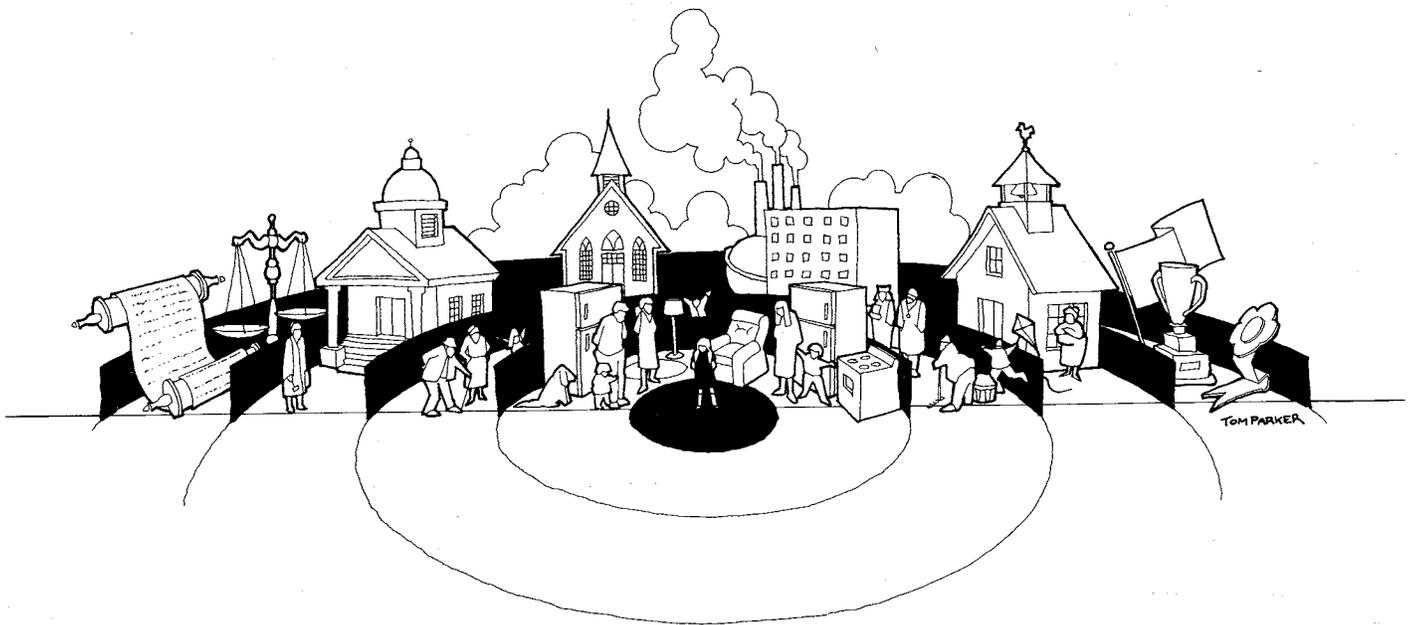


# Communication for Empowerment

A Facilitator's Manual of  
Empowering Teaching Techniques



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## Beginning a Workshop or Session

There are four distinct start-up phases in any workshop. The first begins when the workshop is conceived and includes all activities involved in its planning (see "Planning a Workshop," p. 10). The second lasts from the arrival of the facilitator until that of the first participant, signaling the informal beginning of the workshop. The third phase includes those activities that occur as other participants arrive. The last phase begins after the majority of participants have arrived and the facilitator announces that the first formal activity will begin. This final phase involves room preparations, introductions, warm-up activities, and agenda sharing.

All of the activities in these start-up phases influence the workshop atmosphere and norms. Because several topics in this section overlap, the divisions are somewhat arbitrary. "Creating a Comfortable Atmosphere and Building Trust" discusses activities in the second and third phases, although this process can continue throughout the workshop. Similarly, although building trust and developing norms are ongoing processes, facilitators should be aware of them from the outset. The last three topics in this section—warm-up activities, agenda sharing, and presentation of self—are elements of the final start-up phase or the formal beginning of the workshop.

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### Creating a Comfortable Atmosphere and Building Trust

#### The Purpose of Creating a Comfortable Atmosphere and Building Trust

Participants' first impressions are shaped by the facilitator's ability to create a relaxed atmosphere. The facilitator should therefore strive to plan activities that will put participants at ease and let them know through physical and verbal cues what is expected of them as well as what to expect. By observing how well-prepared the facilitator is and how well she or he can create a relaxed atmosphere, participants draw some initial conclusions about the facilitator's competence and how comfortable they will feel in the group. The ideal atmosphere is neither superficial nor lighthearted, but rather one in which participants feel they can think through and talk openly about the issues and concerns the workshop is addressing.

Creating a comfortable atmosphere is closely related to building trust. The word "trust" is often overused and underdefined in discussions of interpersonal relationships and group dynamics. In the context of workshop settings, trust is a feeling of security stemming from a belief that others will listen and try to understand without making premature judgments. In an environment in which there is trust, people discuss their thoughts, feelings, and opinions openly; both agreement and disagreement are easily expressed. In fact, conflicts or disagreements can be resolved cooperatively only in situations or relationships in which there is a high degree of trust. Because it is highly unlikely that any two individuals, much less all members of a group, will be in total agreement at all times, trust is important if communication beyond a superficial level is to occur.

Trust is fundamental to empowerment. In groups in which there is a high level of trust, members feel supported and valued. Facilitators feel empowered because discussion flows

spontaneously; they can devote more effort to helping members tie ideas together or make sense out of diverse experiences and less to encouraging people to talk.

Real trust usually takes a long time to develop. For this reason, groups that continue for a long time are more likely to develop higher levels of trust than those that meet only briefly. Setting realistic goals for developing trust is important. Expecting high levels of trust in a group that is meeting for only a short time will result in frustration for everyone.

Norms, or standards of behavior, which develop very early in a group, also contribute to a workshop's atmosphere by communicating information about expected behavior. They may arise formally (the group agrees that the session will begin on time regardless of how many members are present, for example) or informally (nothing is said about dress but everyone comes in casual clothes). A facilitator who starts a workshop by standing behind a lectern and giving a half-hour lecture followed by a 20-minute individual pencil-and-paper exercise is creating an environment in which passive involvement is the norm. On the other hand, a workshop that begins with each participant introducing her- or himself followed by a whole-group activity (see "Warm-up Activities," p. 25) creates an atmosphere in which active involvement is the norm.

Initiating a group discussion early in a workshop about whether to permit smoking accomplishes several goals relevant to creating norms. If the facilitator listens to proponents of both sides, adds her or his feelings, and then helps the group arrive at a decision acceptable to everyone, participants will feel that active involvement and expressing conflicting opinions are group norms and that the group is capable of resolving disagreements cooperatively. By actively participating, the facilitator will also clarify expectations about her or his role. This example of cooperative conflict resolution will enhance participants' positive feelings about the facilitator and each other and thus increase group trust.

During an empowering workshop, such norms as supportiveness, cooperative decision making, openness, equality, and member-to-member interaction are encouraged.

## The Process of Creating a Comfortable Atmosphere

### Setting Up

To create a relaxed atmosphere, the facilitator needs to feel comfortable in the workshop space and well-prepared before the first participant arrives. It is always wise to arrive early at the workshop site—if you're familiar with the space, you'll feel relaxed when participants arrive. Before the workshop begins, check that the room is set up properly, get materials in order, put up newsprint, thread film or slide projectors, get refreshments ready, post signs directing participants to the room, and go over the exercises. Using this time to write instructions or questions on newsprint may make you feel unnecessarily pressured and give early arrivals the impression that you are unprepared; make every effort to write questions and instructions before you get to the site.

The most desirable room setup is one that is appropriate for the group, with enough chairs and room for everyone but not so many that it looks as though many people did not show. Entering a half-empty room makes people feel discouraged and disappointed. It is much better to have to set up additional chairs than to greet participants in a half-empty room. If card games or other exercises that require a flat surface are on your agenda, make sure tables are readily available. Grouping movable chairs around small tables or in a semicircle offers seating options

for both small- and whole-group exercises. Such an arrangement implies that all group members are equal and encourages people to talk to one another.

Heating and ventilation can have a major effect on a group's energy level. If group members are stifling yawns, don't assume they are bored. Poor ventilation could be the culprit. If windows open, letting air in for a few minutes before the workshop or during a break can enliven a stuffy room. If anyone in the group is uncomfortable inhaling cigarette smoke, clear provisions should be made for smoking. Establishing a policy at the beginning of the meeting, such as allowing smoking on one side of the room only, will prevent an awkward situation later on.

Lighting should also be adjusted before the workshop begins. Indoor lighting is sometimes overused during the summer. Rather than assume that all available lights should be used, adjust them to a level that is comfortable for you and then ask participants whether they would like more light. Overlighting can create a harsh, glaring tone.

### **Greeting Participants**

The facilitator can establish some initial interaction with the participants by greeting them as they arrive and providing instructions about what they should do until the formal part of the workshop begins. Giving such directions empowers participants by letting them know what behavior is appropriate for the next few minutes and thereby familiarizes them with their new environment and encourages them to relax.

Devoting some time before the workshop begins to chatting informally with participants provides them with evidence of a philosophy of mutuality and equality. At this point participants' personalities and ways of expressing themselves contribute immensely to establishing the atmosphere in the group. The facilitator and participants also get to know one another and establish some informal connection.

By sitting with participants in a circle rather than in front of them, a facilitator can begin to establish a norm of mutuality. To avoid creating the impression that power is concentrated in one part of the room, do not sit next to a cofacilitator.

If your group has met one or more times before, introduce new members before discussing business items or beginning workshop activities. A brief introduction will make newcomers feel included and valued by the group.

### **Dealing with Details**

Relaying such basic information early in the first session as the location of the rest room, facility rules, where to store coats, and arrangements for meals will help participants feel comfortable in and in control of their environment. Information about breaks and starting and ending times is generally included in the agenda-sharing section (see "Agenda Sharing," p. 28).

Establishing ground rules also helps participants feel comfortable. For instance, are people expected to maintain confidentiality about certain aspects of the workshop? If so, this ground rule should be stated clearly at the beginning of a workshop and group agreement reached. One common ground rule for empowerment workshops is that group members should feel free to sit out an activity but should not interfere with others who are participating.

Ground rules about starting and ending can also be discussed at this point. If a time schedule is to be adhered to strictly, say so clearly. On the other hand, if you would like ending times to be flexible, that possibility should be discussed with the group.

How the facilitator deals with these details can contribute to or detract from the empowerment process. One empowering approach for deciding on the details of the workshop is to offer your opinion and then encourage the expression of opposing views. It may be impossible or difficult for some participants to stay later than the designated ending times, for example, and some negotiation about ending on time may be necessary. Such discussion will communicate to participants that the facilitator is responsive to their needs. Working with the group in formulating the ground rules will have an empowering effect on the facilitator; because they have been involved in this process, participants will be likely to adhere to the rules.

Although discussion of these details is necessary, the goal of this section of the workshop is to get the group to reach agreement about the details. The empowering effect of this process will be negated if the discussion goes on for too long at the expense of workshop content. For this reason, we suggest that the facilitator offer a suggestion and ask participants whether anyone has difficulty with it or would like to offer an alternative.

### **Dealing with Unexpected Guests**

Occasionally a participant will unexpectedly bring a child or a person will attend who looks as if he or she does not belong (an elderly person at a workshop directed toward parents of young children, for example). Be prepared for these possibilities. If child care needs are likely to be a concern for participants, they should be considered and arrangements made before the session (see "Not Another Meeting!" p. 14). If a parent brings a child and care is not available, talk with the parent to determine activities the child could do during the workshop. Most important, the child should not become bored and distract the parent or other participants. Perhaps you could direct the child to play somewhere in the room away from workshop activities. Markers and newsprint are often good makeshift entertainment for children.

