

The Art of Partnerships

Moderator: Welcome to this Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Office Hour. Be sure to download all handouts, videos, and slides prior to viewing the Office Hour. During the presentation, you may be asked to pause the Office Hour and complete an activity, such as viewing a video, reviewing a handout, or reading a resource. Once you complete the action, return to the Office Hour and continue viewing. Now let's get started with this Office Hour.

Jennifer Olson: Welcome to the Art of Partnerships Office Hour. Our names are Jennifer Olson and Dewanna Knight. Jennifer is the senior technical advisor and Dewanna is the senior program associate/information specialist for the National Center on Early Head Start and Child Care Partnerships. You all know that responsive care giving is at the heart of the care we provide to infant and toddlers and the foundation of children's learning. Relationship building is also the heart of partnerships. Building relationships is the art of being intentionally aware of who we are, where we're going, and the skills we need to bridge relationships with others along that journey.

Dewanna Knight: This short webinar is designed to encourage grantees' use of reflection and planning and their work with members of their EHS-CC Partnerships programs. We will ask you to be in touch with your feelings and senses in order to better consider how you build relationship-based partnership. We will then move on to identifying some strategies to improve communication and planning within the partnership. Finally, we will touch on the specific topic of resistance to change, and how you might build on quality relationships to decrease potential resistance to the changes you are about to implement.

Jennifer: Many of you may be familiar with this pyramid graphic developed by the Quilt Project and adopted by the Office of Administration of Children and Families. This model shows a progression towards full collaboration. As you can see on your screen, we begin with networking with one another when we establish partnerships, sharing information, networking, getting together at community events, then maybe we begin to coordinate services. And we move on to cooperating and offering services to children and families. But the partnership grants ask us to collaborate on that service, and we'll talk more about that in these next slides.

Dewanna: Relationship-based interactions are most successful when evident throughout the partnership organizations. Responsive care giving is defined as being tuned into each child using the physical and social environments to support learning. We do this by building and maintaining positive, nurturing relationships, accurately reading and responding to the cues of each infant and toddler and their families. These same behaviors and attitudes are extended to all types of communication with families. The message of respect and inclusion begins at enrollment and extends through the process of developing partnership agreements, home visiting, parent education, and advocacy and transition.

These same skills can be demonstrated when staff are tuned into each other's interests and needs and use their working environment to maintain a positive relationship. Professionals who demonstrate respect for one another through active listening, conflict resolution, inclusive decision making, and careful planning are demonstrating relationship-based interactions. Finally, the manner in which supervisors support and supervise staff is another opportunity for positive relationship building. Reflective supervision and monitoring provide opportunities for respectful conversations and positive interactions, leading to a supportive workforce.

Governing bodies, such as Policy and Tribal Councils and Board of Directors can demonstrate relationship-based strategies in their planning decision making and conflict management.

Jennifer: Just as we build and nurture relationships with children and families, partners must do the same with each other. Leaders must be tuned-in to the needs of their co-partners. Some of the ways you may build relationships now is through effective meetings, inclusive agendas, ongoing and clear communication practices. But as partnership grantees, you have the additional tool of partnership agreements. These types of planning and communication tools become the third partner, much as the environment in the classroom becomes the third teacher. Partnerships can be supported by taking the time to check in with each other on a regular basis. These check-ins can allow those involved to read and respond to cues that may indicate that the partnership is going well, or might need tweaking.

You might ask yourselves, “How is the partnership doing and how are we measuring the success of our relationship? What is new and what is different? What elements or processes from each of your organizations can be or has been used to enhance this effective partnership? How will we know when we meet our goals?”

This slide helps us think about achieving or reaching the status of a relationship partnership. Be mindful of the fact that you may need to become aware of the elements that characterize a new or different status before you can actually determine what the new order may be. So what do relationship-based services look like, feel like, sound like? The first step in this process is to come to some agreement on the definition of relationship-based and then to determine if a change is needed. The following slides explore how we think, grow, and become different from what we were before.

Dewanna: Obvious measures of goal achievement might be referred to as science- or evidence-based. Programs might cite success by saying, “We are serving 50 percent more families or subsidies than we did at this time last year.” Or, they might report that 70 percent of all child care partner staff meet certification requirements or are enrolled in a professional development program. Additionally, programs might celebrate the fact that four partnership child care playgrounds have been upgraded to meet all child care and EHS safety regulations. These are measureable outcomes that have an agreed-upon framework to measure success, and are identified with the success in any program or partnership.

