

Teachers and Parents Working Together: Delivering a Tell Me A Story Workshop to Parents

This training is designed for teachers and parents to work together on helpful methods for reading books with young children. The books used in the Tell Me A Story program encourage teachers and parents to read books that support children's social-emotional development and strengthen their capacity to manage emotions and relationships.



Goal For teachers to model the Tell Me A Story program for parents.

Objectives Participants will:

- Gain practical strategies to employ when reading books with social-emotional themes
- Have tools to deliver a parent workshop on the Tell Me a Story program to a center-wide parent audience

Method and Content

This workshop has two distinct sections, each designed to build on one another.

- Exercise One: Identifying Strategies for Reading Books With Social-Emotional Themes
- Exercise Two: Reading Tell Me A Story Books: A Demonstration

In Exercise One, teachers and parents have the opportunity to discuss strategies for reading social-emotional based books. Using a Handout (1) as a tool to guide the conversation, teachers and parents may work together to find solutions for addressing challenging topics that may arise when books prompt questions from children. In the next exercise, teachers model reading *When My Mom is Sad* for parents.

Getting Started

What You Need:

- Time – this training should take 2 hours, not including Workshop Leader preparation. For more information on **Time Management**, see the *Introduction to the Tell Me A Story Workshops*.
- A training space large enough to accommodate the members of the training to participate in large group discussion. For workshop groups larger than 20 participants, you may want to consider including two Workshop Leaders to help manage and respond to participant needs. For more information on considerations with **Group Size**, see the *Introduction to the Tell Me A Story Workshops*.
- Seating for the training group (e.g. semi-circle for more interactive exercises)
- Prepare a training packet for each participant with the following materials:
 - Handout 1: Strategies for Reading Books With Social-Emotional Themes With Your Children
 - A Workshop Evaluation
- A pen or pencil for each participant

Workshop Leader Preparation

Read through all the workshop materials first. Take time to reflect on your own responses to the exercise questions, focusing especially on your own preconceived notions about engaging families at your center and reading books.

Consider the fact that workshop participants (the parents) may have different feelings about the workshop's themes, including the appropriateness of discussing certain topics with children, their own comfort level with reading, working closely with a teacher, and/or supporting their child in talking about feelings. Think ahead of time about the elements of the workshop that are most important to emphasize and how you can remain flexible in order to understand where your participants are beginning with this subject matter. For instance, if you have a parent who reports that she/he will never feel comfortable reading with his/her child, ask "Why?" before coming to your own conclusions. That participant may be concerned with reading books that raise difficult subjects and emotions, or may simply be uncomfortable with trying new things. **Everyone should approach this subject matter at their own level of comfort around reading and working with parents.**

It is also strongly recommended that you have parents participate in your classroom's Circle Time prior to doing this workshop together. Doing Circle Time together will give you an opportunity to have a mutual understanding of what reading the TMAS books is like, the unique responses that children may have, and the strengths and challenges every adult has when reading the stories. Spending time together in the classroom prior to this workshop provides you with a chance to plan a more effective training.

Preparing the Workshop Space:

- Prepare the training space by positioning chairs so that the participants can begin as a large group, and then move easily into smaller groups.
- Place a training packet on each chair in the room.
- Prepare one large piece of paper, entitled "Parking Lot for Ideas."



Parking Lot
for Ideas

Introduction to the Training

Workshop Leaders are encouraged to use their own words to introduce the training. Some key points to consider are:

- Welcome the group and review logistics – general agenda, time frame, when to expect breaks, materials, sign-in sheet, etc.
- The topic of the training is “Teachers and Parents Working Together: Delivering a TMAS Workshop to Parents.”

For example, you might say...

“The exercises will specifically focus on how to use books in order to promote discussion and conversation with children. By reading books, asking questions, and giving children a chance to share their ideas, we can encourage expression and have a unique opportunity to create a community of children who feel supported to explore social-emotional topics.”

