

# STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING: LEADING A GUIDED DISCUSSION

# 1-D



Job Performance  
Situation 1:  
Orienting New  
Staff

HEAD START  
*MOVING AHEAD*  
COMPETENCY-BASED TRAINING PROGRAM



Developed under delivery order number 105-97-2043, the Head Start Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Revised in 2000 by the American Institutes for Research under contract number 105-94-2020

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This material was produced in 1998, by Education Development Center, Inc., and Circle Solutions, Inc.

## REFERENCE

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This activity develops skill competencies in *leading a guided training discussion*. Participants will learn how to prepare for leading a discussion and how to manage one. They will work on establishing rapport in a discussion. Finally, they will learn how to help participants transfer learning to their ongoing work

Related skill activities include 1–C, Staff Development and Training: New Staff Orientations; 1–E, Individual Development: Giving Feedback; and 1–F, Individual Development: Developing Learning Plans.

*Sources.* *Developing a Head Start Training Plan*. 1993. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Lang, C., *Case Method Teaching in Community Colleges*. 1986. Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc. Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community, *Setting the Stage: Including Children with Disabilities in Head Start*. 1997. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Supplemental Training Materials, Module IV, *Developing Goals and Objectives*. Washington, DC: Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. *User's Guide to Curriculum in Head Start*. 1988. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Group Facilitation Tool Box, Facilitator Skill Development Process*. p. 13. Washington, DC: Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

# OVERVIEW

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## Leading a Guided Discussion

**Outcomes.** Participants who complete this activity will be able to

- identify opportunities for a guided discussion as an appropriate staff development strategy
- develop discussion questions based on learning objectives
- select a discussion stimulus
- use questions, call patterns, body language, and visual aids to manage a discussion
- use a three-step process to respond to incorrect answers
- help participants develop action steps to incorporate what they learned into their work

**Materials.** Newsprint and markers; Head Start video *Curriculum in Head Start*; copy of the Head Start Program Performance Standards

### Components

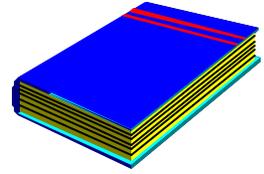
This activity can be done by one person, an informal group, or a formal workshop. We have provided suggested times, but participants and facilitators may wish to adjust these to their own timetables.

Step 1. Background Reading: Preparing for a Guided Discussion	15 min.
Step 2. Worksheet: Preparing for a Guided Discussion	40 min.
Step 3. Background Reading: Conducting the Discussion	15 min.
Step 4. Handout: Dealing with Challenging Participants	10 min.
Step 5. Worksheet and Role Play: Responding to Challenging Participants	45 min.
Step 6. Summary	10 min.
Suggested total time	2 hrs. 15 min.

This activity contains 25 pages.

# STEP 1. BACKGROUND READING: PREPARING FOR A GUIDED TRAINING DISCUSSION

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Suggested time: 15 min.

Study the following reading. Feel free to highlight sections or write comments in the margins.

“Training is an ongoing activity designed to increase the level of competence and expertise of staff and volunteers.”<sup>1</sup>

Staff of local and federal Head Start organizations are often called upon to provide training. Staff in local programs provide training to orient new employees, convey up-to-date information or build skills with existing staff, and introduce parents to the world of Head Start. Federal staff are frequently required to conduct workshops at conferences or other large gatherings. Although many Head Start staff are eager to conduct a lecture-based workshop or lead an experiential activity, others avoid the role of trainer at any cost.

Not all effective training is packaged as a formal lecture or simulation. One training technique is the guided discussion: a leader facilitates a structured discussion that has specific objectives and that uses particular stimuli and planned questions to advance learning in the group. It can be used by both experienced trainers and nontrainers alike.

## I. WHAT ARE GUIDED DISCUSSIONS?

Guided discussions are used as a training method in almost every field, especially when there is a problem to be solved. They convey information and build shared understanding. They offer an alternative to didactic presentation techniques when you want participants to learn new concepts and apply what they’ve learned.

Guided discussions have several features in common:

- One or more participants who are prepared to explore new ideas.
- A leader who has identified learning objectives for the experience and manages the discussion. Frequently, the leader will involve participants in developing the goal and learning objectives for the experience.

