

## 1B. Workshop for Parents: Partnering with Early Childhood Staff



**Partnering with Early Childhood Staff** is designed to support learning for a facilitator and group of parent participants. It offers interactive activities and reflective exercises.

This workshop can be adapted as a virtual offering. Refer to the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement resource **Leading Online Parent Meetings and Groups** as a guide.

Introduction: Family Connections Workshop Series for Staff and Parents



1A. Workshop for Staff: Partnering with Parents



1B. Workshop for Parents: Partnering with Early Childhood Staff



2A. Workshop for Staff: What is Depression?



2B. Workshop for Parents: What is Depression?



3A. Workshop for Staff: Talking with Children About Difficult Issues



3B. Workshop for Parents: Talking with Children About Difficult Issues



### Workshop Focus

Strong relationships between parents and early childhood professionals are key to the healthy development of young children. Partnering with professionals is an ongoing process. It can sometimes be challenging for both parents and professionals.

This workshop offers an opportunity for parents to explore these relationships and consider strategies that support positive and strong partnerships.

In this resource, “parent” and “family” refer to all adults who interact with early childhood systems in support of their child, including biological, adoptive, and foster parents, pregnant women and expectant families, grandparents, legal and informal guardians, and adult siblings.

## Goal

To enhance the strategies used by parents to engage with early childhood staff so that families experience stronger benefits from the Head Start and early childhood experience.

## Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Deepen their understanding of the importance of partnering with early childhood staff
- Explore communication challenges that can occur
- Learn practical strategies to use when partnering with teachers and staff
- Become more confident in reaching out to teachers and staff

## Method and Content

This workshop has three sequential sections:

- Exercise 1: Reflecting on Our Relationships with Staff
- Exercise 2: Discussion of Reflections from Exercise 1
- Exercise 3: Exploring Strategies for Partnering with Staff

Exercise 1 provides participants with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in working with teachers and other staff.

In Exercise 2 participants are encouraged to discuss the benefits and challenges of making strong connections with teachers and staff.

In Exercise 3 the group will discuss positive strategies for partnering with early childhood staff.

Throughout the workshop, it is important to emphasize how our own behaviors and attitudes can impact our relationships.

## Estimated Time

1.5-2 hours

*This does not include facilitator preparation.*

## Learning Environment

- A space large enough for participants to engage in whole group discussions. Consider including two facilitators for large groups (e.g. more than 20 participants).
- Seating for the group.

## Materials

- Five large pieces of paper and a way to hang them on the walls of the space
- Markers for each participant
- A packet for each participant with the following materials:
  - Handout 1: Strategies for Partnering with Early Childhood Staff
  - Workshop Evaluation Form

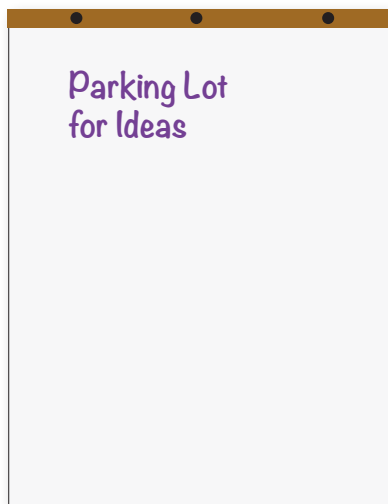
## Facilitator Preparation

Read through the workshop materials in advance. Reflect on your own responses to the questions in Exercise 1. It is important to acknowledge your own comfort level and any biases with the subject matter before leading the workshop. Consider what you think are the barriers to building strong relationships between parents and staff.