- Describe the objectives of this training:
Let participants know that the training will give them an opportunity to:
 - Recognize the unique opportunities that using books offer to spark thoughtful conversation with children
 - Work together with parents
 - Learn strategies for delivering a center wide TMAS workshop
- Explain the “Parking Lot for Ideas” sheet as follows: during the training, if a question, suggestion, or concern unrelated to the training exercise, but related to the topic is offered, the Workshop Leader will record it on the “Parking Lot for Ideas” sheet. Refer back to these ideas at the end of the training for further discussion as time permits.
- Review the *Training Ground Rules*, which are a short list of statements intended to promote a safe, positive environment for all participants. These can be printed on a piece of paper for all to see, but reviewing the rules and asking for group agreement is the most important step before beginning the exercise.

Training Ground Rules

There are no right or wrong answers in any of the activities we will be doing today. Everyone’s opinions and feelings are respected here.

One at a time. We want to hear what everyone has to say, so it is important to remember that group discussion requires strong listening skills.

Learning takes time. We will not rush one another when trying to understand and participate.

Maintain Confidentiality. While sharing our experiences we do not need to use names of children, parents or staff.

For example, you might say...

"It is a pleasure to have you all here today. I know that it can be hard to find time in our busy lives to come participate in workshops and events at our center. We appreciate you taking the time to be here. Today we will be talking about the benefits and challenges of reading books with our children, particularly when the books may bring up some hard feelings for children (and us!). In this first exercise, we will review strategies for reading with young children."

Exercise One

This exercise provides the opportunity to share and discuss strategies for engaging families in a workshop. Workshops offer a venue for people to get to know each other better, and for families to express concerns and ask questions. As parents get to know one another, they are broadening their support network and becoming resources for one another. This is also an opportunity for staff to build relationships with parents so that they may feel comfortable enough to participate in Tell Me A Story activities.

- ▶ Direct participants' attention to Handout 1. This handout serves as a "conversation-starter" with parent participants.
- ▶ As you read through each item in Handout 1, allow time for participants to discuss their reactions. Remember, all opinions are valued and respected.

Handout 1

Strategies for Reading Books With Social-Emotional Themes With Your Children

- ▶ **Ask questions and draw attention to the way a character is feeling** and the way the character expresses these feelings (e.g. “He looks sad to me,” “What do you think?” “Her face seems angry because of the way her eyebrows are bunched up.”) Some children may see the direct link between their feelings and the story and volunteer what they think. Others may need you to be more concrete and ask specific questions.
- ▶ **Focus on the feelings AND what the character did about those feelings.** This will help children think not only about how they feel, but how to express it.
- ▶ **Some children may not want to talk.** Not every child will want to talk about the book or their feelings, or some may need to think about the story and hear it more than once before commenting on it.
- ▶ **Listen and reflect.** Your actions provide a powerful example for your child. Be aware of how you model respectful communication and expression by helping your child feel good about his/her reaction to the story.
- ▶ **Consider other activities that promote social-emotional discussion and growth.** Social-emotional topics can be explored in many ways, such as dramatic play, art, dictated stories, and creative movement.
- ▶ **Talking about feelings by using children’s books is a good idea because it creates a safe and supportive environment for children.** Children will also benefit from the opportunity to discuss how parents can sometimes exhibit emotions that are confusing to them.

Transition to Exercise Two

The group has now had the chance to review strategies for reading, as well as share their own ideas. In this next exercise, teachers will build on the conversation from Exercise One, and model reading one of the TMAS books.

Exercise Two:

Now that the group has had the opportunity to get to know each other more, and to build trust, the Workshop Leader (the teacher) will read to and with parents.

- ▶ Inform parents that you will be reading the story to them as it would be read to children in the classroom. This way, parents can learn to read with their children in ways that will support their child's emotional expressiveness.
- ▶ Point out parts of the story that describe the little girl's experience and connect it to the children's own experiences by asking questions and drawing their attention to the plot and illustrations.
- ▶ The following information can be considered a "script" for reading with your child.

When My Mom is Sad

By Mary Watson Avery & William Beardslee

Summary: A little girl is confused by her mother's moods and behavior. Her mother reassures her with a conversation about depression and taking care of oneself.

Social-Emotional Themes:

Age-appropriate discussion of parental depression

Overall Preparation:

In our experience, we wouldn't share this book with children until we had indicated to parents that the subject was being discussed. Think about how it would be best to communicate this to the parents in your program. Consider if a letter home would be sufficient, or if you would like to supplement that with a parent meeting, workshop or additional resource on parental depression.