If child care will be a continuing problem for some parents, work with them to plan care for future sessions. Help the parents arrange alternate care, provide toys so that children can entertain themselves quietly in a corner of the room, or arrange for care somewhere else in the building, for instance. Whatever the solution, the parents should not be made to feel that they are causing a great problem. If such feelings surface, the parents are likely to stop attending and surely will not feel supported.

Sometimes a workshop attracts people who do not seem appropriate for its goals and activities. It is a good idea to talk with them before the workshop formally begins. An informal, friendly discussion is more effective than an interrogation. You might approach a male at a workshop for pregnant teenagers by saying, "Hello, I'm \_\_\_\_\_. I'm wondering whether you are aware that this workshop is designed for pregnant teenagers." If the person affirms an interest in attending (because his grandchild or girlfriend is pregnant, for instance), you will need to decide whether his or her presence will disrupt the group. If you think it will, a comment such as the following is recommended: "I can surely appreciate your concern. However, I believe it is important that all participants share the same situation. In my experience, people are more likely to talk openly when they feel others share their immediate concerns. If you'd like to leave your name and a number where you can be reached, I'd be happy to contact you tomorrow to recommend other places in the community where your concerns could be better addressed. Thank you for coming. I hope the lack of clarity in our publicity hasn't caused you too much inconvenience."

These and other problematic situations are not likely to occur if participants' needs are anticipated and responded to before the workshop series or session begins. Publicity directed toward a specific audience is a first step toward ensuring an appropriate group for your program.

All of the activities that occur before the official start of a workshop contribute to creating a comfortable atmosphere, building trust, and developing norms. Warm-up activities, agenda sharing, and the facilitator's self-presentation, all of which are discussed in the following sections, also help create a positive atmosphere.

A group's mood needs continual attention. Be aware of subtle changes. A comment such as, "A number of you look tired; I wonder if we need to take a break now instead of later" is often effective. Sharing your observations and asking the group to decide a course of action shifts responsibility onto participants. In acting on their own behalf, they gain experience in controlling their environments.

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## Warm-up Activities

### The Purpose of Warm-up Activities

A warm-up activity generally takes place after a workshop session has formally begun, although it may be the first item on an agenda. The purposes of a warm-up activity can be to introduce people to each other and to the facilitator, to increase people's sense of belonging, to begin to establish group cohesiveness, to help people relax, to introduce the theme of the workshop, and to help set a positive tone (see "Creating a Comfortable Atmosphere and Building Trust" p. 21) In workshops designed to increase empowerment, the warm-up activity begins this process by providing participants with large doses of positive recognition.

### Using Warm-up Activities

Warm-up activities, especially in the first session of a workshop series, should be designed with the overall goals of the workshop in mind while recognizing that most participants will not know one another and are likely to feel somewhat uncomfortable in their new environment and situation. In addition to the purposes listed above, a warm-up activity can help people concentrate on the workshop, put people in touch with their thoughts or feelings, or just encourage conversation. In choosing or creating a warm-up activity, consider the specific functions you'd like it to serve as well as its appropriateness for the group. A physical activity may not be well-received as a warm-up activity by a group used to intellectual interactions, for example. The references at the end of this section include a number of ideas for warm-up activities. Any that are appropriate for the group and the goals for the activity can be used or modified.

### An Example of a Warm-up Activity

The warm-up activity on the next page, from session 1 of the Family Matters "Empowering Families" module, accomplishes several goals of empowerment. By asking participants to list their positive qualities and share them with others, respect and group unity are encouraged. The

exercise also provides a structure through which workshop members make an active effort to get to know one another. Individuals should feel free to reveal as much or as little about themselves as they want. This is the first exercise in a 2½-hour workshop of a nine-part series.

**Warm-up (20 minutes)**

The purposes of this exercise are to introduce the participants to each other and to the concept of empowerment. The activity should also help develop a spirit of cooperation in the group.

**Instructions for Facilitators**

1. Greet participants as they arrive. If you have decided to use name tags, distribute them. Introduce yourself and hand each person an index card.
2. When it is time to begin, take a seat, preferably between two participants. Say:

**At the beginning of each session, I will go over the agenda to let you know what we will be doing. (Hand out agendas.) Tonight's agenda begins with a warm-up exercise designed to introduce you to each other and to help you learn about empowerment. After that, we will . . . (Go over the rest of the agenda with the group.)**

3. Say:

**I would like each of you to write two words that describe something good about yourself. They might be words like "happy" or "honest," which are characteristics, or "cooking" or "bowling," which are activities you are good at. After you have written down these words, choose a partner and tell that person your name, a bit about yourself, and why you chose the two words.**

**Then add one positive word about your partner to his or her list, based upon what you have just learned. Please begin.**

4. If there are an uneven number of participants, complete the exercise with a person who does not have a partner. Offer help to anyone who looks bewildered or uncomfortable.
5. After about 10 minutes, say:

**In 2 minutes I will ask you to come back into the large group. Then each of you will introduce your partner and explain the three positive words on his or her list.**

6. After 2 minutes, call everyone back into the large group. Introduce your partner and explain the three positive qualities or skills on his or her list. Have your partner do the same for you. Then help participants go through this process.
7. Thank everyone for sharing and lead a discussion about (1) how participants felt as they thought of positive words to describe themselves; (2) how they felt as they thought of positive words to describe their partners; and (3) how they felt as their partners thought of positive words to describe them.

8. Say:

**What we just did, besides get acquainted, was to begin the process we call empowerment. We looked for a person's good qualities and abilities and expressed our admiration and respect for them. The person now feels more confident about her- or himself and, consequently, more open to change and to new ideas.**

## Presentation of Self

### The Purpose of the Presentation

The overall goal of any empowerment workshop is to encourage and build upon the strengths of its members. The traditional leader-as-expert model, sometimes called an authoritarian leadership style, is contrary to the empowerment model for a number of reasons. Under such leadership, group members are not given the information to make decisions and therefore rely on and expect the leader to make decisions for them. Consequently, members may see themselves as less able, less legitimate, less responsible, and less valued. To acquire power, members have to find some way to oppose the leader and her or his plans. Although the authoritarian style has some benefits for the leader, especially if participants follow unquestioningly, it is ultimately unempowering. Authoritarian leaders have a great deal of responsibility but no control over participants' behavior, which can be very frustrating.

At the other extreme are leaders who take no responsibility, who are more than willing to let participants do whatever they want. This leadership pattern generally implies "no one's in charge here." If participants are ready and able to take responsibility, to provide self-direction, and to encourage others to do the same, a laissez-faire style may be empowering. Most participants, however, feel they cannot facilitate, are not familiar enough with the topic or content of the workshop to provide direction, and consequently feel incompetent, overwhelmed, or frustrated if they have to provide direction for the group. Participants often feel vulnerable under a laissez-faire leader because no one is responsible for defining or maintaining boundaries. The laissez-faire workshop leader is not likely to feel empowered because he or she has no responsibility and thus gains no reward. The workshop is totally out of his or her control.

The empowering facilitator, often referred to as democratic, falls between these two extremes. He or she believes in providing guidance without control, sharing responsibility, and informing and including participants in decision making. Democratic facilitators give participants as much information and responsibility as possible without overwhelming them with more than they can or need to handle. She or he actively attempts to provide a framework within which participants can take responsibility for their own learning. Most important, a democratic facilitator guides the process but clearly conveys the message that everyone, including him- or herself, will be learning from one another. The assumption should be that although the facilitator may have some knowledge and expertise by virtue of her or his experience or education, all participants have information and experiences to contribute. It is crucial that the facilitator communicate this message when introducing her- or himself.

Most workshop participants will have more experience with the traditional expert-student relationship than with the more equally balanced democratic leadership style. It's a challenge for a group facilitator to inspire confidence in his or her capabilities while communicating that participants are capable partners in the learning process.

### The Process of Presenting Oneself

The following guidelines should help you develop an appropriate self-presentation:

- Use a comfortable, informal style.

- Volunteer information that will help participants identify with you. (“I’m a parent of four children ranging in age from 6 to 15, and I taught elementary school for seven years.”) It is important to provide such information throughout the program.
- Let participants know your qualifications for leading the workshop and how you came to lead it.
- State your philosophy of the role of facilitator—how you expect the group to work and learn together.
- Project an attitude of sincere self-confidence rather than an “I’m an expert” attitude.

### An Example of a Presentation of Self

“I’ve had a chance to meet many of you by now. . . . I’m Ruth Davies, a Cooperative Extension agent for the past three years here in Pleasants County. I was a public school teacher for five years before going into Cooperative Extension work and have two children who attend this school. I’ve been encouraged by the caring attitudes of my kids’ teachers, so I was delighted when Jim Asgarden, your principal, asked me to lead the Family Matters in-service education program. Diana Marcus, who has taught fourth and fifth grades here for many years, went with me to the state university last spring, where we attended workshops on leading the Family Matters in-service program for teachers. We’ll be working here as coleaders. Diana . . .”

### Agenda Sharing

#### The Purpose of Agenda Sharing

Announcing the agenda for a workshop early in a session has an empowering effect on participants for several reasons. It provides the basis from which the group and the facilitator can agree on the direction of the workshop and lets participants know what will happen during the next few hours. It also helps put participants at ease and clarifies whether the session will meet their needs, interests, and expectations. Inviting participants to respond to the agenda by asking, “Would anyone like to respond to this outline” or “Is this plan what you expected?” for example, encourages them to ask questions or suggest changes. Finally, if participants know the approximate length of each activity, they are more able to direct themselves toward meeting goals. A participant who needs a drink of water, for instance, is less likely to leave the group if she knows there will be a break in a few minutes.

Although participants in Family Matters workshops do not create the agenda, being given an opportunity to agree to it or change it includes them in the decision-making process. Consequently, they are likely to become committed to the decision. Inviting participants to respond to the agenda also conveys that the facilitator recognizes that their needs, expectations, and opinions are worthy of consideration. If the agenda is not discussed and it does not meet

participants' needs, they may resist by digressing from the designated topic, which will leave the facilitator feeling unempowered. Sharing the decision making empowers both the facilitator and the participants.

It is important for the facilitator to feel and convey the belief that the workshop design is a good one. He or she should understand the purpose and process of each activity as well as the goals of the overall workshop. If participants have objections to the agenda, try to understand the basis for their concerns and work to resolve them. You may have to change or reorder activities or the participants may have to adjust or change their expectations. Suggestions for specific changes should, where possible, come from group members. Before proceeding with any further activities, final agreement on the agenda should be reached by the entire group, including the facilitator. In negotiating and reaching agreement on the agenda, the facilitator has an excellent opportunity to demonstrate his or her belief that the workshop is a joint learning experience and to affirm that all participants are considered active and valuable in this process.

If your workshop includes more than one session, announcing the upcoming agenda at the end of the current session allows time for adjustments.

### The Process of Agenda Sharing

Although an agenda may be written on paper and handed out, it is easier to change if it is written in large print and posted where it will be visible throughout the session. The agenda should include the objectives for the workshop, the activities in the order in which they are expected to occur, and the time allotted for each activity. The time schedule for breaks and meals should also be included.

### An Example of a Workshop Agenda

**Objectives**

- To build a spirit of cooperation in the group and familiarize participants with the topics for the workshop
- To identify the many people who help children learn
- To develop a mechanism for determining how families' and teachers' values related to school affect home-school communication
- To identify characteristics parents prize in teachers
- To identify behaviors that foster parent-teacher rapport
- To share successful parent-teacher communication techniques
- To develop plans for applying concepts and techniques in the classroom

**Activities**

- Circulate and Sign** (15 minutes)
- Overview of Workshop** (15 minutes)
- Who Helps Children Learn?** (20 minutes)
- Break** (10 minutes)
- Values Line** (30 minutes)
- Who's the Best Teacher?** (35 minutes)
- Lunch break** (45 minutes)
- Sure, I Believe in Good Communication!** (40 minutes)
- Can This Relationship Be Saved?** (50 minutes)
- Sharing Successful Parent-Teacher Communication Techniques** (45 minutes)
- Wrap-up and Challenge** (25 minutes)

## References

### **Presentation of Self**

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## Process Skills

The following section focuses on skills and information basic to effective group leadership. This discussion of group development and dynamics will help you understand when intervention is necessary, how to give instructions and lead discussions, how to determine the most appropriate-sized group for an activity, as well as how to handle difficult behavior, all within an empowerment perspective. The basic techniques of group process apply to any group, regardless of its content or focus.