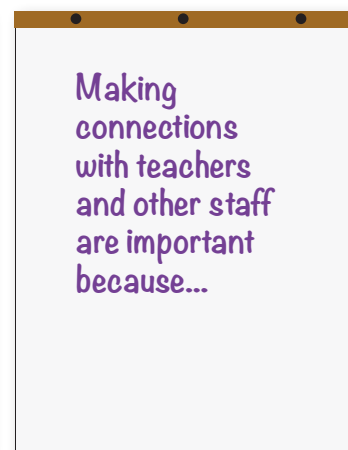
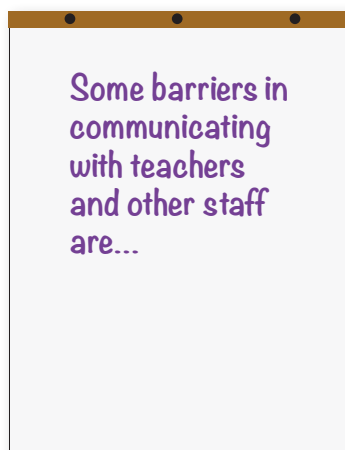
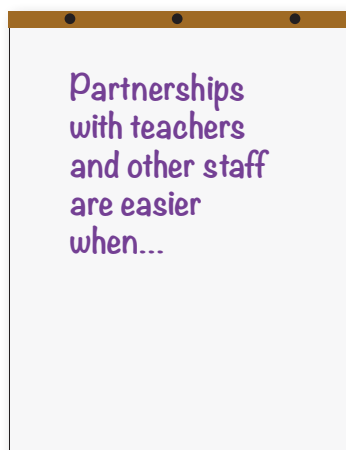
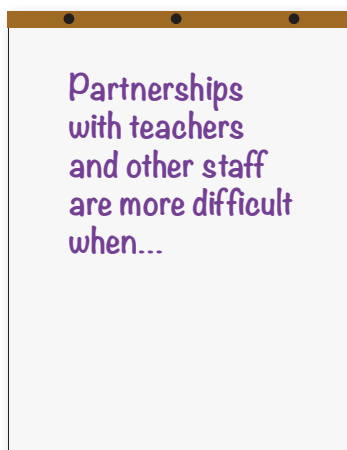
This workshop will encourage parents to discuss their feelings about working with staff. Consider how much practice the group has had with this type of discussion. Review the facilitator strategies provided for you to support your role in facilitating a positive environment.

## Preparing the Workshop Space

- Set up chairs so that the participants can begin as a large group. Plan in advance how you will move into smaller groups.
- Place a materials packet on each chair in the room.
- Prepare a large piece of paper entitled “Parking Lot for Ideas.”



- Prepare four large pieces of paper with titles (see below).



- Display the large pieces of paper so that the whole group will be able to see them and can write on them easily.
- Markers can be set out in front of the papers or given to each participant prior to the exercise.

## Introduction

Facilitators are encouraged to use their own words to introduce the workshop. Some key points to include are:

- Welcome the group and review logistics – general agenda, time frame, when to expect breaks, materials, sign in sheet, etc.
- Introduce the topic. For example, you might say: “The title of this workshop is Partnering with Early Childhood Staff. Communicating with your child’s teacher and other staff members can be both rewarding and challenging. Today’s workshop will provide a chance for you to discuss some of the feelings you have when working together to best support your child in various situations. We will also consider strategies to strengthen engagement between parents and staff.”
- Describe the objectives of this workshop:
  - Deepen understanding of the importance of partnering with early childhood staff
  - Explore communication challenges that can occur
  - Learn practical strategies to use when partnering with teachers and staff
  - Become more confident in reaching out to teachers and staff
- Explain the “Parking Lot for Ideas” to the group. If a question, suggestion, or concern is offered that is related to the topic but unrelated to the specific exercise, the facilitator will record it on the “Parking Lot for Ideas” sheet. The facilitator can refer back to these ideas at the end of the workshop for further discussion as time permits.
- Create a Group Agreement with the participants. This is a short list of co-constructed statements intended to promote a safe, positive environment for all participants. Ask the participants what they will need to fully participate in the workshop. These can be printed on a large sheet of paper. Creating a Group Agreement is an important step before beginning the exercise.

### Sample Group Agreement

Treat each other with respect.

Agree to disagree.

Maintain confidentiality—what is shared in the group stays in the group.

Managing technology (use of phones, etc.).

Humor can be helpful.

(Additional suggestions to create a positive, safe environment.)

## Exercise 1: Reflecting on Our Relationships with Staff

This exercise gives participants the opportunity to reflect on their experiences with teachers and other staff. It encourages them to share their thoughts on what has made those interactions both meaningful and challenging.

- Begin by reading aloud the statement on each of the four large pieces of paper:
  - Partnerships with teachers and other staff are more difficult when...
  - Partnerships with teachers and other staff are easier when...
  - Some barriers in communicating with teachers and other staff are...
  - Making connections with teachers and other staff is important because...
- Ask the participants to think about how they would complete each of these phrases. Ask the participants to walk around the room and write their answers below each statement.
  - Encourage all participants to provide honest responses.
  - Encourage participants to add their response even if someone else has already written it. Or, ask them to place a check mark by the original response to show that another person is thinking about it too.
- Reconvene the large group after all participants have added their answers to the statements. Read the answers to the group, sheet by sheet. This is an opportunity to ask for clarification. Note the range of responses, ask for any additions, and suggest responses not noted – especially if they represent known experiences in the program.
- Table 1 presents examples of participant responses and themes to develop.

