

Strategies for Training Standardized Workshops with Small Groups

- To maintain standardization and adhere to the philosophy of competency-based training, we must first agree that no new “content” can be added to any single workshop in a standardized workshop and all content in the curriculum must be delivered. Trainers may be tempted to add new material or skip over material if the smaller group doesn’t have the diverse, lively discussions and interactions more often found in larger groups.
- Activities can be adjusted, however, to best meet the needs of a small group (4-6 people). Additionally, trainers can take this opportunity for in depth case discussions, more application exercises, and transfer of learning activities. Many trainers report they appreciate the extra time as they are able to take issues to a greater depth.

Strategies for the start of training:

- ▶ Use the additional time during introductions to ask for more information from the trainee. The information requested should be purposeful as follows:

To review earlier modules: “What has been the most surprising/difficult concept in Core so far?” “Do you see any themes developing through the modules?”

To initiate discussion: “What would you like from your fellow trainees?” (such as suggestions, resources, problem-solving, etc.), “What do you see as the advantages, disadvantages of small training groups?” Ask the trainees for their commitment to participate as much as they can.

To set the stage for networking: “What area of special knowledge or experience might you bring to this training?”

To establish valuable expertise in the room: “Have you had a previous job in a helping profession?”

To engage the trainee on a more personal level: “What is something about you that your colleagues probably don’t know?”

Example: In Caseworker Core Module VIII, conduct the introductory Lifebook exercise in its entirety (ask trainees to do a page for past, present, and future). This will ultimately help the trainee develop more insight and skill in the formation and use of Lifebooks.

Strategies during training:

- ▶ Create CPS Questions on-the-fly. These can be designed to recap knowledge of content just presented or to anonymously allow trainees to give feedback of the topic or the training itself.

- ▶ Encourage trainees to bring in their own cases for discussion. Ask trainees to describe their challenges with the family and ask the others to problem-solve. This can be done verbally or written on index cards as “Have you tried this?”

Example: In Caseworker Core Module II, participants may problem-solve difficulties a trainee is having around engaging a particular family. In Module VI, a trainee may have a family who is not complying with the case plan and he doesn't know why. In Module VIII, a participant may be working with a child who has difficulty with family contacts.

Example: In Assessor workshops, ask trainees to plan a placement, “staff” a challenging family assessment or adoptive match, or identify post adoption resources within the local community. You may opt to use one of the skill-building activities (final handout in each workshop's handout packet) as a small group or individual activity.

- ▶ Create additional case scenarios beyond the ones provided in the curriculum.
- ▶ Create a twist or add complexity to a given case scenario. After everyone has worked on the same case, ask the group “But what if ..?” This can be asked of the whole group or the trainer may create different “what ifs” to give to each person in the workshop. The trainer could also ask trainees to rewrite any given scenario by adding their own, “what ifs”, then pass it to another trainee to describe what they would do.

Example: In Caseworker Core Module V, “But what if Mrs. Carr comes to the office under the influence of drugs?” or “But what if Mr. Carr is arrested for domestic violence”, etc.

Example: In *Openness in Adoption*, change the scenarios for the Openness Puzzle activity to include additional challenges or characteristics.

Example: In CAPTA, Fourth and Fourteenth Amendment Rights workshop, develop several short case examples to consider after identifying criteria for interviewing a child at school without prior parental permission. Ask participants to discuss the pros and cons of interviewing the child at school.

Example; In Reunification and Case Closure in Child Sexual Abuse, when finished developing a safety plan for the reunification of an adult offender to the home, ask the small groups to the safety plan in anticipation of a juvenile returning to the home.

- ▶ Create an application exercise as follows. Write five “Dear Abby Social Worker” letters that ask advice from an imaginary social work expert. Use a situation from the content presented so far. Put each letter in an envelope, addressed to Abby Social Worker. Draw a mailbox on a flip chart page and tape the five letters on the mailbox.

A person comes to the flip chart, chooses an envelope, and answers the question with her advice.

Example: In Caseworker Core Module IV, create a letter: “Dear Abbey Social Worker, How can I get my clients to give me assessment information when they think I’m just being nosy?” Signed Confused in Cleveland. The response could be: “Dear Confused, It may be helpful to explain the type of questions you’ll be asking the client ahead of time and why those questions are important to help the family receive the right services.”

Example for Caseworker Core Module VII: “Dear Abby Social Worker: I believe a child on my caseload may have a developmental disability, but I can’t convince the parent to take him for an assessment. What should I do?” Signed Wondering in Wayne County. Response: “Dear Wondering, It might be helpful to find out if the parent is anxious or frightened about the assessment process. If so, you can provide information about what the assessment will be like, and perhaps accompany the parent to the assessment. Or, the parent could be in denial. In that case, you will need to appeal to their desire to “do the right thing” for the child.”

Example: In Tier One *Family and Child Assessment*: “Dear Abby Social Worker: I have a prospective family who has had some mental health difficulties with depression (history of substance abuse; marital problems). How do I know if this poses a serious risk for an adopted child?” Signed, Fearful in Fairfield County. Response: “Dear Fearful, How has the family coped with this challenge? How long has it been since the challenge presented itself? What is different today than when the individual or family was struggling with this challenge? What has the individual or family learned as a result of this experience?”