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<sup>1</sup> *Developing a Head Start Training Plan*. 1993. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, p. 1.

- A common stimulus such as a book, article, case study, video, or live observation. The stimulus can come from Head Start materials or experiences or from other sources—family photos, storybooks, real-life vignettes, or commercial films.
- A set of questions designed to help the learners reflect on new ideas and explore ways to apply them to their work.

Guided discussions are especially useful in engaging participants in analyzing a situation or event so that they can arrive at principles to apply to their work. Effective guided discussions not only convey information but increase the learners' analytical and critical thinking skills. They also surface and clarify misconceptions. Guided discussions involve a high level of participant involvement, so learning often occurs on a deeper level and is retained longer. Used in a group setting, guided discussion helps participants learn from each other and gives them an opportunity to develop their group problem-solving skills.

## II. WHEN CAN GUIDED DISCUSSIONS BE USED?

Guided discussion lends itself to a variety of situations:

- Supervisors or staff-development coaches can engage an individual employee in a one-on-one coaching session to build his knowledge about a particular topic.
- Group leaders can use guided discussion as an informal training experience for an intact group such as the education staff of a local Head Start program or a group of federal program specialists.
- Trainers can use the technique in a formal workshop at a conference or other large gathering.

Guided discussion can be an especially effective tool in orienting new staff. Supervisors or staff-development coaches whom they appoint can use it to orient a new employee to the organization's goals or principles. They can use it to walk staff through situations they may encounter in a classroom or in an onsite review experience, and they can use it to assess how prepared the employees are for a given situation. When other employees are involved, a guided discussion can become a team-building experience.

## III. GETTING READY

A successful guided discussion begins with thoughtful preparation. Experienced trainers know that there is a direct relationship between the amount of prework they do and their ease in facilitating the experience. In fact, well-prepared guided discussions often seem to lead themselves. A discussion leader can ensure the success of the training experience by following these steps:

- Develop a goal and learning objectives that will meet the learning needs of the audience
- Select a resource that will illustrate the learning objectives and stimulate discussion
- Develop questions that will lead to the key points in the discussion

## Develop a Goal and Learning Objectives

The *training goal* tells the participants what you hope to achieve through the discussion. Like most goals, it is stated in broad terms and identifies who the learners are and the overall behavior the learners are expected to acquire.<sup>2</sup>

Frequently, the goal of a guided discussion is to address a training need discovered through supervision, observation of practice, or staff responses to training surveys. For example, a child development services manager who knows that most of her staff struggle with individualizing for children might state the training goal in this way: “to strengthen teachers’ capacity to plan for individual children’s needs, strengths, and interests.”

Helping staff prepare to offer new services is another goal. For instance, a program that is planning to offer full-day and full-year services might offer a guided discussion on summer learning activities for children.

Because goals are stated in general terms, they are open to interpretation.<sup>3</sup> *Learning objectives* are more specific—they elucidate the goal by articulating the major points that you want the participants to take away from the discussion. Usually, objectives begin with an action verb. For example, a child development services manager who wants to strengthen teachers’ capacity to individualize might state the objectives in this way:

- Understand the importance of individualizing
- Build an understanding of individual children through observation, assessment, and conversations with parents and other staff
- Use your knowledge of child development to select areas of focus for each child
- Select approaches and strategies for addressing each child’s individual goals
- Develop a curriculum plan that reflects strategies for individual children in the context of overall classroom activities

Trainers who conduct workshops for outside groups or conferences are often given a predetermined goal in the form of an invitation to conduct

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<sup>2</sup> Supplemental Training Materials, Module IV, *Developing Goals and Objectives*. Washington, DC: Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, p. SUPP-6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

the workshop on a particular topic. They do not have the luxury of knowing the audience and its particular training needs, but they need to collect whatever information they can (the job categories of people likely to attend, their level of experience, etc.) in order to develop meaningful learning objectives. When this information is unavailable, trainers can choose to develop a workshop that meets the needs of a particular group and advertise it as such (e.g., “This workshop was designed for new Head Start directors who want to know more about community collaboration”).