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### Facilitating Group Process

An underlying assumption of the Family Matters Project team in developing their materials was that group communication processes are as important in empowering people as the content of the materials. Group process is the ways things happen in a group, as opposed to the content discussed or taught. It is the how rather than the what of a group's activity. Group process consists of norms, communication processes, the facilitator's behavior, members' roles and behaviors, decision-making processes, cooperation and competition, stage of the group's development, and the degree of cohesion. Some of these elements are discussed in other sections of this handbook (see "Creating a Comfortable Atmosphere and Building Trust," p. 21; "Leading Group Discussions," p. 37; "Working in Small Groups," p. 40; "Handling Difficult Behaviors," p. 43). We strongly recommend that you read additional references to develop a more thorough understanding of group dynamics.

### General Issues and Concerns

The central concerns in facilitating group process in empowerment workshops are what to do or say when. Unfortunately, it is impossible to provide specific responses to the question "What do I do when . . . ?" Although a specific behavior or interaction in one group may appear to be identical to that in another, the underlying factors may be quite different and thus different interventions may be most effective. For example, one group might have a low level of participation because several members have had an unpleasant experience with a participant outside the group setting. In other groups the same behavior might occur because several members think things over very carefully before speaking, there is an established norm of nonparticipation, or participants do not understand or have interest in the topic being discussed. Depending on the group's stage of development, such behavior could result if individuals do not feel accepted or are trying to avoid conflict. Effective intervention would reflect an understanding of both the underlying reason for the behavior and the processes that would be the most empowering.

Two forms of group processes—member-facilitator interactions and member-member interactions—can empower participants (Jewell and Reitz 1981). In the most empowering member-facilitator relationship, members feel responsible for both the process and the content of the group. Members respect the facilitator's skills and knowledge but do not depend on the

facilitator to provide the "right answers," to approve of opinions, behaviors, or conclusions, or to make decisions for the group; there is a balance between member-member and member-facilitator communication. Members make suggestions about the direction of a discussion or activity and take responsibility for initiating breaks, providing refreshments, and offering support or encouragement.

In an empowered group, an equal balance of participation among members usually reflects their feelings of acceptance and willingness to share ideas, opinions, feelings, and experiences. Group cohesion occurs when members cooperate to achieve a common goal. When people feel empowered, they feel free to express viewpoints that conflict with those of others. Differing opinions are taken into consideration; no one position is perceived as "right."

The characteristics of an ideal group should be kept in mind to evaluate the group's progress and determine what interventions may be necessary. Achieving evidence of some of these characteristics some of the time is an accomplishment, especially for less experienced facilitators. Failure to achieve all of them, however, does not mean that the group is a failure. Understanding how groups work and their stages of development will help your group become fully empowered.

### Stages of Group Development

The stages or phases in a group's development have been defined by many researchers and observers. Although they do not agree on the details, most researchers agree that groups move through several stages.

There is general agreement that in the first stage of group development people are unsure about their relation to other members and to the facilitator and of their role in the group. Their behavior often reflects their anxiety about being accepted by other group members. Some people may be extremely cautious about sharing personal information or disclosing opinions. Others may dominate, overtalking or overpersonalizing. Often people appear to be dependent on the facilitator, looking to him or her for cues about how to behave. By demonstrating empowering behaviors during the earliest stage in a group's development, a facilitator can greatly ease people's anxieties and make them feel welcome (see "Creating a Comfortable Atmosphere and Building Trust," p. 21).

In the second stage in a group's development, conflict often arises over who will control or influence the group. Competition among members and challenges to the facilitator's authority are common during this stage. Challenges are not usually as strong in a structured setting such as a Family Matters educational workshop as in less structured settings such as therapy groups. A skilled facilitator can minimize challenges by giving as much power to participants as they are able to handle. If, however, a facilitator adheres rigidly to his or her power or authority, more challenges may arise in a structured group than in a less structured one. During this second stage it is important to diffuse competition among members. Such interventions as drawing out participants, actively supporting the belief that a variety of opinions are valid, making decisions agreeable to everyone, and generally creating an environment in which members feel they can be heard and have some influence on the group are effective.

The final stage in a group's development is often referred to as maturity. This phase is characterized by the behaviors described in the discussion of the fully empowered group.

## Member Behaviors

Throughout this handbook we have discussed the facilitator's role in leading empowerment groups. To be consistent with an empowerment perspective, the facilitator must understand and reinforce the role members play in contributing to and taking responsibility for a group's development.

Although member behaviors can be categorized in many ways, Benne and Sheats's (1948) classification system seems most helpful. They classified member behaviors into three categories: those that help the group accomplish its task; those that facilitate effective group process; and those directed at satisfying individual members' needs. The following discussion, based on Benne and Sheats's model, includes only those behaviors that facilitate group effectiveness. Difficult behaviors are discussed elsewhere in this book (see "Handling Difficult Behaviors" p. 43).

### Task-Facilitating Behaviors

- Initiating/contributing—offering suggestions about how to view or handle a problem.
- Information- or opinion-seeking—gathering factual or value-related information from the group.
- Information- or opinion-giving—offering factual or value-related information to the group.
- Elaborating—helping the group develop a theme or idea.
- Coordinating and orienting—summarizing individuals' or the group's position on an issue.
- Recording—writing down ideas, suggestions, positions, or decisions made by the group.

### Group-Building Behaviors

- Encouraging—recognizing the contributions of another group member and validating her or his opinion, feeling, or idea.
- Mediating—resolving tensions or disagreements among members by offering compromises, legitimizing the existence of disagreements or different opinions, or suggesting a creative solution that integrates the concerns of everyone involved.
- Gatekeeping—keeping communication open (inviting quieter members to speak or proposing procedures to give everyone equal "air time," for example).
- Process commenting—noting the group's process or way of dealing with a task.
- Following—agreeing with the group's decisions or views.

Both task-facilitating and group-building behaviors are important to the functioning of an effective group. Encouraging participants to behave in any of these positive ways will help them to view themselves as valuable group members.

## Group Decision-Making Methods

As with other elements of group process, decision-making methods can be categorized in several ways. The following is a summary of some of the most common methods:

*Decision by authority or decree.* Decisions are made essentially by one person by virtue of his or her expertise, status, or official position in the group, with or without the group's consent or input.

*Decision by majority or percentage vote.* This is the most common method for making decisions in American society. Usually members discuss relevant issues until a faction taking one position is large enough to obtain a predetermined percentage of the votes (usually 51 or 66 percent). Consequently, minority views are ultimately ignored.

*Decision by default.* This method could be called "decision by nondecision." A decision is made passively because the group is unable or ignores the need to make a decision. Often the decision is to do nothing. When decisions are made by default, no one can be held responsible for them.

*Decision by consensus.* These decisions are reached by developing creative alternatives that take into consideration the concerns of all group members and therefore are agreeable to all. Because the opinions, concerns, and suggestions of all members are recognized and given legitimacy, consensus decision making is generally the most empowering for individuals and for the group as a whole. Each person should be given an equal opportunity to influence the group. Participants also quickly recognize the need to act responsibly, taking into consideration the concerns of others.

Although consensus decision making is generally the most empowering, it is also the most time-consuming. It takes time to hear everyone's viewpoints and to arrive at a creative or integrative solution. When a group is under a great deal of time pressure, people are likely to feel uncomfortable taking up valuable time to express their opinions, resentful if others do, and inadequate if a satisfactory decision is not achieved within the given time frame. As a result, members who hold a minority view may give in only to allow the group to reach a decision or to avoid being the cause of conflict. In this case a comment such as the following is appropriate: "Joan, I thought you expressed a strong opinion against this issue a few moments ago. I'm not sure I understand why you are suddenly so willing to change your mind." When creative, integrative solutions are being generated, however, this situation is not likely to occur.

Some participants are likely to be more familiar with and therefore more likely to pursue decision-making methods other than consensus. For this reason, it is essential to understand the principles and rationale for using this method and to explain and model it for participants.

A facilitator should be aware of group process at all times. With this understanding, the facilitator can decide what measures to take to move the group forward. When a group is proceeding smoothly, group process issues may seem relatively unimportant. On the other hand, when a group gets stuck in a discussion, energy seems low, tasks are not getting accomplished, or the mood isn't what it could be, facilitators must be able to assess the situation. If the facilitator pays close attention to a group's development throughout the workshop, changes in energy level or mood won't come as a surprise.

To remain alert to a group's development, one must see, hear, and sense all that is going on, including communication patterns (Who is talking? To whom? How much are people talking?)

Who plays what roles?); the content of discussions; mood; and nonverbal cues (Are people sitting forward and listening? Are they wandering off to take a break? Are they turned toward or away from any one individual?). A facilitator who notices that participation and energy in the group is generally low, for example, might say, "Everyone's energy seems to have gradually decreased over the last half-hour. I wonder what's causing this or what suggestions you might have for changing it."

Although it is important for the facilitator to encourage a group's development, he or she should not feel solely responsible for its progress. If the facilitator takes too much responsibility, both he or she and the group will be less empowered than they could be and the facilitator will feel overwhelmed and isolated. Participants who take on some of these responsibilities or who recognize their own facilitative behaviors will feel competent to create effective group situations—an important skill in dealing with the institutions that affect their lives.

The group must not become so focused on process, however, that it fails to accomplish its tasks. It is a challenge for the facilitator to remain attentive to group process while encouraging participants to accept responsibility.

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## Giving Instructions

### The Purpose of Giving Instructions

Before beginning any workshop activity, participants should be given clear, concise instructions so that they will know what behavior is expected of them. Telling groups of four or five that they will have 10 to 15 minutes to discuss an issue and make a list to share with the whole group, for example, lets participants know that they may have to limit their comments and that the discussion will have to be focused if the task is to be accomplished in the allotted time. With this information, participants can monitor their own behavior.

### The Process of Giving Instructions

The following guidelines for giving instructions should prove helpful.

- Be certain of both the goal and the process of an activity.
- Tell participants the goal of each activity before the specifics.
- Give instructions in the form of a firm request or invitation rather than as a demand or order ("Could everyone please finish up in the next few minutes and rejoin the whole group in the circle" or "Now I would like you to . . ." not "Stop what you're doing and rejoin the whole group.")
- Give instructions when the group is still and quiet so everyone can hear. If participants are involved in an activity, it may be necessary to attract everyone's attention first. If participants are in small groups, it may be useful to give each group instructions separately.

- Give participants a general time frame for each activity (“Please take the next few minutes to talk with your partner about . . .”).
- Give only one or two instructions at a time. After they have been followed, give the next. A long list of instructions can be confusing and is difficult to remember.
- If participants need to respond to a series of questions, write them on newsprint or a blackboard where they can be easily seen.
- Don’t overdirect. Too much direction can make people feel like robots. Effective instructions give people the information they need to get a job done and the freedom to decide how to do it (“Find a partner and then together find a comfortable place to sit somewhere in the room.”).
- Don’t underdirect. People may interpret the objectives differently, which can lead to chaos and frustration. Asking participants to “discuss their reactions to a film,” for example, may be too general. Guiding questions are more helpful (“What was the most important message of this film?” or “What were the values of each family in this film? How were they expressed?”).
- Be sure the instructions are clear. Making a comment such as “Is everyone clear about what we’re going to do now?” and observing participants’ behavior (Are they following the instructions or are they standing around looking confused?) should help you accomplish this goal. If the instructions do not appear to be clear, repeat them.