Workshop Leader Reflection

Before modeling how to read this book to parents, reflect on the story's subject matter and how parents may react to the content. Consider your own understanding and experience with the subject of depression. You may want to spend some time learning more about depression and resilience. Two brief articles included in the Tell Me A Story Materials as a resource are: (These may be found under Additional Resources.)

- *Parenting, Depression and Hope: Reaching Out to Families Facing Adversity*
- *Fostering Resilience in Families Coping With Depression*

You do not have to be a mental health expert to share or discuss *When My Mom is Sad* with children and families. The book has been written to reflect the concerns and questions a preschooler might have, and is structured to present a supportive conversation between a child and parent, in which the mother shares some important, age-appropriate information about depression. The story concludes with a reassurance that action is being taken in order to respond to the mother and child's needs, and therefore provides a responsive message of hope.

1st Reading: Learning about the book.

Point out parts of the story that describe the little girl's experience and connect it to your child's own experiences by asking questions and drawing their attention to the plot and illustrations.

Before reading the story for the first time:

Display the front cover to the children.

The title of this book is "When My Mom Is Sad"

Two people wrote this book: **Mary Watson Avery** and **William Beardslee**

What do we think this book will be about?

Accept answers from your children, then prepare them for the story by introducing them to the main characters through the cover illustration: This little girl is going to tell us about her mother and her little brother.

While reading the story for the first time:

Looking at the first page, point out the little girl and her mother in the background.

Here's the little girl who is telling us about her mother.

Looking at the second page in which the mother is yelling, draw attention to the children on the couch. *Do you see the little girl and her brother here?*

Looking at the page in which the little girl is hiding, ask: *Where is she?* (under the table) *What did she bring with her?* (her doll)

Looking at the page that mentions the mother crying, ask: **What is the brother doing?** (Yelling)

Point out to the your child: **The little girl thinks her mother is crying because she is bad.**

At the point in the story in which the little girl asks her mother what is wrong, draw attention to this part in the plot.

Okay, now the little girl has decided to ask her mother about what is going on.

Looking at the last two pictures, draw attention to how the story is resolving.

Oh, look! Is the mother smiling now? What about the little girl?

After reading the story for the first time:

Ask your child for his/her opinions about the book.

Did you like the drawings?

You may need to go back to the book and show the illustrations.

Allow your child to ask her/his own questions.

2nd Reading of the Story: What are the characters feeling?

Provide a stronger focus on the character's feelings and the social-emotional themes of the story.

Before reading the story for the second time:

Display the front cover to your child.

Do you remember the last time we read this book?

While reading the story:

Look at the little girl's face (while she is under the table.) **How do you think she feels? Why does she feel that way?**

The little girl doesn't know why her mom is crying. In this picture I think her face looks confused. What do you think? Maybe she is worried?

What happened? Now the mommy is smiling. Do you think talking about it made her feel better? Does the little girl feel better? How do you know?

After reading the story for the second time:

Ask your child for her/his opinions about the book and share some key points you would like her/him to remember.

And then in the end...(The mommy and the little girl are happy. The little girl knows things are going to be better.)

3rd Reading of the Story: What does the story make me think about?

Before reading the story for the third time:

Display the front cover to the you child.

Do you remember this book?

Do you remember the little girl? And her brother? And mommy?

Let's see what happens.

While reading the story for the third time:

Remember last time we talked about how the little girl feels when her mom is crying? Confused? Worried? What is the little girl going to do about those feelings?

The little girl feels upset but she is not going to hide this time. What is she going to do? (Talk to her mom about it.)

The mom is reminding the little girl about when she was sick so that she can understand what it is like for the mommy.

After reading the story for the third time:

Ask your child for his/her opinions about the book.

This book makes me think of all the different feelings we can have - and that sometimes all those feelings can be hard to understand.

I like the part when the little girl asks her mother what's wrong and the mommy explains it to her. What part did you like?

I also liked when the mommy smiles and then the little girl does too.

Wrapping Up

Pulling things together at the end of the training is an important step for everyone. As a workshop gets close to the end and people are feeling tired, it can be tempting to skip this part. Let people know that you will get them out of the workshop on time, but want to take a few more minutes to wrap up the time you've spent together.