## Select a Discussion Stimulus

Now you are ready to select a vehicle that will serve as the stimulus for your discussion. It can be a video, an article, a book, a case study, or even copies of new regulations: the revised Head Start Program Performance Standards serve as the stimulus for the *Revisit and Renew* training package. Sometimes an actual observation of someone performing a function can be a wonderful stimulus for discussion.

The resource you select should

- challenge the conventional wisdom or demonstrate innovative practices (these types of resources are more likely to provoke thoughtful discussion than information that confirms what the participants already know)
- clearly illustrate your learning objectives
- if it is a video, feature characters that your audience can relate to
- if a reading or case, be written at a level appropriate for your audience

Head Start has a vast array of resources that can serve as a stimulus for discussion, including training packages that contain videos and prepared discussion guides. To obtain information on available Head Start resources, leaders can consult

- Catalog of Head Start Materials. This annotated listing of training materials is available from the Head Start Bureau.
- The Training Activities Matrix developed for the Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community. This resource provides an overview of 40 Training Guides. It maps the topics of each guide against the revised Head Start Performance Standards.
- The region’s Quality Improvement Center or Disabilities Services Quality Improvement Center. Training and technical assistance specialists in each center are familiar with resources that might serve your purposes.

## Study the Training Resource

Next, develop the key points you want to cover. Begin by thoroughly studying the resource yourself. You may need to read or watch it, or both, several times to learn its content and understand its nuances. Study it until you can answer these questions:

- What is the main message of the resource? Do you agree or disagree with the message?
- Are the ideas new? Do they differ from current thinking or practice? If so, in what ways?
- How will participants respond? Will seasoned staff respond differently from new members? How could staff responses differ from your own?
- How can you use this resource to reach your training goal? Remember that many resources can be used for multiple purposes. For example, the *User's Guide to Curriculum in Head Start*<sup>4</sup> contains four different workshop outlines that can be used along with the *Curriculum in Head Start* video.

## Develop Questions

When you've become comfortable with the content of the resource, you are ready to develop questions to guide the discussion. If the resource is part of a training package, the questions in the user's guide may meet your needs. Most videos produced by Head Start are accompanied by excellent discussion guides.

If you are using an article, a case study, a live observation, or a video that has no discussion guide, you will need to develop the questions. Skilled trainers usually develop a core group of five or six primary questions and a set of subquestions that they may use if central points are not raised during the discussion. The list usually begins with general questions about the discussion resource (e.g., "What did you think about the reading?").

The interaction<sup>5</sup> of participants can be so lively that an observer could lose sight of an important and basic reality: you are directing the discussion, through the kinds of questions you ask and whom you select to answer them. Questions can be used to

- kick off the discussion
- obtain information

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<sup>4</sup> *User's Guide to Curriculum in Head Start*. 1988. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Lang, C. *Case Method Teaching in Community Colleges*. 1987. Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc., p. 18.

- clarify a point
- draw attention to related points
- foster debate
- resolve a debate
- change the direction
- suggest a hypothesis
- stimulate abstract thought
- begin a summation

As a general rule, open-ended questions work best to engage participants in a discussion. These questions are thought-provoking and generate a wide variety of possible answers. They usually begin with the question words *what*, *where*, *which*, *why*, and *how*?

### Help Others Prepare

Discussion participants also need to prepare in order to fully participate. You can help them by

- providing the stimulus in enough time to allow for thoughtful reading (if the stimulus is a written resource, such as case study, article, or regulations)
- arranging or assisting the participants in arranging for the observation (if the stimulus is a live observation)
- sharing discussion questions to serve as a reading or observation guide

# STEP 2. WORKSHEET: PREPARING FOR A GUIDED DISCUSSION

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Suggested time: 40 min.

Purpose: To prepare participants to conduct a guided discussion

Part I (5 min.) Select scenario 1 or 2, then follow the directions below in Part II.

1. You are the mentor for two program specialists who have recently joined the Head Start unit after completing 10 years in another unit within ACF. During a recent meeting with the group, they expressed a desire to learn more about child development services in Head Start. You decide to use the Head Start video *Curriculum in Head Start* as a way to begin a guided discussion with the program specialists.
2. You are a family service manager in a local Head Start program. Recently you've noticed that the family workers whom you supervise have difficulty describing the program's child development philosophy to parents. You decide to show the video *Curriculum in Head Start* at your next staff meeting as a way to begin a discussion with the family workers.