### An Example of How to Give Instructions

The Family Matters materials include detailed instructions for each activity. They are intended to aid less experienced facilitators and facilitators who are unfamiliar with these materials. These instructions are meant only as guidelines. Facilitators are encouraged to adapt them to fit their personal styles.

The instructions below are from the Circulate and Sign warm-up exercise in the first session of the in-service program for teachers in the “Cooperative Communication between Home and School” module.

Walk around the semicircle, handing each teacher a *Circulate and Sign* worksheet. Offer pencils as needed. As you walk, say:

**For the next 10 minutes please circulate among the group, asking people questions that will enable you to fill in your sheet. For example, to complete question 1, you’ll ask everyone you meet whether he or she is a parent and a teacher. When you find someone who is, ask this person whether he or she has or has ever had a successful relationship with his or her child’s teacher. If the person answers “yes,” ask him or her the reasons the relationship is successful, and to sign your sheet. Then move on to another question. Please try to limit each conversation to about 2 minutes. Any questions? Please move away from the chairs and begin.**

## Leading Group Discussions

### The Purpose of Group Discussions

Unlike some discussions that are designed to lead a group to a specific conclusion, as is often the case in formal classroom settings, discussions in Family Matters workshops ideally encourage participants to reach their own conclusions; to value their own opinions, feelings, and experiences; and to respect others' contributions. In an empowering discussion, each individual contributes and is therefore a resource for others. An empowering discussion also accomplishes these goals:

- It fosters group unity as participants discover that others have had similar experiences or feelings.
- It encourages the development of a common wisdom among group members.
- It encourages members to get to know one another.
- It provides participants with more ideas and options than they might arrive at on their own.
- It gives participants an opportunity to view their own experiences from a variety of perspectives.

A group discussion is not a debate, an argument, or just a conversation. Nor is facilitating a discussion the same as leading a meeting. In group discussions, special attention needs to be given to the educational and empowerment goals.

The role of a facilitator in a group discussion is complex. It is his or her responsibility to clarify the purpose or goal of the discussion, to begin the discussion, to keep it relevant to the goals and flowing smoothly, and to model empowering behaviors. Specifically, the facilitator should help participants understand and relate to one another. When participants feel respected and that there are no "bosses" and they can speak openly, they are able to develop inner strength and support networks.

### The Process of Leading Discussions

Before beginning any group discussion, a facilitator should be clear about its purposes or goals. In empowerment workshops, one goal, regardless of the specific discussion topic, is to encourage participants to draw on and respect their own strengths and those of others.

In Family Matters workshops, the purpose of each activity is identified and questions are suggested to help the group focus on the topic or issue being considered. In addition, a "trigger" device is often included to get people talking: a film, case study, role play, minilecture, guided fantasy. Obviously these devices cannot be used successfully if the facilitator has not reviewed the materials thoroughly before meeting with the group.

One effective way to start a group discussion is by asking key questions. Questions designed to stimulate the exchange of ideas or experiences are more effective than those that suggest there are right and wrong answers. As you prepare questions, think about possible responses and be

prepared to accept and help the group accept a variety of answers. It is often helpful to write the questions on newsprint or a blackboard and to leave them posted throughout the discussion.

Telling participants the time allotted for a discussion helps them monitor themselves and the group. Appointing a volunteer time keeper is advisable because it shifts responsibility from the facilitator to the group and is therefore empowering. Time keepers are likely to need some specific direction, such as being told to warn the group when the time allotted for a discussion is almost up.

It is important that group discussions be presented as cooperative activities. Most group members will have participated in discussions in formal, schoollike settings and are likely to think of them as competitive activities in which there are "right" answers. For a discussion to be empowering, participants need to feel comfortable and respected (see "Creating a Comfortable Atmosphere and Building Trust," p. 21).

During discussions, pay close attention to all that is going on (see "Facilitating Group Process," p. 31). Discussions provide a good opportunity for improving group process.

Because the purpose of a discussion is to share ideas, it is not uncommon for people to disagree. People who have strong beliefs about an issue sometimes find disagreement threatening and may behave in ways that impede the group's progress. An understanding of difficult behavior should help you alleviate most of these problems (see "Handling Difficult Behavior," p. 43).

No materials are fail-safe and perfect for every group. For this reason, it is important to be prepared to use a variety of techniques to keep the discussion on target. The following techniques should prove useful.

### **Constructive Questioning**

Once a "trigger" device has been introduced, constructive questioning can be used to initiate a discussion. After reading a case study, for example, the facilitator might ask, "What happened? Why? What was the most important event?" Whether a lively discussion follows will depend on the effectiveness and relevance of the "trigger" device for participants and the skill of the facilitator in recognizing when they are absorbed, why they are absorbed, and what will stimulate them further. Encouraging participants to respond to each others' comments and asking personal questions such as "What do you think? Do the rest of you agree? Has anyone had a different/similar experience?" increases involvement and provides direction.

When used effectively, constructive questions are stimulating, focus on the goals of the discussion, and address the concerns and experiences of individual members. Ideally, they make people feel that their experiences are of value and that they are being encouraged to participate. In contrast, questions that are fired rapidly like interrogations make people uncomfortable and suggest that there is a "right" answer or conclusion they should recognize. Defensive behavior is likely to be the result.

### **Linking Comments**

Linking comments relate what one person has said to an idea or concept the group is exploring or to other comments. They are intended to recognize the contributions of individuals and to involve them in the group. A linking comment such as "Jane's experience sounds very similar to what you were concerned about earlier, Mike," for example, implies that Mike's remarks were valuable enough to remember and refer to again.

Linking comments encourage participants to talk to one another (“Sara’s feelings about her interactions with parents seem to be similar to yours, Ann. I wonder whether you two think your experiences are similar” or “Do you agree with that, Alfredo? Your experience seems to suggest a different conclusion.”). By encouraging interaction between group members, linking comments also help increase group cohesion.

### **Summary Statements and Lists**

Family Matters activities do not require that a group reach a joint conclusion or majority vote. Participants should, however, feel they are progressing toward a goal. Summary statements at the end of an activity or workshop session should provide reinforcement that progress has occurred.

Summary statements highlight major points, themes, or opinions that have been expressed during a discussion. They clarify what has been said up to that point so further discussion can be based on a common understanding of what has been accomplished. Summary statements also empower participants by reinforcing the value of their contributions and the idea that differing opinions or perspectives are valid and legitimate, that not just one opinion is “best.” Before asking participants to accept a summary statement, however, it is important to give them an opportunity to change it. A comment such as “Do you think I’ve described all of the positions on this issue or have I left some out?” is appropriate. Seeking group consensus empowers participants by encouraging them to agree, disagree, or make changes. The facilitator also feels empowered knowing that this process has led the group to agree about its perceptions of its accomplishments.

Asking a member of the group to make the summary statement is an excellent way to share responsibility with participants and give them an opportunity to try out a new skill. Allocating this responsibility also gives the facilitator a chance to hear what participants have gained from a discussion and to determine what interventions, if any, might be useful. People feel most comfortable about trying out this role if they are asked to volunteer at the beginning of a discussion so they can prepare their presentation.

Although summary statements are often made at the end of a discussion, they are also effective at any point if a group seems stuck or ideas are being repeated. A summary statement can provide a sense of progress, help a group decide how to proceed, or suggest alternatives that have been ignored.

Keeping a list of points made during a discussion is another way to provide a group with a sense of progress and to recognize participants’ contributions. Checking items that are mentioned more than once is recommended because it points out issues on which group members agree and share concerns. You might want to ask the group to refine the list for the purpose of summarizing participants’ opinions, making a general point, or linking the discussion to further work. As with other workshop activities, list making should be used for a clear purpose.

### **Ending and Making Transitions**

The decision to end a discussion should be based on two major considerations: the time available and the group’s energy and involvement. If most group members seem involved, offering new ideas, opinions, or experiences, it may be useful to extend the discussion beyond the allotted time. On the other hand, if a discussion has “fallen flat” or only one or two members are involved, it may be appropriate to end it even if more time has been allotted. Reading a group’s energy level

by observing the number of people who are participating and body language (Are participants sitting up and leaning forward? Do they look interested?) is valuable in making this decision.

Transition statements, which link a discussion to the next activity or relate it to the goals of the workshop session or series, help participants understand the organization and flow of the workshop and prepare for the next part of the program. The following comment is an example of such a statement: "This discussion has generated a lot of good ideas which will certainly be helpful in improving home-school communication. From here we're going to move on to a discussion of another aspect of home-school interactions."

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## Working in Small Groups

### The Purpose of Working in Small Groups

From an empowerment perspective there are several advantages to working in small groups—dyads (pairs), triads (groups of three), or subgroups (usually ranging in size from three to half the group)—especially if your total enrollment is greater than seven or eight.

- In a small group each person has more "air time," thus encouraging participation and involvement, especially if people are shy.
- Because each person has more "air time," each has an opportunity to develop and express her or his own views and to hear responses to them.
- Issues can be examined in depth.
- Because the facilitator is not the focal point of the discussion, there is plenty of opportunity for member-member interaction.
- Small-group activities provide the facilitator with another situation in which to watch members interacting, which may provide a new perspective on some individuals.
- Participants hear a variety of alternatives for solving problems as each group reports on its conclusions.
- Because everyone generally needs to participate to complete the task, small-group activities encourage cooperation.

### The Process of Working in Small Groups

Like any learning situation, small groups are appropriate for some activities and not for others. For a small-group activity to be empowering, participants need to be able to perform the required tasks successfully without direct guidance or supervision. An exercise that requires an observer or guide, for instance, will not work well if the person taking on that role does not know what to look for or cannot tell others what he or she observed.

Once the decision has been made to divide into small groups, the next step is to help form appropriate groups. To encourage participants to get to know one another, you may want to ask them to team up with people they do not know well. If it is desirable to have a particular mix in each group, making a comment such as "Please be sure there are at least two single parents in each group" or assigning people (to ensure that there is a good reader, for example) will help you achieve your goal. Because it encourages people to act on their own behalf, asking participants to group themselves is generally more effective (although perhaps somewhat less efficient) than making assignments. On the other hand, it is unempowering for a participant to have to identify him- or herself as a poor reader, for example. As always, which strategy to use will depend on the tasks to be performed and the mix of participants.

Once the groups have formed, you may want to ask volunteers to be discussion leaders and recorders. The discussion leader's role is to keep the group focused on its task. The recorder takes notes and reports back to the larger group. Because these roles require both speaking and writing skills, the roles should be explained and volunteers chosen to fill them. By observing participants in a variety of activities, the facilitator will become familiar with their skills and abilities. This knowledge will help in assigning roles and in determining the support they will need.

After recorders and discussion leaders have been selected, the facilitator can take the following steps to help the small groups function well:

- Give clear directions about what the groups are to do and how much time they have to do it.
- Explain exactly what information the recorder will share with the larger group.
- Let the groups know what your role will be while they are working ("I will be circulating among the groups to help out. Let me know if you have questions or need my help.").
- Circulate to make sure the groups are proceeding with their tasks, especially if people have never worked in small groups before.

### Working with Dyads

Dyads are effective if the group is working on a complex problem or issue such as how to get support from a relative, friend, or institution. They are also effective when multiple relationships, events, problems, or issues are being explored, as in a discussion of a film or case study, and for sharing personal experiences. The steps above should be used.

### Working with Triads

Triads are effective for practicing communication and problem-solving techniques or doing mini-role plays. If the task is to work out a way for a parent to establish positive contact with her child, for example, one person could be the parent, one the child, and one the observer. The first two people could role-play for 1 or 2 minutes, after which the observer could comment positively and then make suggestions about what could be said or done to improve communication. Encouraging participants to alternate roles is recommended because it helps them understand a problem from several perspectives.

Triads are also useful in solving a problem such as arranging child care when both parents work outside the home. In this case the three people could work on solving the problem and then present their conclusions to the entire group. Triads have an advantage over groups of five or six because they encourage greater interaction among participants. Because the group is small, people who are shy often feel more comfortable expressing themselves.