### Facilitator Strategy

Consider these tips for facilitating thoughtful discussion:

- **Keep in mind that the participants are sharing their views with one another in a group setting.** This type of discussion may be common or rare, depending on the participant's previous experiences. If they have had little experience with groups before this workshop, you may need to reassure them that the environment is one they can trust to be supportive and confidential. Refer to the Group Agreement as needed to maintain a trusting environment.
- **Some participants may be unsure about recording their thoughts and feelings in a way that everyone can see.** If you find some participants attempting to “sit out” this part of the exercise, encourage them to participate in a way that feels comfortable to them. Be sensitive to issues of literacy and language. Working in pairs or small groups with an assigned transcriber may be helpful.
- **Anticipate that some participants will voice strong feelings.** The exercise encourages people to reflect and speak honestly. Make sure participants share their opinions and experiences in a way that is respectful to the environment. Remind participants of the Group Agreement if necessary.

**Table 1. Sample Responses for Exercise 1**

Response Categories	Examples of potential responses	Themes for facilitator to develop in the discussion
Partnerships with teachers and other staff are more difficult when...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They don't listen</li> <li>• They don't want to talk to me</li> <li>• There is no trust</li> <li>• They are from a very different culture</li> <li>• They are under a lot of stress</li> <li>• There is no time</li> <li>• They avoid me</li> <li>• We do not agree on what is best for my child</li> </ul>	<p>This prompt encourages participants to reflect on the challenging aspects of working with staff. Some participants may have strong feelings on this topic, but little experience in discussing it.</p> <p>Others may feel shy or concerned that sharing any difficulties may label them as “negative.” Acknowledge this prompt as a jumping off point to further discuss the strategies and help participants feel their responses will lead to a productive outcome.</p>
Partnerships with teachers and other staff are easier when...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They want to work with me</li> <li>• They trust me</li> <li>• They care about my child</li> <li>• They smile</li> <li>• They are pleasant</li> <li>• They speak the same language</li> <li>• They are open to suggestions</li> <li>• They take responsibility</li> <li>• They say hello</li> <li>• They are respectful and listen</li> </ul>	<p>This prompt pushes participants to acknowledge what teachers and other staff do to contribute to and encourage success. A key point can be made by pointing out that teachers can contribute to how comfortable parents feel by doing the same things listed as responses.</p>
Some barriers in communicating with teachers and other staff are...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hostility</li> <li>• They ignore what I say</li> <li>• They don't say hello or goodbye when I am in the classroom</li> <li>• We do not speak the same language</li> <li>• I don't know them</li> <li>• I am trying to watch my children</li> <li>• They yell or curse</li> <li>• They are shy or unresponsive</li> <li>• They won't believe what I say about my child's behavior</li> <li>• They don't trust me</li> <li>• I am preoccupied with something else</li> </ul>	<p>This prompt asks participants to reflect on especially challenging interactions. Focusing on these barriers can evoke strong emotions in some.</p> <p>Others will be able to consider what they themselves have done to make communication especially unproductive. A key point is to encourage participants to consider what both parents and staff members contribute to any interaction.</p>

Response Categories	Examples of potential responses	Themes for facilitator to develop in the discussion
Making connections with teachers and other staff is important because...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is what is best for the child</li> <li>• It is the only way to connect school and home</li> <li>• It is a goal of Head Start and other early childhood programs</li> <li>• We are working together on behalf of the child</li> <li>• They need our help</li> <li>• It is the best way to build trust</li> </ul>	<p>A key point in this and all the prompts is the important role that trust plays in parent-teacher relationships. Emphasize that trust can best be inspired through positive interactions, providing a foundation for all other work together.</p>



## Exercise 2: Discussion of Reflections from Exercise 1

Exercise 2 provides the opportunity for participants to reflect further on the responses shared in Exercise 1. Participants can explore the contributions that they can make in the success of building partnerships with teachers and other staff.

- Notice the themes that emerge from various responses, especially those that carry stronger emotional content for the group. Encourage questions and more specific comments about the parent's role in relationship-building.
- Use the responses as a “jumping off point” to ask questions that encourage reflection and discussion.