While extremely valuable, these cannot express the art of interactions, which are often associated with soft measures to describe a culture of relationship-based interactions and service delivery.

Jennifer: Let's think about these softer measures that could include our senses. When we think about a relationship-based classroom, how do we identify that quality? We may be able to use an environmental assessment tool to describe the number and types of interactions. But how do our senses register the components of a relationship-based classroom? If we can do that, then we can also begin to describe how we want it to become, or be able to acknowledge its existence. Close your eyes for a minute. Think about a relationship-based classroom, or family child care home. What do you hear, see, and feel? Describe the environment and those interactions in the chat box to share with others.

What do the voices express? How do they respond to children? Is there a sense of calm? Is teaching inclusive, intentional? These are some of the things that we thought about when we imagined putting our responses into the chat room. People might feel a sense of calm and safety. People might have a sense of a routine. They might hear voices responded to children's needs. Adults describing children's behavior, only a little crying. Let's look at what you mentioned in the chat room. Okay.

Let's talk about what you saw in the chat room. Adults watching infants and toddlers and following their lead. Adults noticing and responding to children's needs. Individualized and inclusive small groups. Perhaps in some classrooms, a lack of clutter and more soft colors might be available. Many open spaces if possible that invite movement and interactions, and environments and materials that invite exploration. Take a look at what your colleagues may have written in the chat room.

Dewanna: Now switch your thinking to a meeting within your CC-EHS partnership program. Imagine you are participating in or observing a planning meeting. The group meets monthly to review their partnership action plan and discuss their progress. Describe the environment and the types of interactions. How are decisions being made? Please enter your responses in the chat box to the right. When we consider this imagine, we thought about the following: who is present and where are they sitting, how might the partners be using the environment to enhance the partnership, what types of questions are asked? Is planning evident? Are there agendas for the meeting? How do people share information? How do partnerships engage with one another? Active listening? Can you sense feelings of inclusion, openness, respect? What does that look like?

Jennifer: Remember that perception is reality in many cases. So being in-tune with what your partners see, hear, and feel is key. To mitigate any misunderstanding or communication failures, establish a common language. That can be equally important to your partnership, and it will enhance your ability to develop shared strategic goals.

We all know that words are critical to building relationships. Here's some examples of phrases that can be used to increase collaboration. When we're setting the stage we might want to ask people, how will we do it, rather than, this is how we do it, asking what resources do we have and what do we need. Let's work together to solve this. What can we do to adapt or adjust? And how might we schedule our time so we can meet and work together?

As you look at some of what your colleagues mentioned in the chat room, here's some things that we thought about. What resources do we have, and what do we need? Let's work together to solve this. What do we need to adapt or adjust? And how can we schedule our time so we can meet and work together? These feel like partnership-based phrases to us. As we look back over the last three reflections, think about how you might use this when building relationship-based partnerships. You might want to use an activity like this to end or begin a planning meeting. You might want to encourage your education managers to use these types of reflections when teaching staff or mentoring staff from child care and Early Head Start. Often when we assume that we have a common definition of something like relationship-based settings and interactions, but knowledge and experience may differ. We would suggest you take time to come to some common agreement about relationship-based services and then put them into practice. Positive communication and strategies help us to build and maintain relationships.

Let's look at some simple strategies.

Dewanna: Stephen Covey discussed in his book, "Effective Habits of Highly Successful People," the concept of the emotional piggy bank. The piggy bank idea was created by the NCQTL in their in-service suites to promote effective relationships. The idea is based on the analogy of a bank account. We make deposits and withdrawals in each other's account as we interact. These can occur in emails, face-to-face conversations, and through other channels of communication. As deposits occur, trust and rapport

grows, just like the balance in your bank account. Negative communication ordinance take their toll on the balance, and with that, the trust and rapport.

When the balance is large, a small withdrawal may have little impact on the relationship. However, if the balance is small, a large withdrawal can put the account into the red. When this occurs, it may take considerable effort to build the account back to normal levels. Interestingly, we can make inadvertent withdrawals or deposits to other's accounts. A statement made at a meeting that may be shared later with an individual that was not present can have an impact. A quick statement made in the hallway without follow-through can be misinterpreted and cause a withdrawal.