### An Example of Working in Small Groups

Small-group activities are incorporated into many Family Matters sessions. In session 1 of "The Employed Parent" series, for example, small groups are used if the group is larger than eight to make the processing of material easier. In session 3 of the series, small groups are asked to complete a task and to solve a problem. In this particular exercise participants are divided into two groups to complete two tasks. They are given the following directions:

Divide the group in half and assign one list to each. Ask the two groups to rank the items on the lists in their order of importance to them. Indicate that they will have about 5 minutes to do this task.

Ask the group to discuss, in the order they ranked the items, how they have dealt with or would advise others to deal with the issues or problems on the list. Indicate that they will have about 25 minutes for this part of the activity and that they should not expect to discuss every item on their lists.

Ask:

**Are there any questions?**

As the groups are working, circulate to facilitate discussion, answer questions, and keep them on track.

After 25 minutes, reconvene in the large group.

Say:

**Who would like to tell us one issue or problem his or her group worked on?**

Encourage the entire group to participate in this discussion.

**Key discussion questions**

Which issue are you going to talk about?

How did members of your group feel parents should deal with this problem or issue?

After about 5 or 10 minutes, move on to the other groups. Follow the same procedure.

## Handling Difficult Behavior

A recurring issue for both experienced and inexperienced workshop facilitators is how to deal effectively with participants whose behavior disrupts the group. Such behavior creates a problem when it excludes or fails to recognize the strengths of others, leads to the actor feeling inadequate, or implies inequality among members. In handling disruptive behavior, it is essential to respect the rights of as many participants as possible. Otherwise, group energy may be lowered and you and the participants may feel helpless.

It is often tempting to categorize an individual on the basis of one behavior. It is more effective, however, to observe the whole person and to look for her or his strengths. Particular circumstances of the workshop, group, or activity may be generating the behavior. A person who never talks during a large-group activity, for example, may talk readily in a smaller group. Always consider a variety of possible reasons for a person's behavior and do not assume that there is a single cause.

The following sections describe a few of the most common behaviors requiring a facilitator's attention and intervention, some possible causes, their effect on the group, and some suggestions for dealing with them.

### The Overtalker

At the beginning of a session or workshop, participants may be relieved if one person is willing to dominate the discussion; his or her volunteering may even reduce their anxieties about talking. If he or she continues to dominate discussion, however, members will feel resentful because they are being prevented from expressing their thoughts, opinions, or feelings. Because they are unable to stop the behavior and therefore to control their environment, they also are likely to feel helpless and unskilled. Eventually, the overtalker will begin to sense other people's resentment and feel distressed.

Overtalking may result from any of a number of causes: nervousness, a need to be the center of attention, fear of being left out, a need to control a situation. It is not the facilitator's job to determine the source of the behavior or to provide therapy, but he or she should be aware of possible causes.

It is crucial in managing any disruptive behavior to avoid personal attack. Overtalking is sometimes best handled by asking the person to finish quickly so other people can speak. Comments such as "Let's hear from some of you who haven't had a chance to say much today" or "Since you've already shared some of your experiences with us tonight, Bill, let's see if anyone else would like to do some sharing" or "Would anyone who hasn't spoken much today like to relate his or her experience?" are all appropriate. If none of these approaches works, let the person know during a break that her or his willingness to participate is appreciated but that you are concerned because other people are not getting enough chance to contribute. Explain that because time is a problem and it is important to hear from as many people as possible, it would be helpful to keep comments brief or give others an opportunity to respond before jumping in. If the person seems unaware of the problem, you might want to determine a way to alert him or her to the behavior. The goal is to give the overtalker both support and information so that she or he can eventually manage the behavior.

## The Undertalker

Although undertalkers may be a problem for the group, their behavior is not always problematic. Some people talk very little but make a valuable contribution when they do. Undertalkers are a problem only when they say so little that they don't get support from the group or feel they belong or their behavior contributes to an atmosphere of inequality. The undertalker may think his or her views or feelings are not valuable to the group, and other group members may feel they are taking risks and making themselves vulnerable while silent members are "safe."

The behavior can be rooted in a fear of looking foolish, low self-esteem, insecurity about verbal skills, or a history of being socialized to listen rather than talk. Again, the facilitator's job is not to psychoanalyze but to be aware of possible reasons for the behavior. It is useful to be alert to whether the behavior occurs in all situations or only during whole-group discussions.

Calling on silent members to encourage their participation removes the decision to talk from their control. On the other hand, they don't have to fight for space. Some quieter members feel more comfortable talking during activities that require their participation. Activities for groups of two or three in which everyone needs to talk to complete the task and in which everyone shares the small-group experience with the larger group also encourage nontalkers. When a usually silent member does talk, support from the facilitator ("That's a good point, Jane. Thanks for your input.") can encourage the person to speak again. You might want to speak to a nonparticipant privately to tell her or him that you miss her or his input and ask whether something about the group makes it difficult to talk or whether nontalking is a usual behavior. Sometimes a brief, nonthreatening discussion of the behavior encourages participation.

## People with Distracting Personal Needs

Sometimes people in a group relate information that is inappropriately personal such as intimate details about their marital relationship. Although such behavior is habitual for some people, it may also occur because an activity (a guided fantasy, for example) or workshop experience has put them in touch with emotionally charged feelings. Such overly personal sharing can make group members feel helpless if they don't know how to respond, if they don't want to respond for fear of encouraging the behavior, or if responding might change the dynamics of the group. In addition, after revealing such intimacies, people sometimes feel embarrassed or vulnerable, especially if they recognize that such behavior is not a group norm.

Because workshops are not generally the appropriate forum for working through highly emotional or personal issues, it is important to curtail such behavior before it becomes a problem. A comment such as the following is appropriate: "I can see you have a lot of feelings about this situation; however, I don't think the group has enough time to deal with them satisfactorily. Perhaps you and I could talk about it during the break (or after the session)." Encouraging the person to express some of her or his emotions to you in private and, if necessary, making a referral will benefit both the participant and the group.

## The Angry Participant

Occasionally a participant will become angry or direct aggressive remarks to the facilitator. A good way to deal with this distressing situation is to recognize the anger ("I can see that my behavior has made you angry") and then determine whether other group members share his or her

feelings. If they do not share the feelings, talk with the angry member alone to try to work things out. Do not let the group turn on the person; neither the angry participant nor the other group members will feel good afterward. On the other hand, if other members have similar feelings, it is important to listen and to try to understand. If the situation is handled well, it can be a constructive experience for everyone.

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# Techniques

Experienced facilitators will undoubtedly be familiar with the “how to’s” of many of the teaching techniques discussed in this section because they are often used in workshop settings. This section includes not only the “how to’s” but also how these techniques can be used to further the empowerment process. It therefore has much to offer all facilitators.

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## Case Studies and Stories

### The Purpose of Using Case Studies and Stories

Case studies and stories can describe real or fictional individuals, situations, or events and can be written in the first or third person. They are valuable “trigger” devices that provide a focal point for encouraging individuals to discuss personal issues and problems without feeling forced to reveal more about themselves than they wish. Participants can be asked to apply theories or concepts that they have learned in the workshops; to discuss questions such as “What would you do if you were this person?”; to identify issues relevant to a particular situation; or, if more than one case study or story is presented, to make comparisons.

Case studies and stories are valuable in stimulating discussion and promoting a sense of equality because all participants have the same amount of information. And because participants have less emotional investment in a case study or story than they have in their own experiences, these devices provide a good medium for the development and practice of analytic skills.

### The Process of Using Case Studies and Stories

The following guidelines are suggested for using case studies and stories:

- Choose case studies or stories that are directly related to the topic under consideration.
- Be thoroughly familiar with the case study or story before presenting it so you’ll feel more confident in discussing it.
- Provide each member of the group with a copy of the case study or story.
- Read or have a participant read the case study to the group or tape it and play it back while participants follow on their copies.
- Prepare questions or activities ahead of time and post them on the blackboard or on newsprint so they will be readily visible or provide handouts.
- Demonstrate the use of case studies and stories as learning tools by reading and discussing one case study with the whole group. If participants then work with case studies in small groups, they will have a better sense of how to direct themselves and therefore will not need the facilitator’s help.

## An Example of a Case Study

The following case study, with questions and the procedure for answering them, is taken from the "Empowering Families" module.

### Instructions for Facilitators

1. Welcome people as they arrive.
2. When it is time to begin, take a seat, preferably between two participants. Review this week's agenda.
3. Divide the group into clusters of four to six people each and ask each cluster to select a recorder. Be sure each recorder has paper and a pencil.
4. Give each cluster a copy of the *T. Family Case Study* and then read it aloud.

### T. Family Case Study

Marty and Helen T. have been married for eight years and have two children, Eric, 6, and Kristin, 4. The family rents the first floor of a three-family duplex in a neighborhood they like because "there are lots of other children nearby." "Renting is tough," says Marty. "We've moved seven times in the past seven years."

Eighteen months ago, fearing that her husband would be laid off again, Helen decided to look for work outside the home. She was pleased when she got a waitressing job at a nearby fast-food restaurant.

Marty and Helen worked different shifts, so one would always be home with Eric and Kristin. "When Helen works it helps the family out a lot because we definitely need the money. But at the same time, we miss her a lot. It's an added stress I could do without," Marty says.

Eric attends kindergarten at a neighborhood public school. Both parents stress the importance of a good education for their children. "I want so much for my children," says Marty. "I want them to be happy in what they do in their lives and not forced into a situation like I was. Due to the form of education that I got, just sort of shuffling through the school system, I ended up working in a place that I desperately wanted to avoid, which is a factory. I want so much more for my son and daughter!"

Helen stresses the importance of communicating with the children. "You can't just give them one-liners like 'I love you' or 'School is important.' You have to play with them, talk with them, know how they're doing in school. You have to keep an insight into what's going on."

The T. family has decided that because there appears to be little hope of Marty being recalled to work at the factory and Helen's work is stressful and not very rewarding, they will move to another state where they can be close to Helen's family. Marty plans to enroll in a computer course near their new home.

5. Ask the clusters to spend about 15 minutes brainstorming sources of information and referral that might be useful to the family in the case study.
6. After about 15 minutes, reconvene in the large group. Label a sheet of newsprint "Information and Referral" or use the blackboard. Then ask each recorder to read the list of sources of information and referral his or her cluster compiled. List them as they are mentioned.
7. Ask the group for its thoughts on the difference between providing information and making a referral. The following points should be included:
  - Home visitors often provide families with information, which they may or may not choose to personalize or interpret. Although the home visitor gives up some control in making a referral, he or she may empower family members by providing them with several options. Referral can also have an unempowering effect if a family is mistreated by an agency or organization to which it is referred.

- Information sources and agencies or organizations that take referrals have biases or points of view. It is much easier to get information from agencies than it is to choose from among them for a referral.
- Information and referral are often separate steps in the same process. Once a parent has information about options, for example, he or she may then seek appropriate referral.
- Identifying an appropriate referral agency or organization is only the first step in a long process for the home visitor/neighborhood worker. He or she must still identify the right person to contact; decide with the client who should make the initial contact; and monitor to ensure that the relationship between agency or organization and parent or family is strengthening the parent's or family's capacity for self-reliance.

## Role Playing

### The Purpose of Role Playing

In a role play, people act out an imaginary situation in which they express their own feelings and reactions rather than the stereotypic reactions of someone playing a role. Role plays are empowering because they encourage participants to draw directly on their own experiences and observations and to reach their own conclusions without feeling they have to reveal much of themselves. The common experience of the role play offers a broader basis for analysis and discussion than provided by a facilitator reading a description of an interaction or situation.

Role plays are not intended to be entertaining, although they should be involving and interesting. Rather, they are meant to enhance participants' understanding of situations and to encourage them to view their own and others' experiences from a variety of perspectives.

Role playing is valuable for several other reasons:

- Because there is less fear of failure and negative consequences than in "real" situations, it provides a "safe" setting in which to try out new behaviors.
- Because role playing lets participants "walk in someone else's shoes," it leads to enhanced understanding of other people's behavior.
- Participants can see how different people handle a situation and can respond to each approach.