### Facilitator Strategies

Consider these examples of themes you can discuss by using common responses to the Exercise 1 questions:

- **“When we say that teachers or other staff aren’t listening, what does that mean? What might make a staff member behave that way?”** Parents and staff may have different perspectives about the same behavior or situation. For example, if the parent shares a concern, the teacher may not see the concern as a problem. The teacher may appear casual, defensive, or ambivalent. The parent may react by feeling disrespected or wondering whether the teacher really cares about their child. Asking participants to imagine what might contribute to a staff member’s response helps them consider important elements of communication. Participants might reflect on how information is given, who is present when it is given, and how one’s response might indicate that they need more time to consider the information.
- **“When teachers don’t say hello or goodbye when I’m visiting the classroom, what does that communicate to me?”** Participants may say “I don’t really mind this,” yet this is an important opportunity for connection. Some teachers and staff members are distracted and/or might not think parents notice these small moments of communication. Participants who have had close relationships with other teachers may be challenged by a current teacher who has a different style. This can be an opportunity for the group to recognize that each individual brings their own experiences and expectations to each relationship.
- **“What assumptions do I make when I feel that teachers or other staff members are avoiding me or being hostile? Are these assumptions based on the particular staff member or on past experiences with other staff members?”** Sometimes it is difficult to separate how a teacher feels from how he or she feels about people. Many people need reminders not to take behavior personally. It is important to acknowledge that how staff behave can impact our responses and affect future interactions with different staff members. Even if a parent says “this doesn’t bother me,” this is rarely the case. This can be an opportunity to note that perspective-taking can be helpful in parent-teacher communication.



## Facilitator Strategies, cont.

- **“How can we use these ideas about the importance of connecting with staff? Let’s consider how these points can inform the strategies we use to build relationships with staff.”** Many participants will know the “right” answers to the prompt asking about the importance of connecting with teachers and staff, but may not have had the chance to discuss these answers.

This is an opportunity to develop and discuss relationship-building strategies. For example, if we believe that an improved relationship with staff will create a better experience for our child, then we will make multiple efforts to connect and communicate. If we are finding it challenging to build a relationship, we can reflect on our strategies and adjust what we are doing.

This type of discussion can move the group along to think about action and the steps necessary to get to that action. Review the responses to the prompt “Partnering with early childhood staff is easier when...” and ask participants to consider how they can apply these ideas to their own lives. For example, acknowledging how a teacher’s positive expression and body language can influence communication is an opportunity to draw a parallel to the impact of a parent’s behavior on communication. This can lead to more awareness about the nonverbal messages that parents give teachers and other staff and how this can impact the relationship.



### Exercise 3: Exploring Strategies for Partnering with Staff

Exercise 3 gives participants the chance to review and discuss positive strategies for partnering with early childhood staff. This exercise provides an opportunity to integrate ideas that have been discussed earlier in the workshop.

- Draw participants' attention to Handout 1 (see page 14).
- Review and discuss the strategies for partnering with staff.
- Bring the participants into the discussion and ask for their responses. Invite participants to ask questions and offer comments.

#### Facilitator Strategy

Participants may want to share examples and discuss specific teachers or staff related to a specific strategy. While this kind of experiential learning can be instructive, remind participants that the names and details about specific persons are confidential. Refer to the Group Agreement and encourage parents to consider sharing specific information only if it is productive and can be done in a respectful way.



## Wrap Up

Bringing ideas together at the end of the workshop is an important step for everyone. It can be tempting to skip this step as the workshop gets close to the end. Let people know that you will honor their time and end the workshop as planned, but want to take a few more minutes to wrap up the time you've spent together.

### 1. Review Key Concepts.

- Acknowledging our feelings about working together with teachers and other staff can help us move from a reaction to an action.
- Special attention paid to consistent communication practices can have a positive effect on parent-teacher relations.
- Effective parent-teacher engagement takes more than one person's efforts.

**2. End on a positive note.** Remind participants that this workshop is an important step in building skills that can support positive outcomes for their child and family. For example, effective partnerships with teachers can foster their child's social-emotional development and long-term learning and academic success. Parents can also strengthen their own leadership and advocacy skills by enhancing their ability to communicate and partner with others.

**3. Review some or all of the comments written on the "Parking Lot for Ideas" sheet posted on the wall.** Consider responding to one comment. Ask participants which of the others they would like to discuss in the time remaining. If you don't have time, acknowledge that the comments are important. Think with the group about other ways to address the comments. These topics may be considered in preparation for other learning opportunities.

**4. Express your appreciation.** Let the group know how much you appreciate their time and hard work. Thank them for sharing their ideas and for being willing to think about change together.

**5. Make yourself available.** Be willing to answer questions and respond to concerns on an ongoing basis after the workshop. If you or another facilitator cannot be available, an on-site staff member may be designated in this role and announced at the end of the workshop.

**6. Collect attendance and evaluation forms.** Collect signed attendance sheet and pass out evaluation forms for the group to complete. Remind participants that these forms are anonymous and collected for the purpose of improving future workshops. During this time, you might also want to label and date any large group work so you can save it for future reference.

