



Use Power Responsibly Worksheet

Introduction

Family services professionals, home visitors, and early childhood staff play an important role in partnering with families. Through these partnerships, staff can effectively connect families to program and community resources.

Early childhood professionals strive to [build relationships with families](#) based on mutual respect and trust and to value families as equal partners.

Sometimes staff perceive or share common identities with the families they serve. For example, a staff member may share a racial or cultural identity with the families they serve. However, even with a common identity, these relationships may not feel equal from the families' perspective. In fact, it can seem to families that staff have more power — or more control or influence — than the families themselves have over their children's learning and development. For example, staff often hold important information about child, family, and community resources. Access to this information can be a form of power. Using power responsibly means sharing information and planning with families, not for them. It means inviting families to inform program directions, policies, and everyday practices.

Power is not necessarily good or bad. However, it is always important for staff to use power responsibly. To work toward balance or equality in the relationship, staff must reflect on the power and influence they have, explore their own implicit biases, and create relationships with families through open communication and collaboration, all the while honoring the families' expertise and wisdom.

Activities

This worksheet features three activities to complete:

1. Reflecting on the Power You Have
2. Reflecting on the Responsible Use of Power
3. Identifying Strategies for Using Your Power Responsibly

Each activity builds on the one before it, so make sure to do them in order:



If you only have 15 minutes, complete Activity 1.



If you only have 30 minutes, complete Activity 1 and Activity 2.



If you have an hour, complete all three activities.

You may choose to spend more or less time on each activity depending on your needs or the needs of your group.

Activity 1. Reflecting on the Power You Have

When we are aware of our power, we can be more intentional about using it to benefit children and families. Consider the examples below of power that Head Start staff may hold:

- Staff select which families are most “in need” of enrolling in the program based on eligibility criteria, which may be influenced by staff members’ personal biases.
- Staff have knowledge and information about resources and choose when and with which family members to share those resources.
- Staff monitor families’ attendance in the program and choose how to support families who have low attendance.
- Staff may have expertise about parenting or child development and may encourage parents to change their behaviors or how they parent their child.

Now, make it personal.

Journaling Activity: Position of Power

- Reflect on your experiences working with families.
- Create a list of when you were in a position of power in the space provided.
- Describe the power you had. Perhaps some of your experiences are reflected in the examples above. It’s OK to repeat some examples from the list above, but try to include some different ones, too.

Experiences with Families When I Was in a Position of Power

Activity 2. Reflecting on the Responsible Use of Power

With power comes responsibility. We can choose how to use our power and use it responsibly to support families. We can choose to be their allies and advocates — particularly when we work with families who have been historically and currently underrepresented in positions of power.

As we work to create equitable programs, we also consider the ways that our position of power (whether perceived or actual) could influence the families we encounter. We are thoughtful about the power dynamic for families who have historically endured (or are still enduring) discrimination or racial inequities as they navigate relationships. We, therefore, must reflect on our own power in relationship with families.

Journaling Activity

- Watch the video [That Little Voice](#).
- Reflect on the video.
- Respond to each question in the space provided.

Think of a time when you witnessed someone using power irresponsibly, and this misuse resulted in a family being treated unfairly. Did you hear a “little voice” telling you to act?

If you did, what action did you take? How did your own personal or professional power influence your actions?

If you did not act, what got in the way?

Activity 3. Identifying Strategies for Using Your Power Responsibly

We can use our power more responsibly when we are aware of contemporary and historical trauma. This awareness can guide us in planning with, and not for, families.

Journaling Activity: Addressing Ways Our Expectations Influence Families

- Read each scenario.
- Imagine that you are the family services staff member working with the family in each scenario.
- Respond to each question from the perspective of the family services staff member in the space provided.

Scenario 1

Mr. Hernandez is a 28-year-old Latino father. He wants to go back to school and is making progress toward that goal. Unexpectedly, his car breaks down. His priorities quickly change. He needs help getting his son, Antonio, to the Head Start center before work until he can afford the car repair expenses. There are no public transportation options. Mr. Hernandez has a new short-term goal that is important to him and his family: getting Antonio to the Head Start program and still getting to work on time.

Reflection Questions

From the family's perspective, what is the perceived power you may hold because of your role?

From your perspective as a staff member, what power do you hold in this scenario?

Considering that you and the family may hold different perspectives about power in this scenario, how could you support and partner with the family, using your power responsibly?

In what ways, if at all, should you consider the family's unique identities — race, gender, culture, etc. — in this scenario?

Scenario 2

The Taylors are a family of two Black lesbian moms and two adopted children. The family is experiencing homelessness. The parents are trying to ensure that their children remain in the Head Start program while also tending to a family member's health care needs for a serious illness. The Taylors are anxious to get these three issues — the experience of homelessness, the continuity of early care and education for their children, and the family member's health care needs — resolved. They want immediate help from the program.

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In what ways, if at all, should you consider the family's unique identities — race, gender, culture, etc. — in this scenario?

For more information, please contact us: PFCE@ecetta.info | 1-866-763-6481

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