Role playing is appropriate under the following circumstances:

- The facilitator wishes to give the group a common point of reference from which to discuss an experience or problem. A facilitator might say, for example, "It would

be helpful if you would show us how the teacher acted or responded when you visited the classroom. If you'll be the teacher, I'll be you."

- Participants would benefit from "wearing another person's shoes."
- Acting out a situation such as a job interview would help participants prepare for it.

### The Process of Using Role Plays

Role plays can take several forms. Each member of the group can portray a different character, or some members can be actors and others observers. Observers are valuable because they see the interaction from an emotionally detached vantage point and therefore have an opportunity to understand the situation differently than the actors can. The observer role is excellent for people who are shy or uncomfortable "onstage."

Role plays can be done by the whole group or in small clusters, each enacting the same situation; the choice is dependent on the reasons for using the technique, the situation to be enacted, and the characteristics and size of the group. Following small-group role plays, participants may wish to compare their experiences with the other groups.

Whole-group role plays work best when group members feel comfortable with and trust one another. Therefore whole-group role playing may not work well in the early stages of a group, when members may feel uncomfortable performing in front of one another and concerned about acting "correctly" or being evaluated negatively.

The following steps should help ensure that your role plays run smoothly:

- Emphasize that there is no right or wrong behavior in a role play; everyone is acting. Remind participants that the goal is to enact a situation and to talk about the results.
- State the goal and reason for using the technique. ("By acting out this situation, you will have the opportunity to observe and express some of the behaviors we have been discussing.")
- Describe the situation to be enacted clearly and in detail.
- Never force someone into assuming a role.
- Give the players written or verbal descriptions of their roles and provide observers with specific tasks such as watching the verbal and nonverbal responses of particular characters.
- Begin the action.
- Stop the action when enough has happened to stimulate discussion, the situation has been adequately illustrated, or the action has become dull or repetitive. When role plays become boring, their impact is diminished.
- Debrief the actors and observers. This process reinforces the value of learning from one's own and others' experiences. Ask each actor to describe his or her experience, response to particular behaviors, and feelings. Asking actors for their

feelings *before* discussing the role play with the group lessens their anxiety about criticism. Ask the observers to report on what happened and encourage them to ask questions. Encourage the group members to discuss what happened in the role play, why it turned out the way it did, and whether they are satisfied with the way it turned out. This last question is particularly useful because it encourages participants to reach their own conclusions about what constitutes a desirable outcome.

### An Example of a Group Role Play

The following example of a group role play is from the "Cooperative Communication between Home and School" module of the Family Matters materials. It is used in the two-day in-service program for teachers.

**To begin, please divide into three groups. Please move your chairs away from other groups.**

Once the three groups have formed, hand each a different *Put Yourself in Her Shoes Case Study*. Say:

**Please select one person to read your case study aloud. After that, role-play your case study. Because role playing is hard for some of us, we'll do a group role play to make it easier. In this role play the major role in your case study will be filled by someone in your group, but other members of your group should be prepared to step in if the first role player asks for assistance.**

**Let's spend 5 minutes reading and discussing the case studies, another 5 minutes preparing for the role play, and 5 minutes acting out an imaginary scene between the family and the school. After the role play, spend a few minutes discussing the questions at the end of the case study. Any questions?**

After 5 minutes, announce that the groups should begin to plan their role plays.

## Brainstorming

### The Purpose of Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a technique for quickly generating and recording alternative ideas or actions. It often results in creative solutions to problems or answers to questions because it draws on the resources of all group members. Because it is fast-paced, fun, and productive, it usually increases the energy level of a group. Used according to the following rules, brainstorming is empowering for individual participants, for the facilitator, and for the group as a whole.

- Say anything that comes to mind.
- Do not discuss or evaluate ideas or suggestions.
- It's okay to repeat.
- Keep a record of all ideas.
- Feel free to add to or piggyback on other ideas.
- Silence is okay. Silence may indicate that people are thinking and that new ideas will be forthcoming.

Brainstorming contributes to the empowerment of group members because it gives everyone a chance to participate in a nonevaluative problem-solving process. Encouraging participants to say anything that comes to mind also frees them to be creative and spontaneous, which makes the activity fun and results in a longer list of alternatives. The absence of evaluation and discussion encourages less confident members to participate.

Brainstorming gives group members a sense of accomplishment as the list of alternatives evolves and positive reinforcement as others piggyback on their ideas. Because no one idea is viewed as better or worse than any other, all group members are equal, and the knowledge, resources, experiences, and creativity of all is affirmed.

Brainstorming puts the responsibility for generating ideas in the hands of the group rather than the facilitator. In addition, the facilitator finds it rewarding to see the group involved in an activity with a concrete and useful end product.

The list of alternatives generated in a brainstorming session provides visible evidence of the group's collective creative ability. The group's strength is further reinforced when alternatives are selected for implementation. Activities such as brainstorming that effectively and visibly draw on the resources of all group members and result in a tangible and usable product dramatically demonstrate that increased power can be gained by being a member of an effective group.

Because brainstorming is fast-paced and enjoyable, it is a good activity to use when a group needs a change of pace. It is also valuable when a group lacks a sense of accomplishment or members need to feel their group is effective. Finally, brainstorming is highly effective for problem solving.

## The Process of Brainstorming

Brainstorming can be done in large groups or small clusters. In either case, a blackboard and chalk or newsprint and markers should be available to record ideas. Choose someone who can write quickly and legibly to serve as recorder. This job makes a person feel responsible and valued and therefore has an empowering effect. Recorders are particularly necessary when many small groups are brainstorming. For a large group, the facilitator might take on this role if he or she is comfortable with it and has good recording skills.

Regardless of whether a group has done brainstorming before, it is a good idea to begin with a review of the rules; to help the group remember, the guidelines can be written out and posted somewhere in the room where they can be seen and referred to throughout the activity. Reminding

participants of the rules will assure them that they can act spontaneously without fear of evaluation.

Before beginning any brainstorming session, explain the question to be addressed. The session might focus on why an event occurred, how to solve a problem or implement an idea, or predicting possible outcomes of an action.

Brainstorming sessions generally last as long as the group is generating new ideas. A drop in energy often indicates that it's time for the activity to end.

Brainstorming is usually followed by a short session in which redundant items are eliminated, ideas are combined and discussed, priorities are established, and one or more of the alternatives are selected for implementation.

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## Guided Fantasy

### The Purpose of a Guided Fantasy

In a guided fantasy group members are asked to recall or imagine an event, experience, or place. Parents might be asked to imagine a typical day at their child's school, for example. A guided fantasy usually begins with the facilitator asking participants to close their eyes and imagine a situation. They are then asked to focus on the specifics of the situation. At the close of the guided fantasy the facilitator helps participants relate their fantasies to issues and concerns of the group. The technique fosters a sense of equality among group members by reinforcing the idea that every person can make legitimate and useful contributions, that no one individual's experiences are more valid than anyone else's, and that people can make valuable contributions even about situations they have not experienced. Finally, in sharing their fantasies with each other, participants learn that working as a group or "community" increases their own knowledge.

### The Process of a Guided Fantasy

People experiencing their first guided fantasy are sometimes surprised by the intense feelings it evokes. For this reason, it is a potentially more powerful tool than such workshop techniques as brainstorming or discussions. Occasionally, feelings arise that the facilitator and participants are unprepared to deal with. To keep the guided fantasy experience within the parameters of an educational workshop, the following guidelines are recommended:

- Explain the purpose of using the technique and its relation to the topic under discussion.
- Use the technique only after trust has developed in the group. Participants need to feel free to let their imaginations roam.
- Tell participants that they can sit out the activity or open their eyes at any time.

- A guided fantasy should not last longer than three or four minutes—enough time to recall past experiences but not enough to dwell on any one incident.
- Consider using a tape-recorded guided fantasy. Listening to the tape ahead of time will help you anticipate the participants' reactions. Using a tape also gives the facilitator an opportunity to observe participants during the exercise.
- Read or play the script slowly so participants have enough time to picture specific events.

If a participant has experienced painful feelings during a guided fantasy, he or she may be unusually silent during the follow-up discussion or express intense emotions. The facilitator should respond to this situation immediately for several reasons. The participant may feel embarrassed or vulnerable later, especially if intensely emotional or personal disclosures are not a norm for the group, and other participants may feel uncomfortable because they do not know how to respond. Educational workshops are not therapy groups and therefore are not the appropriate setting for working through intense emotions. On the other hand, people who are experiencing strong feelings need recognition and support. An alert facilitator can recognize a participant's response and prevent inappropriate sharing by saying, "I can see that this activity has caused you some painful feelings. Perhaps we can talk about it during the break or after the session when there will be more time." Such a response acknowledges that the feelings are valid and important and offers the participant an opportunity to discuss them at an appropriate time. By actively listening during the break, the facilitator will encourage the person to tell as much as she or he wants to about the experience.

### An Example of a Guided Fantasy

The following script for a guided fantasy is from the "Cooperative Communication between Home and School" workshop materials for parents.

Let's imagine that it is possible to have a perfect classroom situation. Choose one of your children to focus on while we fantasize. Please get in a comfortable position, close your eyes, and relax.

PAUSE

Keeping in mind what you want for this child, imagine that you are visiting this ideal classroom. How many children are in the class? Are they all the same age or are children of more than one grade level learning together?

PAUSE

What learning projects or lessons is your child involved in?

PAUSE

What teaching methods is the teacher using? What is the teacher's greatest skill? What personal qualities does the teacher have? What is most important to this teacher? Who else is in the classroom besides the teacher and the students?

PAUSE

What does the classroom look like? What is the first thing you notice when you enter this classroom?

PAUSE

Describe the tone or feeling of this classroom.

PAUSE

Now let's go outside the classroom to the rest of the school. Is the school large or small? Where is it located? What other classes or services does it offer students? What role do parents play in this school?

PAUSE

What do you notice as you enter the front door of the school? How does this school communicate with students' families? How does this school interact with the rest of the community?

LONG PAUSE

We're nearly ready to reenter the adult world of the present.

PAUSE

When you're ready, please open your eyes.

## Minilectures

### The Purpose of Minilectures

A minilecture is a brief talk (usually not more than 10 minutes) by the facilitator to impart a common understanding of a concept, provide a shared framework for discussion, or offer factual information. Because it is a relatively passive learning activity, a lecture is not usually considered empowering. In addition, there is an implicit difference in expertise and therefore equality between the lecturer and her or his audience. On the other hand, a minilecture that comes at the right point in the overall set of learning activities, provides relevant information, and is delivered in an open, informal manner can be both useful and empowering.

Minilectures are most valuable if they occur when group members are prepared to receive and make use of the information. Giving a minilecture on five ways to empower families when participants do not know what empowerment is would not be useful. On the other hand, a minilecture on the definition of empowerment given early in a series of workshops entitled

“Empowering Families” could be both useful and empowering because it would provide a common basis of understanding and make explicit the assumptions and goals underlying the workshop series. In conveying this information, the facilitator reduces some of the distance between him- or herself and the participants. This distance can be further decreased by encouraging group members to ask questions about the material and challenge what has been said. A remark such as “What do you think about this idea? Does it seem to fit your experiences?” will encourage discussion.

In addition to content, one’s style in giving a minilecture can either add to or detract from its empowering potential. Confidence and a genuine effort to involve participants in the content of your talk help convey a sense of equality. If you are well-versed on the topic of your material, you will convey a positive, confident attitude and appear prepared for questions. Giving a minilecture from memory usually indicates familiarity and comfort with the subject.

Participant involvement also helps empower the facilitator. Delivering a presentation to a blank-faced, silent audience can be very discouraging and leave the facilitator feeling isolated and powerless. Involving participants by asking questions or using relevant examples will sustain their interest, which will reinforce the facilitator’s feeling that he or she is presenting valuable information.