We can apply this concept to the partnership relationship of those involved in your awarded project. What is the state of your bank account with your partner? Take a moment to reflect on this and share your thoughts with those in the chat room. That the bank account can look like a piggy bank when we talk with children and families, and we think this image is a good one for partnerships as well. These are a few of the outcomes that can occur when we make deposits among partners: respect, trust, and openness.

Let's take a look at other ways to keep the bank account full.

Jennifer: We know that in some cases, previous interactions of partnership activities could have eroded trust or caused difficulties among members of that partnership. If this is the case, encourage partners to discuss how they might identify these issues and develop a plan to replenish that bank account by making deposits. This could actually be a fun exercise designed to give the partnership members new language to use to manage conflict. Conflict can come from many sources, but sometimes it comes from growing pains. Learning to partner and improve relationships can be exciting. There will also be bumps in the road. And some of these bumps come from something called resistance to change.

We might start about thinking about resistance to change with a common joke. Recognize that a wet baby is the only one who really likes change. We all know that it's difficult to change. As a partnership is formed, there may be many small and some significant changes that will occur as service systems are aligned, regulations and standards are consolidated, and all of the many changes that you're going to have to make. As change becomes a reality, resistance to change can occur. And interestingly enough, those who the most successful in the current system may be those who are the most resistive. Change may actually undermine the order of things that was comfortable and familiar prior to the new set of circumstances. These changes can result in people feeling less safe and may actually interfere with their sense of belonging.

Think about a circumstance in which you've had to change and grow. Suddenly there are new ways of doing things and new people to get to know. There may be new requirements you need to learn, or new expectations. How did this make you feel? Often people report feelings of insecurity or unhappiness. "If only we could do things the way we did before," we might hear people say. Maslow's theory may provide a framework for understanding these feelings. Maslow's theory is built on the assumption that our basic needs must be met before we can move on to more sophisticated or complicated human needs, such as self-esteem and a desire to reach our full potential.

These needs are described as psychological needs, love and belonging needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. You'll see them described on the slide in front of you. When we consider change, we might actually impact feelings of security and belonging, the sense of routine, group

acceptance, and feelings of achievement and work. When staff and management feel these shifts begin to occur, they might become entrenched in the old or current system that helped them meet those needs, and as a result, they may not want to participate in the changes required by the new partnership. This is referred to as resistance to change.

This slide provides information on the seven components of resistance to change. These span from individuals having a rational reaction associated with knowledge to those who simply opt out of participation due to their perceived sense of a lack of benefit to themselves. A couple of these factors stand out. It would seem that the rational, emotional, economic, and skill areas can be addressed through information sharing, skill building, and support. But the other factors of status and social resistance may be far more difficult to address, as some individuals might be less likely to acknowledge their concerns and fears behind these active resistance feelings.

The good news — that if identified, resistance can be resolved through quality communication and an increase in knowledge and support over time. We can also develop a new set of communication skills and reinforce and support new roles. The next slide looks at some of these obvious strategies for minimizing resistance to change. Here are some simple suggestions for overcoming resistance to change. If the resistance comes from rational feelings, help increase knowledge. If it comes from emotional, take time in implementing change and involve informal leaders in your organizations.

If the resistance is economic, you might want to provide reassurance and more information. What about if the resistance to change is status? It might help to clarify roles and responsibilities. Or, what if it's social? We suggest you create time to build relationships in teams and recognize that that building may take time. If it's skills, training, mentoring, and coaching can be very relevant and helpful. And if it's a path of least resistance, we suggest you share progress in a positive way to help bring people along.

All of these begin with timely and clear communication. And fortunately, the EHS Child Care Partnerships have the resources to support staff to overcome some of this resistance due to the economic and skill areas by providing you with startup funds.

Dewanna: In conclusion, we would like you to reflect on the following three questions: What did I learn about my perceptions and feelings about partnerships between EHS and CC organizations and staff? What is one new strategy I learned for building relationships through quality communication? How will I recognize potential resistance to change associated with building partnerships? We hope this Office Hour PowerPoint will be useful to you in your journey towards effective partnership that provide quality services to young children and their families.

Jennifer: We'd like to thank you for joining this Office Hour today, and leave you with information about the National Center on Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships. On this slide is our contact information, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Moderator: Thank you for participating in this Office Hour. Be sure to post your questions and comments in the chat room to the right to connect with your colleagues, as well as the content area experts.