Part II (15 min.) As you watch the video, think about questions and responses that the group you are working with may have. Record your thoughts below.

I am working with (circle one)

- new program specialists
- family workers

Possible questions and responses of participants in my group:

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Part III (10 min.) By yourself or with a partner, develop learning objectives for your group (major points you want participants to take away from the discussion).

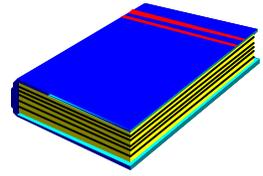
1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

Part IV (10 min.) Develop at least five questions that are based on your learning objectives.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

# STEP 3. BACKGROUND READING: CONDUCTING THE DISCUSSION

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Suggested time: 15 min.

Study the following reading. Feel free to highlight sections or make notes in the margins.

## I. THE ELEMENTS

To lead a successful discussion you need two competencies: you have to know the content, and you have to manage the process.<sup>6</sup> In managing the process, you need to believe that others, even new staff, have important ideas to contribute to the discussion. You also need to believe that active engagement of participants will promote deeper learning. Discussion leaders who believe that they know everything there is to know about a topic, or are unwilling to learn from participants, are not effective.

If you lead the discussion successfully you will find that you are

- asking participants to analyze the stimulus
- guiding the discussion by your questions
- maintaining “enough” direction
- summing up what the participants have taught

## II. ESTABLISHING RAPPORT

We know from adult learning principles that adult learners need to know two things: (1) that a training experience will be worth their investment of time and (2) that the training environment is a safe one. You can fulfill both these prerequisites by including a brief time to discuss everyone’s expectations at the beginning of the session.

The specifics of this discussion will vary from training to training, but keep the following tips in mind:

*For a one-on-one discussion*

- Hold the discussion in a private place where distractions will be minimized.
- Agree on a time limit for the discussion before you begin; it will help you keep the discussion on track and free both of you from worrying about the time.

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted from *Case Method Teaching in the Community College*. 1986. p. 6.

- Indicate that you, too, are looking forward to learning more from the discussion.
- Assure your discussion partner that the conversation will be confidential.

*For an in-house staff discussion*

- Indicate that this is an opportunity for staff to explore new ideas and learn from one another.
- Agree on a time limit.
- Establish ground rules for the discussion, (e.g., listen respectfully to what others are saying, do not interrupt).

*For a workshop setting*

- Tell participants a little about yourself and your philosophy of training.
- Let others know that a successful discussion depends more on what they have to say than on what you say.
- Establish ground rules for the discussion.

If the discussion resource is a video, even if some participants have seen it, you will need to introduce it briefly. Include the original purpose of the video and say who produced it. You can also suggest questions for participants to consider as they watch the video.

### III. LEAD THE DISCUSSION

Explain what you hope participants will get out of the experience. They need to know if the purpose is to raise awareness or to make a change in their practice following the discussion. Depending on which expectation they have in mind, they will tune in differently and ask different questions. After all participants understand the expectations for the session, the discussion can begin.

Typically, trainers begin the discussion by summarizing or asking a volunteer to summarize the key points of the resource they've read or seen. If all participants agree on the summary, an invitation to share initial impressions can be extended with questions like the following:

- What did you think?
- How does this relate to what we do?
- What good ideas are presented here?
- What do you agree with? What can't you accept?

The discussion continues with your prepared questions and fully explores important points by asking follow-up questions.

## Hints for Discussion Leaders<sup>7, 8</sup>

A discussion in the hands of a skilled leader seems to run itself. In reality a leader uses a number of techniques like the following to create the illusion of an effortless discussion. (Many of the points below refer to group discussions, but most can be applied or modified by a leader who is involved in a one-on-one discussion).

- Keep the conversation focused on the subject.
- Listen carefully and monitor participants' body language to stay aware of how the group is doing. If you are not sure, check in with a simple "How are we doing?"
- Give each person a chance to speak. Look at a reluctant participant and smile. Let him know that he has your support when he is ready to speak.
- Don't allow anyone to dominate the conversation.
- Encourage people to speak to the whole group. They may be tempted to speak just to you.
- Challenge someone's ideas without challenging them personally.
- Don't panic if the discussion lags; the group may need time to think about what they are hearing.