Limiting a lecture to two to three minutes mitigates some of the potentially unempowering aspects of traditional lectures. Participants are not likely to become bored and can ask questions before they are overwhelmed with information, and the facilitator has only a small amount of material to convey. To be most effective, a minilecture should make a few points clearly and emphatically so that they can be understood by all members of the audience.

### The Process of Giving a Minilecture

Before giving a minilecture, take the time to become thoroughly familiar with the material. Rehearsing the presentation to be sure it is clear and concise is helpful. Try to illustrate points with examples that are relevant to your group. If participants feel the talk applies to them, they are more likely to become involved.

A relaxed and comfortable atmosphere is best for giving a minilecture. Although all group members should be able to see the speaker, it is not necessary to stand behind a podium or lectern because doing so accentuates the distance between the speaker and the audience. In a large group, the facilitator may need to stand to be heard; in a small group, sitting on the same level as the participants creates a sense of equality.

Visual aids are often helpful for keeping participants’ interest and for emphasizing the main points in a talk. They can be as simple as key words or phrases on a blackboard or a diagram or picture.

Stopping at a few points and asking whether people understand or have questions and following up the lecture with a question and answer session facilitates a give and take between the lecturer and the audience and is a good way to find out whether you got your main points across. Following the question and answer session it may be useful to have the whole group or small groups discuss how the minilecture relates to their own experiences or to include an activity that accomplishes this goal.

## An Example of a Minilecture

The minilecture reproduced below comes from the first session of the "Empowering Families" module of the Family Matters materials. Although minilectures are written out in full in the facilitator's manuals, we recommend that you use your own words and style for such presentations.

### Minilecture: What Is Empowerment? (25 minutes)

The purpose of this activity is to familiarize participants with the empowerment process. Although a minilecture is not necessarily the most empowering teaching technique, it is suggested here because a great deal of information must be conveyed. Ideally, the atmosphere will be relaxed and ample opportunity allowed for give and take among participants and the facilitator.

#### Instructions for Facilitators

1. Introduce the exercise by reading the following two paragraphs aloud to the group. At one or two points, stop and ask: Do your experiences support this idea? Can you give an example?

**Empowerment**—what a positive word. It is a process of encouraging people to take power. Empowerment is a process that involves change—change in the attitudes and behaviors of an individual. The process may be initiated by an individual, but more often it is set in motion by outside forces. These forces make it possible for the person to change by providing him or her with opportunities to develop a new, more positive view of him- or herself. As a result of this change, the person feels that he or she has greater control or influence over situations, greater responsibility, and eventually greater power. Power without responsibility is undemocratic. Therefore, empowerment is designed to facilitate responsible action.

How can parents and families be empowered to take action for themselves and their children? Empowerment gives these important adults unconditional, positive recognition for their parenting role. They gain increased confidence as parents and, as a result, change their attitudes and behavior. For example, a parent might become more open to the ideas of others, able to express dissatisfaction with his or her behavior or situation, or able to initiate or expand social relationships or ask for help. If the people in the social world of the parent react to these changes nonjudgmentally and positively, the parent is likely to become more competent as a parent. A father might become more involved in the care of his child and more or less reliant on relatives and friends for assistance in child care or for advice on childrearing. He might become more careful in selecting a school or teacher for his child or even change his working hours or job to make his life as both parent and worker easier.

2. Pass out the handout *Key Words and Phrases for Empowerment* to each participant. Then reread the description slowly and ask whether there are questions. The key words and phrases on the handout are underlined in the description and discussed below. Encourage group members to write on the sheets if they wish.

**Process:** A process takes *time*. It cannot be accomplished overnight.

**Change:** Change usually can be recognized by the parent and used as a measure of progress. The parent may be the only one who realizes that change has taken place and needs to be able to express such knowledge.

**Outside forces:** Some dependence on forces outside the person—relatives, friends, neighbors, organizations, agencies, newspapers, radio, TV, schools, church, employers—is healthy. To understand a person's behavior, one needs to understand how he or she is affected by these forces.

**New, more positive view of self:** To participate in many American social programs, a parent must prove that he or she cannot adequately support or take care of his or her family. Consequently, the parent's confidence is lowered at the time when he or she needs it most. Empowerment is an attempt to reverse this process: to build confidence to stimulate constructive action.

**Control or influence plus responsibility equals power:** It is very difficult for people to accept responsibility for something they cannot control. A worker feels responsible for the quality of his or her work when given some control over it. The worker is likely to feel less comfortable when responsible for work done by others, especially if she or he has no control over them. Similarly, parents can be expected to be responsible for the support and management of their families only if they can control at least some aspects of their lives as parents.

**Unconditional, positive recognition:** If parents are to take responsibility for the development of their children, they need to feel that parenting is important and that they are important for doing the job. One of the main tasks of a good support program is to find as many ways as possible to tell parents that they are appreciated by the community for the very important job they are doing. Such a message must be unconditional—without *ifs*, *ands*, or *buts*. Unconditional recognition gives parents the support that leads to changes in attitudes and skills.

**Parenting:** Parenting is a multifaceted job involving the social and cognitive activities that the parent provides for the child and the limits she or he places upon the child's behavior. Parents act as advocates and coordinators for their children by establishing a good relationship with their school, obtaining medical care, introducing other children in the neighborhood, and so on. The empowerment approach to support programming is concerned with both the activities and the skills of being a parent.

**Social world of the parent:** Parents have to understand and work successfully with many different people, including other family members, friends, their child's teacher and principal, their boss and coworkers, and people in organizations.

**Competent:** It will become clear as this program goes along that it is based on the idea that parents are the best judges of their own competence. Parents' sense of competence is likely to increase as they gain access to new sources of information and ideas. One purpose of an empowering support program is to provide access to such information sources positively and nonjudgmentally.

3. Lead a brief discussion about the empowerment process.

**Key discussion questions**

Do these ideas about empowerment fit your experiences?

4. End the activity by summarizing the empowerment process as highlighted below and distribute the handout entitled *A Summary of the Empowerment Process*.

- Empowerment involves change, takes time, and requires an understanding of the environment in which families live and work.
- To empower parents, they must be given unconditional, positive recognition for the important job they are doing.
- For many parents, empowerment involves a change in their perception of themselves.
- Over time, empowerment should increase parents' feelings of control over their worlds and the development of their children.
- To empower parents, the community must provide nonjudgmental support and access to information about being a parent and a citizen.

## Rank Ordering and Priority Setting

### The Purpose of Rank Ordering and Priority Setting

Rank ordering and priority setting are useful techniques for organizing items in a list according to their relative importance. As such, they are aids in the decision-making process. For example, participants might be asked to rank-order a list of alternatives for dealing with a problem according to the ease with which each task could be carried out. Ranking or prioritizing helps accomplish several goals:

- It helps group members determine the items on which there is the most and least agreement.
- It increases participants' confidence in their own judgment.
- It helps group members determine the first step in an action plan when a number of alternatives are available.
- It establishes an order in which to discuss topics.

Rank ordering and priority setting impart power because workshop participants take responsibility for making decisions and then act on them. These techniques also build skills that participants can use to cope with unclear or overwhelming situations. To the extent that having these skills gives an individual control over his or her life, acquiring them is part of the empowerment process.

### The Process of Rank Ordering and Priority Setting

Rank ordering and priority setting can be done by individuals, by groups, or by both (individuals can rank-order items and then pool their lists to create a group list). It is important to state clearly the criteria participants are to use to rank their lists (for example, the values that are most important to them, the actions that are most difficult for them). Directions such as "Order these alternatives from the best to the worst" imply that there is one "correct" order and therefore should be avoided. Participants are likely to feel most self-assured when they are making personal evaluations ("Rank the alternatives according to what is most valuable *to you*"). This slight difference in wording encourages participants to make truly personal decisions.

Several methods can be used to rank items. The various alternatives can be discussed and then rank-ordered by the entire group or each participant can vote for three or five options with the votes tallied to determine the ordering. This method works best when it is preceded by a discussion of participants' strong preferences or dislikes for certain items.

Sometimes rank ordering is used to determine the group's next activity. In this case it is wise to give another option to members who have no interest in working on any of the group's top choices. A participant could choose to work on a different activity alone, for instance, or with a partner.

Once a list has been rank-ordered, it can be used to trigger large- or small-group discussions or as a basis for decision making. This final step will help participants understand the usefulness of this tool.

### An Example of an Exercise in Rank Ordering

The following example is from the "Empowering Families" module.

Ask the participants to rank-order in their minds the three items on each list that they consider most important. This task should take approximately 5 minutes.

Ask a volunteer to share his or her list and to explain the choices. Number the list on the newsprint as the volunteer responds. Encourage others to share their lists and the reasons for their choices.

## Use of Media

Media—films, audiotapes, photographs, and illustrations—can greatly enrich a workshop experience. When carefully integrated into the program, these resources help participants focus their thoughts and draw conclusions, stimulate discussion, and, like case studies and stories, provide a shared experience. The use of media tools frees the facilitator to concentrate on the learning situation. Used creatively, they are an effective and entertaining way to convey information. A well-done film, for example, often illustrates a concept more memorably than a lecture.

### Films

#### **The Purpose of Using Films**

As visual case studies, films can serve several functions in an empowerment workshop:

- They provide examples of particular situations and thus give participants practice in observing and analyzing the experiences of others.
- They can increase participants' understanding of how people communicate with one another.
- They provide participants with examples of situations that may be similar to their own.
- They are a shared experience for the group to observe and discuss together.

### **The Process of Using Films**

Mechanical equipment (audiotape or video equipment and films, slides, or overhead projectors) should be tested before the session. Reviewing how to operate the equipment, confirming that it works, and checking that all necessary parts are present (an extension cord, an adapter, the correct projector) help prevent problems and delays during the workshop. Always check to be sure the room can be darkened.

Several other precautions can be taken to ensure that the film viewing is an effective learning experience.

- Order films well in advance of a workshop and plan an alternate activity in case it is not available or does not arrive in time.
- Preview the film to note interactions, sequences, or dialogue to bring to the group's attention; to develop discussion questions relevant to the learning objectives; and to determine the relevance of any questions that are provided with the film.
- Before showing the film, alert the participants to watch for certain scenes (for example, "Watch how the mother in this film interacts with her children," "Watch how this person handles himself in a job interview," or "Notice how the teacher interacts with different parents.>").
- After the showing, ask audience members for their general impressions and feelings. If they have had an intense emotional reaction, they will have difficulty analyzing the film. Encourage them to express their feelings. The discussion can then move on to the points that the group was asked to focus on (for example, "It seems people had different responses to this film. Perhaps a discussion of parent-child relationships will help us understand our responses.>").
- Ask participants to relate their own experiences to the film: Is the situation portrayed similar to or different from their own situations? Such discussion encourages participants to view their own experiences as valuable to the learning process.
- If the film is long or portrays many relationships or sequences that you wish to emphasize, consider stopping at various points and asking participants to discuss or write notes on what they have seen thus far. Be careful, however, not to stop the film so often that you disrupt its flow.
- Consider showing the film more than once. Films that are longer than 30 minutes usually depict many different relationships and interactions. In a second viewing people are likely to notice things they missed the first time: to answer a question or pursue a disagreement raised in the discussion; to view a situation from a new perspective; or to observe the interaction from a particular point of view.

Discussions of films (see "Leading Group Discussions," p. 37) generally proceed through three stages. The first stage is intended to clarify the facts: who did what, when, and how. In the

second stage, participants are asked to support their feelings about characters' motivations using facts from the film. In the third stage, participants compare their own values with those expressed in the film. This subject usually sparks lively discussion. Participants learn that there are many ways to solve problems and that their experiences are as valid as anyone else's.

The written materials supplied with a film, such as the case histories in the *Family Matters Film Discussion Guide*, often stimulate discussion and enhance the viewing experience. The following example has been excerpted from the *Family Matters Film Discussion Guide*. It is imperative that each person who shows the Family Matters film fully understand the information in this discussion guide. Understanding the film's purpose will greatly enhance its usefulness locally.