- ▶ Create a problem-solving exercise as follows: Each trainee writes down one challenge, problem, tough case, etc. at some length. Trainees then trade papers and attempt to problem-solve the case as if they were the person’s supervisor, asking provocative questions.

Example: In Caseworker Core Module VI, the “supervisor” may ask the trainee to explain the goals, objectives and activities of the case plan. Another option is to take the role of the defense attorney instead of the supervisor and challenge the trainee to defend her case plan.

Example: In “Caseworkers and Parents: Rights and Responsibilities”, ask trainees to write down or practice suggested responses for caseworkers to use when parents ask, “Do I have to talk to you?” during investigations.

- ▶ Periodically, stop the training and ask trainees to take a question “from the hat” such as: “What would keep you from implementing this strategy, practice, etc. on the job?” (Is there an “elephant in the room” that needs to be addressed?), “What have you been

doing already that demonstrates this skill, activity, etc.?” or “How would your job change if you started this practice?”. Discuss and encourage trainees to share ideas.

Example: In Caseworker Core Module VIII, the process of family contacts, as recommended in the curriculum, may in fact change the way the agency conducts family visits. The trainee may need to be prepared to defend a change in agency policy.

Example: In the Assessor workshop, *Placement Strategies*, trainees learn the importance of pre-placement visitation and planning. Ask trainees to consider implementation issues and/or policy changes that might be necessary to minimize stress for children during an emergency placement.

- ▶ Bring in that day’s newspaper, such as *USA Today*, and discuss national events or pending legislation that have some connection to the training content. There is usually at least one article that has some relevance to the module.

Example: When a mother gave birth to eight babies and had six more at home, the issues of culture, values, marginal parenting, poverty vs. neglect, etc. could all have been discussed during Caseworker Core Module I.

Example for Caseworker Core Module VII: There are often examples of abused or neglected children in the newspaper. The trainer could ask the group to consider how the child’s maltreatment might affect his development or social/emotional functioning.

Example for the Sexual Abuse Intervention Series: There is always a current media story regarding sexual abuse. Ask the group to analyze the story for common myths and misconceptions about sexual abuse – these are often subtle; or identify parts of the story that reinforces what we currently know to be true about sexual abuse.

- ▶ For small groups that may not have much diversity, ask the question: “How might someone else feel about this same issue?” The “someone else” may be a supervisor/manager, a person from a different unit, a foster or adoptive parent, a person of another ethnicity, a person from a large city or rural county, etc. In other words, ask trainees to put themselves in someone else’s shoes.
- ▶ Provide participants with written background/reference information on a specific topic. Ask that person to study the material, become familiar with it, and prepare a presentation to the rest of the group. You may also give them specific questions to answer regarding their topic.

Examples: Caseworker Core Modules I, V, VI, VII, and VIII have FACT SHEETS or guided questions that can be used for this purpose. The trainee then leads a discussion of the topic. The trainer’s role is to assure the information

presented is accurate and complete and the most important points have been made.

Strategies at the end of training (TOL):

- ▶ Create a point/counterpoint discussion that summarizes concepts that have been presented in the workshop for which there may be different perspectives. Again, the trainer must make sure the information given is accurate and should summarize the main points of the discussion.

Examples: In Caseworker Core Module I (which includes a structured values debate) and VIII, (which contains discussion of whether siblings should be placed together or should children be placed with relatives), you may set up a two-party point/counter point discussion much like the format used on *60 Minutes*.

- ▶ Conduct a Jeopardy-type wrap up exercise that covers the content of the workshop. This may be done with cards or with the game function on the Classroom Performance System.
- ▶ Allow ample time for participants to complete their action plans. Pair participants to ‘critique’ the other person’s action plan before presenting them to the large. Ask each trainee to give feedback and suggestions on the implementation of the activities in the plan.
- ▶ Create a networking opportunity by encouraging follow-up contact among participants. Create a list of participants’ contact information.
- ▶ Review or re-pose the CPS Questions that had wrong answers to see if participants had progressed in their learning. You may also repeat opinion questions to see if those have changed during the course of the workshop.

Example: In Caseworker Core Module IV, repeat the earlier CPS Question that asked participants to gauge their level of confidence in conducting accurate assessments and, hopefully, they will feel more confident by the end of the training. If not, discuss why not.

- ▶ Create a new CPS Question on-the-fly by slightly changing one of the questions to get to a point you taught in the workshop.

Example: In Caseworker Core Module V, slightly change the situation posed in one of the four case scenarios and ask if the worker would still answer the CPS question in the same way. For example, what if Lloyd was having an asthma attack instead of pink eye? Would the worker still wait until the end of the school day to see the mother? What conditions change the worker’s response?

- ▶ Provide participants with links to online resources such as the *Field Guide to Child Welfare*. Discuss how this and other valuable resources have led to the creation of standards for current evidenced-based practice.

Example: Much of the material in Caseworker Core can be directly linked to the *Field Guide to Child Welfare*. Note those references in the Core curricula and provide a list of cites to the Field Guide that relate to the topic presented.

Example for Sexual Abuse Intervention Series: If access to the internet is available, there are valuable online resources that caseworkers never have time to access. Spend time surfing the net and highlighting key resources from favorite spots.

- ▶ Create a final case scenario that integrates all the major themes of the workshop.