## IV. MAINTAIN "ENOUGH" DIRECTION<sup>9</sup>

As the leader you not only direct the discussion but also maintain some degree of management over the group as a whole. The challenge is to refrain from lapsing into a lecture while at the same time keeping the discussion from turning into a bull session with no focus. The following techniques can help.

### *Choice of Questions or Remarks*

- Insist through the questions that it's important to stay on a topic or that it's time to move on to another.
- Rephrase the questions: perhaps participants aren't responding because they didn't understand the first time.
- Direct the participants to a particular exhibit or part of the resource to focus attention back on the resource and away from a dispute that is going nowhere.
- Ask a series of questions that address and honor a good point made by a participant.

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<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community, *Setting the Stage: Including Children with Disabilities in Head Start*. 1997. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> Adapted from *Group Facilitation Tool Box, Facilitation Skill Development Process*. 1994. Washington, DC: Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, DM-H1, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from *Case Method Teaching in the Community College*, 1987, p. 23.

- Use humor to diffuse tension or conflict.

#### *Call Pattern*

- Call on a participant for a particular response or point of view.
- Make eye contact with a participant to encourage him to speak.
- Foster a debate by calling on two participants known to have different views or who are sitting some distance from each other.
- Respond to a participant's comment directly or refer a comment to another participant for his or her response.
- Do not call on a participant who just speaks out. Nod instead to a participant with her hand up.

#### *Body Language*

- Walk toward a participant to encourage her to speak.
- Hold your hand up to forestall a participant who wants to speak.
- Turn your back on a participant.
- Interpose your body between two participants in a heated debate.
- Listen and wait: it gives people time to think.

#### *Using the Newsprint or Overhead Transparencies*

- Put particular comments on the newsprint: this signals a point to remember.
- Point to an idea already on the newsprint.
- Draw circles or lines to connect ideas on the newsprint.

## V. HANDLE CHALLENGING PARTICIPANTS

The primary role of the group leader is to make sure that the group achieves the agreed-upon objectives of the discussion while respecting the needs of the individuals in the group. The greatest roadblock to reaching these goals is challenging participants. Dealing with these challenges may be uncomfortable, but you owe it to the group to keep the discussion on track.

One common roadblock to group learning is the participant who answers a question incorrectly or shares an opinion that is contrary to accepted Head Start practices. In general, use the following three guidelines in responding to questions.

1. Always reinforce correct answers positively.
2. Acknowledge the effort of the respondent regardless of the answer given.
3. Minimize potential embarrassment for wrong or incomplete answers.

For example, suppose a teacher suggests that it would be a good idea to hold Head Start graduation ceremonies with children wearing caps and gowns. The leader might respond respectfully by saying:

“Yes, Sarah, it is important to celebrate the end of a child’s Head Start experience. Does anyone else have thoughts about caps and gowns at graduation?” When you use this technique, the group is not left with the false impression that you agree that caps and gowns are acceptable, and Sarah is not embarrassed in front of the group.

(See the Step 4 Handout for ways to handle 10 types of challenging participants.)

## VI. CONCLUDE THE DISCUSSION

Even a dynamic, fruitful discussion will remain only an interesting training exercise unless the discussion leader helps participants apply what they’ve learned to their ongoing practice. Leave time at the end to summarize key points, draw conclusions, and determine next steps.

### **Summarize Key Points**

At the end of the discussion, distill the thoughts and responses of participants into several key points. Ask the participant(s) to summarize what they learned from the discussion, using the questioning techniques described earlier to elicit the most important points. Be sure to capture not only the points that you thought were important, but those that represent the opinion of the entire group, even if you may not have thought of them yourself. If you are working with a group, record the most cogent points on newsprint as a visual reminder. You may also want to record key points on your copy of the article or case, or in a notebook.

### **Draw Conclusions**

A summary goes just so far; participants also need to reflect on the implications that these key points have for their practice. Leaders frequently ask participants to think about what they will do differently as a result of what they learned. For example, a family services manager who participates in a discussion on family-centered practices may conclude that she needs to make her program’s data-collection forms less burdensome for families.