1. Review Key Concepts

- ▶ Recognize the unique opportunities that using books offer to spark thoughtful conversation with children
- ▶ Work together with parents
- ▶ Learn strategies for delivering a center wide TMAP workshop

2. End on a positive note. Encourage parents to continue reading books with their children. Suggest that they set a goal of reading for 15 minutes every day to start. Remind them that children and adults respond best to change when it is taken one step at a time.

3. If time permits, **review some or all of the comments written on the "Parking Lot for Ideas" sheet posted on the wall.** Consider responding to one comment, then asking participants which of the others they would like discussed in the time remaining. These comments should also be considered in preparation for the next training.

4. **Express your appreciation.** Let the group know how much you appreciate their time and hard work. Thank them for sharing their ideas and for being willing to think about change together.
5. **Make yourself available.** After the training, be willing to answer questions and respond to concerns on an ongoing basis. If the Workshop Leader cannot be available, an on-site staff member should be designated in this role and announced at the end of the training.
6. **Collect Attendance and Evaluation Forms.** Ask parents to sign an attendance sheet and complete an evaluation form. Remind participants that these forms are anonymous and collected for the purpose of improving future trainings. During this time, you might also want to title and date any large group work so you can save it for future reference.

Extending Learning and Supporting New Skills

In order to extend the workshop's content to changes in professional skill and behavior, the Workshop Leader and administrators should consider these follow-up activities:

Provide Supportive Supervision for Individuals and Teams. Teachers need additional opportunities to discuss integrating books and engaging families with a supervisor or a mentor. It may be helpful for teachers to review goals established with parents during regular supervision.

Implement Classroom Observation & Social Service Support. Consider making regular classroom observations when parents are present. Take notes in order to keep track of change over time and the outcome of new strategies. Make time to follow up with discussion of these observations with the teacher teams.

Create Action Plans. In order to improve efforts to engage families, teaching teams and supervisors must agree on the steps to be taken to be successful. Make sure to develop a variety of short-term and long-term goals in order to acknowledge all levels of growth and success.

Workshop Leader Reflection

The Workshop Leader should take some time to review the training experience once it is over, read through and tally the evaluation forms, and review the results. Some additional questions to consider are:

Was I prepared? Did I have all the materials I needed? Was the room adequate? Did I feel confident with the topic?

Did the training go as I imagined it would? Did the group respond the way I thought they would? Were there any surprises? Were there any elements of the training that went especially well?

Were the participants engaged? Did the group size seem appropriate? Who seemed comfortable enough to share their thoughts with the group? Who did not seem comfortable? Do I know why? Did I get the feeling that the participants understood the exercises and materials? Who was present and who was missing today? Is there anyone I need to follow up with immediately?

What were some of the themes that people talked about in this training? Was there a group of issues that the responses and discussion had in common? Are any of those issues a surprise? How can I use those issues in future trainings to make the exercises more effective?

What would have made this training better? In hindsight, what could I have done differently? Why? How can I use that information to make the next training even more successful?

Did I gain new knowledge from this training? What did I learn? In addition to new information on the training topic, did I gain any new knowledge about the training group or individuals in the training group? Did I learn something new about myself as a Workshop Leader?

Workshop Evaluation

Title of the Workshop: **Teachers and Parents Working Together:
Delivering a TMAS Workshop to Parents**

Location _____ Date _____

Please rate how well the training met the objectives below:

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Not Good
Objective 1: Gain practical strategies to employ when reading books with social-emotional themes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Objective 2: Gain tools to deliver a parent workshop on the Tell Me a Story program to a center-wide parent audience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Overall rating of this workshop:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Usefulness of information presented:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Usefulness of workshop activities:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creativity of workshop activities:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trainer's knowledge of subject:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trainer's presentation style:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is there anything you would like to learn that was not presented in this workshop?

Would you like more trainings that expand on this topic? Yes No (Please circle one)
I would like more training on:

Additional Comments:

Additional Resources

Short Papers for Staff:

Parenting, Depression, and Hope: Reaching Out to Families Facing Adversity
*Fostering Resilience in Families Coping With Depression: Practical Ways Head Start Staff
Can Help Families Build on the Power to Cope*