## Facilitator Reflection

Take time to review the workshop experience, read the evaluation forms, and summarize the results. Some additional questions to consider are:

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

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

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

**What were some of the themes that people talked about in this workshop?** Was there a group of issues that the responses and discussion had in common? Are any of those issues a surprise? How can I use those issues in future workshops to make the exercises more effective? Are there any Parking Lot items to integrate into other learning opportunities?

## Facilitator Reflection, cont.

**What would have made this workshop better?** What could I have done differently? Why? How can I use that information to make the next workshop more successful?

**Did I gain new knowledge from this workshop?** What did I learn? Did I learn anything new about the group or individuals in the group? Did I learn something new about myself as a facilitator?

Use these strategies to build and sustain strong partnerships with teachers and other early childhood staff:

1. **Establish a friendly relationship with teachers and other staff.** This may simply involve smiling and saying hello and goodbye.
2. **Be authentic and specific when sharing information or concerns with staff.** Consider the information and context you have for your child's behaviors. Think about how sharing anecdotes and stories from home may help staff understand your child better.  
  
For example, you might say "Eva's cousin visited last week and wanted to build with her set of blocks. Eva said 'no,' stood in front of the blocks, and refused to move. She collapsed to the floor in tears when I said she would have to share. She's done this with other children who have visited and I'm getting worried. Have you seen this as school? Do you have suggestions for what to do at home?"
3. **Find a common goal, such as the well-being of the child.** Parents and staff in Head Start and other early childhood programs want the best for each child. This is true even if the staff person may seem overwhelmed, exhausted, and/or angry. Build your partnership with staff by focusing on the shared care and concern for your child.
4. **Plan ahead. Spend some time thinking about what you want to say.** If possible, postpone a sensitive conversation if you are rushed, angry, or nervous. Think about the best time, place, and environment to approach the staff member. Consider if privacy is important for the conversation. For example, "I'm thinking this isn't the best time or place for us to talk. Could we schedule some time to sit together when we're not so rushed?"
5. **Consider the staff member's perspective when interpreting behavior.** It can be helpful to remind ourselves that we don't often know why someone is acting a specific way. It may have nothing to do with us or the current situation. Take a few breaths and reflect before taking the person's behavior personally. Avoid interpreting staff behaviors as a personal insult.
6. **Listen to the staff member and repeat what you heard to confirm that you understand what they are saying.** For example, you might say, "It sounds like you are saying that my child is more successful playing with one child than with a group. Is that correct?"
7. **Building relationships can take time.** Engaging in ongoing conversations and being open to the other's perspective both contribute to trust.
8. **Reflect on your feelings about communicating with staff.** Reflection can help you learn about yourself and make your partnerships with staff more productive and satisfying. By acknowledging the emotions that come up during these interactions, you can focus on how to contribute positively to the partnership process.

Workshop Evaluation

Title of the Workshop: **Partnering With Early Childhood Staff**

1. Please rate the extent to which you agree that the workshop met each objective:

	Strongly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Disagree a Little	Agree a Little	Mostly Agree	Strongly Agree
Objective 1: Participants will deepen their understanding of the importance of partnering with early childhood staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Objective 2: Participants will explore communication challenges that can occur.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Objective 3: Participants will learn practical strategies to use when partnering with teachers and staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Objective 4: Participants will become more confident in reaching out to teachers and staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Disagree a Little	Agree a Little	Mostly Agree	Strongly Agree
I was satisfied with this workshop.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The information presented was useful.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The workshop activities were useful.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The workshop activities were creative.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Facilitator was knowledgeable about the subject presented.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Facilitator’s presentation style was engaging.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Is there anything you would have liked to learn more about this topic that was not presented?

**Family Connections: Workshop Series for Staff and Parents**  
**Workshop Evaluation, cont.**

4. Would you like more workshops that expand on this topic? (please select one)

- Yes
- No

5. I would like more learning opportunities about:

Additional Comments:



## Related Resources

Explore the following resources on the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website:

### Family Connections Short Papers

These short papers are designed to share information on topics that are central to understanding depression, resilience, and best practice in engaging parents facing adversities. They are intended to work as stand-alone handouts for parents and staff as well as materials used in workshops and in parent groups. Short papers for parents include:

- **The Ability to Cope: Building Resilience in You and Your Child**  
Explore strategies for building resilience and facing adversity.
- **Parenting Through Tough Times: Coping with Depression**  
Learn how to recognize depression, understand how it can affect parents and children, and review suggestions for help.
- **Self-Reflection in Parenting: Help for Getting Through Stressful Times**  
Explore the benefits of using self-reflection as a parent, especially when facing stressful times, as well as strategies for practicing self-reflection.

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ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**



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