## **Determine Next Steps**

Encourage the participants to develop an action plan so that they can apply what they learned to their practice. The plan can include steps like these:

- Obtain more information about the discussion topic through follow-up reading, observations of other staff, and further discussion with a supervisor.
- Institute a new practice.
- Share new information with other staff.

Each step needs to indicate an action and a completion date. For example, the family services manager might decide to engage a committee of family workers to make their intake forms more family friendly before February.

In a one-on-one discussion or in other discussions with your own staff, it is usually helpful for the leader and the participant to develop the action plan together. This lets the participant tap into your knowledge of follow-up resources and engage you in supporting the action steps. Frequently, these will include a step for a follow-up discussion or an observation of any new practices adopted. In a conference or workshop setting, you can invite the participants to share some of their actions steps with the whole group as a way of validating their plan. You can also suggest that participants share their plans with their at-home supervisor.

# STEP 4. HANDOUT: DEALING WITH CHALLENGING PARTICIPANTS<sup>10</sup>



Suggested time: 10 min.

CHALLENGING PEOPLE	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
1. Talker Tim	<p>Has something to say about everything.                      Be careful with Tim. You want to slow him down, not shut him up.                      Direct questions to others in the group. “That’s good, Tim. What do you think, Bob?”                      If all else fails, talk to Tim privately on break. “I’m so glad you’re in the group, but I need to hear from others. I’ll call on you when they need help.”                      Avoid eye contact.                      Structure question so that it’s closed-ended (“yes” or “no”).</p>
2. Flatterer Flo	<p>Gives false feedback from the group by continually agreeing.                      She asks and courts your opinion in any way she can.                      Bypass her as much as you can.                      Remember that her feedback may be false.                      Check with others in the group.                      Don’t let her dominate all your time.</p>
3. Yacking Yolanda	<p>Side conversationalist.                      Determine if the talking is disruptive or if it is another form of learning.                      Pause and wait until the talking stops.                      Move closer to Yolanda.                      Bring Yolanda back to task.                      Refer to Yolanda’s previous contribution.                      Ask her opinion about the current topic.                      When stronger action is needed, rearrange seating.                      Take a break and let Yolanda know that her behavior is disruptive.                      Ask for her input to the solution.                      Explain consequences if talking continues.                      (These are progressive steps. Go only as far as you need to go to correct the situation.)</p>
4. Arguing Ann	<p>Insincere; has a hidden agenda that even she may not be aware of.                      Stop the argument. Don’t get drawn in.                      Try questions as a way to get at the hidden agenda.                      If that doesn’t work, throw it to the group.                      Try agreeing with at least part of it to diffuse argument.</p>
5. Wandering Wilbert	<p>Continually gets discussion off center.                      Thank him for his contribution and throw questions to the group to get back on track.                      Paraphrase what you think Wilbert is saying. Introduce your paraphrase with, “Let me be sure we understand.”</p>

<sup>10</sup> Adapted from *Group Facilitation Tool Box, Facilitation Skill Development Process*. 1994. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Washington, DC.

**CHALLENGING PEOPLE****POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

6. Wrong Answer Willie	Rephrase the question and redirect it. Acknowledge any part of the answer that is correct.
7. Griping Gus	He sometimes has legitimate complaints but more often likes to hear himself whine. If the complaint is legitimate, throw it out to the group.
8. Silent Sam	He may be an active participant even though he says nothing. Check nonverbal behavior to see if he's with you. You may need to ask him a question to check.
9. Bored Brenda	Try to determine why she's bored. She may use boredom as a front because she feels insecure. If she knows it all or thinks she knows it all, use her as a resource.
10. Know-It-All Ken	If productive, continue dialogue. If nonproductive, use the following action:  a. Don't get into an argument. b. Turn it over to the group for discussion. c. Listen to and acknowledge the question but don't confront. d. Suggest alternative views. e. Don't become defensive; acknowledge mistakes when appropriate. f. Don't put the challenger down.

## STEP 5. WORKSHEET AND ROLE PLAY: RESPONDING TO CHALLENGING PARTICIPANTS

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Suggested time: 45 min.

