.
4. **Build on strengths**—Acknowledging strengths builds trust and increases practice of the strength.
5. **Be present**—Put aside the cell phone. If anyone interrupts demonstrate your interest by asking them to schedule a later time with you. Stay focused on the task at hand.
6. **Promote participation**—Encourage and value different perspectives voiced by any and all group members.
7. **Consider physical space**—Furniture, space, materials and a location where it's safe to share can support focused and authentic work.
8. **Ensure equity**—No one person or group of people should dominate the discussion.
9. **Welcome** all participants warmly every time. Make introductions as needed.
10. **Respect, value and include** consistently.
11. **Celebrate successes**—Connect positive efforts to clear expectations and goals and celebrate.
12. **Have fun**—Share humor and enjoyment.

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Organizational Supports Ensure Productivity

Organization and preparation help build community and ensure productivity. Plan well, prepare for success, and anticipate how to manage difficulties.

1. **Anticipate needed details**—When time, location, materials and space are secured ahead of time the group feels ready to learn when they meet.
2. **Prepare content**—Know what you intend to say and do to support the learning process. Your confidence reassures participants about their own authentic participation and the importance of the work.
3. **Set norms**—Collaboratively decide norms to clarify how the group will work effectively together. Allow for changes over time as needed.
4. **State purpose and goal(s)** —State the intention and expected outcome of the meeting clearly. Keep to the agenda.
5. **Know your learners**—Consider appropriate materials and strategies for different knowledge levels and learning styles.
6. **Manage time**—Plan time realistically and keep to the schedule; consider having a timekeeper. Finish. Motivation is enhanced with progress.
7. **Schedule and protect frequent and regular times for collaborative learning**—When job-embedded learning is routine it improves practice.
8. **Meet concerns or resistance positively**—Acknowledge problems and focus on problem-solving together for an optimal solution or outcome. Small steps achieve more success. Articulate and maintain a focus on the shared mission.
9. **Make connections**—Often one area of work, or one solution, affects other areas. Connections reinforce the impact of one's efforts and stimulate motivation.
10. **Check for clarity**—Avoid misunderstandings and misinformation by checking frequently for clarity.
11. **Use protocols**—Ensure structure, focus on the topic and equity of voice by using protocols.
12. **Focus on the topic**—Resist distractions that prevent progress. If new or important ideas are raised, suggest an alternative time to address them satisfactorily. Consider using a "parking lot."
13. **Intervene respectfully**—Call on norms and protocol "rules" to reign in distractions. Everyone appreciates agreements and standards that are followed.
14. **Aim for consensus**—When the group is clear and understands the plan, "buy in" is optimized. Support additional discussion if necessary, or gain agreement for a "trial" or "pilot" to learn more if consensus is not achieved.
15. **Agree on "next steps"**—Protect time before ending to agree on actions and those responsible for follow-through if that was a purpose of the meeting.

16. **Reflect on learning**—Ensure there is time to debrief what was learned if that was a purpose of the meeting. Encouraging everyone to share aloud will highlight the value of the work and reveal progress
17. **Keep notes**—Documenting the work and progress informs future work and meeting plans.

Instructional Supports Advance Learning

Supporting learning with effective facilitation means being strategic in offering comments and questions in a way that promotes reflection, analysis, integration and application.

1. **Use the inquiry approach**—Prompt critical thinking and deepen understandings with inquiry. Resist the urge to give the "right answer," as that can squelch discussion and learning. Encourage participants to explain their thinking and the rationale for their practices or decisions.
2. **The facilitator is not the expert**—While the facilitator is often a leader, it is important that he or she not default to the role of expert—someone who imparts knowledge to the group—as the trainer in a training would do. Being a facilitator of collaborative, professional learning means one must elicit the expertise of the group. This approach supports people in constructing new knowledge for themselves.
3. **Share experiences**—When participants share experiences they can broaden perspectives and suggest changes in practice.
4. **Value expertise**—Everyone has something to offer to enhance learning.
5. **Make Connections**—Making connections to research, experiences or successes builds competence and elevates best practices.
6. **Be authentic**—Be transparent about what you know and don't know. The ongoing learning is important for everyone.
7. **Use research-based practice frameworks and resources**—Reliance on research-based sources to address questions or problems and to inform innovation builds confidence and proficiency and highlights best practices in the early childhood field.
8. **Build on Strengths**—When strengths are connected to best practices, they can influence multiple areas of proficiency and overall confidence.
9. **Offer a "sandwich"**—The elicit-provide-elicit "sandwich" is a technique to encourage reflection and discussion. The facilitator first asks questions to elicit what the person or group already understands about a topic, or strategies they have already tried. The facilitator then asks if they would like to hear his or her idea or suggestion. If the answer is yes, the facilitator then provides the idea or suggestion. Importantly, the facilitator then asks for the response to the information. It is critical for the facilitator to learn how useful the idea or suggestion was, as this keeps the dialogue going.

10. **Deal with resistance**—As when aiming for consensus (above organizational support), suggesting a "pilot" or "trial" to learn more can reduce opposition and encourage a challenge to learn.
11. **Consolidate learning and promote transfer to practice**—Protect time at the end of meetings for reflection. When everyone shares a learning from the discussion and a new idea to try in practice then learning is reinforced for all, and a commitment to practice improvement is advanced.
12. **Summarize**—Listen, track and summarize ideas to promote learning.
13. **Plan for next time**—Plan collaboratively for the next meeting, including suggestions on content and process.

Information in this resource is adapted from McDonald, J.P., Mohr, N., Dichter, A., and McDonald, E.C. (2013). *The Power of Protocols: An Educator's Guide to Better Practice, 3*rd ed. New York: Teachers College Press.