#### Introducing the Film

Just before showing the film, please use the following introduction to acquaint viewers with the parental empowerment concept and the Family Matters Project.

Over the years a human service system has evolved that too often categorizes families according to their weaknesses rather than their strengths. For example, some agencies serve only families who can show that they are unable to provide a healthy environment for their children. By the time such a family receives services, it has come to view itself as weak, incompetent, and unable to cope.

People who work with families can view them either from the positive empowerment approach, which emphasizes their strengths, or from the crippling deficit approach, which emphasizes their weaknesses. Think of a glass of water— you can look at it as half full or half empty, depending upon your perspective.

The two families in this film were part of the Syracuse Family Matters Project. They generously shared their lives with the filmmakers so that people all around the country could take a closer look at how communities support or hinder family life. Please watch for each family's strengths as you view the film.

Show the Family Matters film.

#### Follow-up Discussion

After viewing the film, please lead a brief discussion (no more than 10 minutes). The purpose of this discussion should be to encourage members of the audience to share their responses to the film and to view families from an empowerment perspective. You can encourage discussion by questioning and clarifying comments. A familiarity with the case studies describing the two families in the film will help you answer questions. If you do not know the answer to a question, say so.

##### Key discussion questions

What are you feeling?

What are your reactions to the two families?

What are the families' strengths? Do you think everyone would see these strengths?

Do you know families whose situations are fairly similar to those in the film?

The *Family Matters Film Discussion Guide* provides a detailed explanation of several follow-up activities.

## Audiotapes

### **The Purpose of Using Audiotapes**

Audiotapes can be effective in workshops for a variety of purposes.

- They provide examples to illustrate a point or to stimulate discussion and analysis; for example, a tape of a parent talking to a child is a more effective way to illustrate communication than a discussion of the problem.
- They can establish a tone (with music, for example) at the beginning of a session or following a break.
- They can be used to record participants' comments or conversations for analysis, practice, or self-assessment (tapes promote more active listening than a conversation in which one has to talk and listen at the same time).
- They can be used as a device to promote participant response.

Although audiotapes can enrich a learning program in a variety of ways, they do not generally capture participants' attention as much as do live or filmed presentations and therefore are not generally useful for presenting information. One advantage of audiotapes over film or video is that they can be more easily designed, created, and changed to fit the needs of a particular group.

### **The Process of Using Audiotapes**

As with film and video, it is important to check out the equipment thoroughly before you need it. Be sure the batteries are working (take an extra set), the recorder is powerful enough to pick up conversations, the recording is loud and clear, and you have all necessary parts, such as a microphone, an extension cord, and an adaptor. To ensure that tapes will be worthwhile, assess their relevance to the discussion topic, as follows:

- Be sure the tapes meet the objectives of the group. Ask yourself, "What function do the tapes serve?"
- Listen to the tapes before the session to determine which segments are most useful and to develop follow-up discussion topics and questions.
- If the tape is providing an example, ask participants for their reactions and how they might change it for a better fit with their own situations or experience.

## Pictures and Quotations

The learning experience can be enriched by using drawings, photographs, and quotations either from magazines, newspapers, and books or specially created to illustrate a concept or stimulate discussion. Obtaining quotations on the most desirable form of parent-teacher relationship from published sources, community people (a local or school official, teachers, parents), and participants (get permission for the last two), for example, is an excellent way to spark lively debate in a group. Also consider asking participants to bring quotations related to a topic they are exploring.

Posting pictures and quotations around the workshop room before a session can set a tone, focus attention, stimulate discussion, illustrate a concept, or demonstrate a range of perspectives. Encourage participants to discuss which pictures and quotations most closely fit their experiences, ideals, or opinions and why. This discussion can have an empowering effect if the pictures or quotations validate participants' opinions or situations or stimulate self-assessment.

The following guidelines may be helpful when using pictures and quotations:

- Have the objectives for the session or workshop in mind when making selections.
- Be sure pictures are large and clear enough to be easily seen.
- Choose quotations that are clear, simple, and well-said and write them so they are large enough to be read.
- The literacy level of quotations should be appropriate for the group.
- Prepare discussion questions ahead of time.

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## Guests

### The Purpose of Inviting Guests

Guests can be an empowering resource in a group for several reasons: They can provide expertise or a perspective not otherwise available (inviting parents to a program for teachers on improving parent-teacher relationships, for example); they can be a link between participants and institutions such as schools and workplaces; they can provide an opportunity to work on problems participants face in their everyday lives (children might be invited to participate in a workshop designed to improve parenting skills); and they can help participants practice communication skills through such techniques as role playing. In addition, guests who are in positions of authority can benefit from increased communication with such groups as parents or workers.

### The Process of Using Guests in Workshops

The following guidelines are designed to help make the guest's visit a valuable experience for everyone involved:

- Workshop participants will be most empowered if they decide who to invite and extend the invitations because these actions provide them with an opportunity to open new channels of communication, develop skills, and to act in their own behalf.
- Guests should be told why they are being invited, what is expected of them, what the group hopes to gain from their participation, and the length of time they will be needed.
- As a group, prepare questions for the guests.

- Don't ask guests to sit through activities that are not directly related to them. This communicates disrespect for their time and for the verbally agreed-on contract for their participation.
- When guests are invited for an entire workshop, all of the activities of that session should include a clear role for them.
- When guests are introduced to the group, state the reason for their presence and the length of their visit.
- Consider inviting more than one guest to add a variety of perspectives on an issue.

### An Example of the Use of Guests

Guests are an integral part of several Family Matters modules. The following example from the "Cooperative Communication between Home and School" in-service education program for teachers illustrates how guests can enrich the workshop presentation.

#### Administrative Responsiveness (30 minutes)

Although changes in teachers' attitudes and practices can greatly improve home-school relationships, teachers sometimes feel that their efforts are hampered by district- or buildingwide policies and procedures. The Administrative Responsiveness exercise has been built into the agenda of the program to allow teachers to express their ideas with people in a position to act on them.

Superintendents and principals should have been involved in the scheduling of the in-service program and ideally have been provided with copies of the monograph by Moncrieff Cochran and Christiann Dean entitled *The School Administrator's Role in Promoting Cooperative Communication between Home and School*.

Although many school administrators are sincerely committed to home-school communication, some resistance to institutional-level change is to be expected. Teachers' suggestions may have been tried with little success, or administrators may feel so overwhelmed by other pressures that they protect themselves by clinging to the status quo. Unless they have attended enough of the session to feel confident of your ability to facilitate this exercise in an even-handed, supportive manner, they may question its inclusion. For these reasons, discretion is required in the planning and leading of this exercise.

#### Instructions for Facilitators

1. Say:

**Some very positive ideas have come out of these sessions. Although many of these ideas can be implemented by individuals or small groups of teachers, others may require the support of administrators or even the whole district. We've invited (names of administrators) to join us for half an hour to brainstorm ideas that school or district administrators could implement to encourage positive home-school relationships. Bear in mind that in a brainstorming session you offer the most creative ideas but do not judge each other's ideas. I'll write the ideas on newsprint. Any questions? (Pause.) Let's begin.**

2. Tape up a few pieces of newsprint. Write ideas as they are offered. If people begin to evaluate the suggestions, remind them of the definition of brainstorming.

3. When ideas are being offered much more slowly, turn to the school administrators and say:

Although we understand that it may not be possible to implement all of these ideas, we hope to plant some seeds. You know much better than I the mechanisms within your district for following through on these ideas. Here's the list. (Hand the newsprint sheets to one of the administrators.) I'd be very happy to hear your ideas on how these suggestions could be promoted. Thank you for taking time to be with us. I'm enjoying working with the creative teachers in this district (if this is true).

4. The administrators may want to respond.

## Panel Discussions

### The Purpose of Panel Discussions

Panel discussions serve two main purposes in empowerment workshops: to provide information and to allow participants to make decisions about their own learning. By providing a variety of viewpoints, panel discussions can be more informative than individual guest speakers, and the planning processes involve participants in decision making, acting on their own behalf, and learning and practicing skills.

### The Process of Moderating Panel Discussions

A more detailed discussion of how to plan and prepare a panel is included in the section entitled "Guests" (p. 63). The workshop facilitator should not necessarily also serve as panel moderator. A moderator should be chosen on the basis of his or her skills and confidence to manage the panel discussion, ability to be neutral, and high credibility. A workshop member with all three of these qualities is the ideal candidate for this role. She or he may need some encouragement and support as well as a chance to go over the program ahead of time with the facilitator. No one should feel forced into moderating, however; nor should anyone without the necessary skills be encouraged to moderate. The results of either situation are likely to be negative.

The basic role of a moderator is to introduce panelists, clarify and facilitate the achievement of the objectives of the panel, manage time, and manage the communication between panelists and between panelists and the audience. Some of the functions a moderator will serve include:

- Introducing the moderator and panelists. The moderator should learn relevant information about the panelists and introduce each one before the discussion begins. Such recognition of their accomplishments will help panelists feel empowered.
- Introducing the specific objectives of the discussion. Although panelists and the audience should already know the subject to be discussed, a restatement at the beginning of the session will ensure that everyone has the same overall expecta-

tions. This time is also appropriate for the moderator to thank workshop participants for putting the panel discussion together.

- Laying out the ground rules. Rules may include the length of time allowed each panelist, a signal system for keeping track of time, the length of time for questions following the presentations, how long a question or statement from a member of the audience may be, whether an audience member may make a second question or statement before all those wishing to make a first statement have been heard, whether follow-up responses are permissible and how long they may be, and how audience respondents will be recognized. These decisions should all be made ahead of time by the workshop members and the moderator. Involvement in the decision-making process will help participants feel included.
- Making sure everyone abides by the ground rules. Let each speaker know when he or she has 3 minutes left by passing a note or giving a prearranged signal such as pointing to your watch (positioning should be planned so you are where you can catch the speaker's eye). If a speaker goes over the time limit, tactfully break in with "Please excuse me for interrupting. Your time is up and we need to save enough time to hear from everyone." It may also be necessary to stop enthusiastic audience members who join in without being recognized or make a second question or statement before other participants have had a first chance. In this case, the moderator needs to stop the person with a reminder of the guidelines and an assurance that she or he will eventually get a turn.
- Preparing questions for the panelists and making sure each gets a chance to speak. Involving all workshop participants in developing these questions (see "Guests," p. 63) will help ensure that the panel discussion meets their needs and will increase their control over the learning environment.
- Eliciting and controlling questions from the audience. If the panel is attended only by workshop participants, the group can make up questions. Panel presentations are likely to stimulate spontaneous questions from the audience. It may be necessary to encourage people who are embarrassed or shy to speak in a public setting to join in asking questions. One technique is to pass out paper and pencils at the beginning of the session. Ask participants to write their questions and to pass them in at the end of the panel presentations (be sure everyone present can write). The moderator can then sort through the questions, choosing the most appropriate, and read these to the panel. This structure can also reduce a moderator's anxiety about the discussion getting out of control. The moderator may need to turn statements into questions, suggest that an individual speak privately with a panelist after the general discussion, defuse hostile questions by restating them in less antagonistic terms, or rephrase fuzzy questions in a more understandable form.
- Being sure everyone hears the questions. For this reason, the moderator should repeat every question from the audience.

## TECHNIQUES

- Monitoring which panelist responds to a question. When a question is not directed at a specific panelist, the moderator can either wait to see who responds or choose a panelist. The moderator should consider the panelists' backgrounds in relation to the question as well as the value of getting a variety of opinions.
- Limiting questions and responses on one topic. Be sure the question and answer session does not become a dialogue between one panelist and one member of the audience. If this happens, suggest that they continue the discussion at a later time and that other topics be pursued while all the panelists are available.
- Ending the formal session. It is important to end the discussion at the designated time. Wrap up by making a summary statement of the positive results of the session, thanking the panelists for coming and the audience members for their interest and input, and inviting everyone to mingle informally.