**Purpose:** To give participants an opportunity to respond to the challenges posed by a discussion participant.

**Part I (25 min.)** If you are part of a group, take 5 minutes to form into groups of four or more so that each participant can be involved in the role play. Ask for one volunteer to assume the role of a discussion leader, a second to play the new family worker. The third member will role play an experienced staff member; the fourth member will play an observer. (If there are more than four participants, others can also play the role of experienced staff members.)

Pass out role instructions. *Each role player should read only the instruction sheets for his or her own role.* Participants should take 5 to 10 minutes to read their own instructions, ask questions, and get comfortable with their roles.

Begin the role play. (It will take about 10 minutes.)

**Alternative Directions.** If you are doing the exercise on your own, read the three role play scripts that follow. Place yourself in the role of the discussion leader. Decide how you would respond to the new family worker, and develop the points that you would make to promote his or her understanding of Head Start's child development philosophy.

**Part II (20 min.)** Conclude by discussing the role play. Be sure to include the perspective of the observer and the role players in the discussion.

## DISCUSSION LEADER INSTRUCTIONS

You are a family services supervisor. As part of your orientation of a new family worker, you have shown him or her the Head Start video *Curriculum in Head Start*. The worker knows the community well and has worked as a volunteer with parents at a local social service agency. Your goal is to ground her (or him) in Head Start beliefs and practices so that she will be able to represent the program to interested parents during your upcoming recruitment process.

You are concerned that this new worker may have unrealistically high expectations for what the program should do. You have overheard her in the lunchroom telling other staff that Head Start's goal should be to teach all of its four-year-olds to read before they enter kindergarten. You have invited an experienced family worker with you to help reinforce the points that you want to make in your guided discussion.

To open the discussion, you mention that the video emphasizes the need to engage parents in their child's experience in Head Start. You ask the new worker if she has any thoughts about ways in which, as a family worker, she can promote family involvement in children's education.

You listen for her reply and decide how you will respond to what she says.

Continue the conversation. Using techniques from the Background Reading, help the new worker gain an understanding of Head Start's educational philosophy while maintaining her enthusiasm. Invite the experienced family worker to play a supportive role in the discussion.

## NEW FAMILY WORKER INSTRUCTIONS

You are a new family worker for the local Head Start program. You have lived in the community a long time. Before coming to Head Start, you volunteered at a local literacy program. You have just watched the video *Curriculum in Head Start* with your new supervisor and one or more experienced family workers. You were delighted when you heard that Head Start believes strongly in the parents' role in their children's education. Many of the Head Start parents you met through the literacy program believe that the best way to prevent illiteracy is to teach children to read before kindergarten. When your supervisor mentions Head Start's belief that it is important to engage parents in decisions about their child's education, you say:

"I'm happy that Head Start involves parents in making decisions about their children's education. Many of the parents I know believe that their children should learn how to read in Head Start. I'll be sure to encourage them to talk to their children's teacher about including reading instruction in the classroom."

## EXPERIENCED FAMILY WORKER INSTRUCTIONS

You are an experienced family worker. The family services manager has asked you to participate in a discussion with a new colleague about curriculum in Head Start. Her goal is to ground the new worker in Head Start beliefs and practices so that she (or he) will be able to represent the program to interested parents during your upcoming recruitment process. As a group, you've just watched the video *Curriculum in Head Start*. The discussion leader may call on you to help her clarify some of the points made in the video.

## OBSERVER

Use the following questions to guide your observation of the interaction between the role players. Be prepared to share your observations at the conclusion of the role play.

How did the discussion leader react to the new family worker's statement about teaching children to read?

1. Did she reinforce those parts of the new employee's reply that were in agreement with Head Start beliefs? If yes, how so?
2. Did she acknowledge the efforts of the new employee? If so, how?
3. Did she minimize potential embarrassment? If so how?
4. How did she help to change the new employee's views?
5. Refer to the Step 3 Background Reading. What other techniques could the leader have used?



## STEP 6. SUMMARY

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Suggested time: 10 min.

### Key Points

- Defining a guided discussion
- Knowing when to use the technique
- Selecting a resource
- Developing guiding questions
- Establishing rapport
- Conducting the discussion
- Handling challenging participants
- Concluding the discussion

### Personal Review

What did you learn from this activity?

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How will you use your new knowledge and skills in your work?

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What other things do you think you might need to learn in order to master the skill of leading a guided discussion?

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
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3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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