

The 5Rs for Effective Learning Leaders

Responsive Relationships

Overview

Who are Learning Leaders?

The term Early Learning Leader includes, but is not limited to, the program leaders who oversee educational service components such as curriculum planning and implementation, ongoing child assessment, coaching and PD for education staff. These learning leaders often carry the title of education manager or coordinator in Head Start and Early Head Start programs, but in some programs, they may also be other program leaders such as site directors or coordinators, child development specialists, master teacher, or coach. Regardless of the title, an early learning leader has, they act to encourage and inspire staff using the 5 Rs (Responsive Relationships, Reason, Resources, Reflective Dialogue, and Recognition).

Responsive and Resilient Relationships

Early Learning Leaders work to create trust, demonstrate caring for and about educational staff and encourage belonging. The foundations of trust, caring, and belonging include leading intentionally through an ever-present lens on equity and anti-racism. Learning Leaders work to achieve an inclusive culture by demonstrating empathy, reliability, and fostering the development of resilience in themselves and others.

Learning Leaders that Engage in **Responsive and Resilient Relationships** Demonstrate **Practices** that Include:

- **Promoting a deeply unified culture:** establishing a community of learning among educational staff; promoting an attitude of *we are all in this together*; and equally investing in implementation and policy.
- **Honoring and respecting education staff's needs:** understanding others' perspectives, valuing planning time, and supporting a balance between child-and operations-focused considerations; and supporting professional development based on individual choice and need.
- **Being available as a trusted resource:** communicating confidence in educational staff's decisions; modeling best practices; providing guidance for implementation of best practice; reinforcing best practice; walking the walk by doing rather than directing; and making visions and values evident through actions.
- **Acting with authenticity, consistency, and transparency:** being present and visible; meaningfully connecting with educational staff; following through on commitments; and acknowledging mistakes along the way.
- **Making vision and values known and visible in the work:** actively promoting a common vision and continuing to reiterate the vision in everyday interactions; and sharing excitement about their own learning—stimulated learning leaders create stimulated staff who spending time with the children.



National Center on

Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

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The 5 R^s for Effective Learning Leaders

Reflective Dialogue

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Reflective Dialogue

Learning leaders check in regularly, formally, and informally, to learn how educational staff are doing, and engage in conversations about how children are doing. They make time for and prioritize planning and discussion times for educational staff to meet with coaches, trainers, supervisors, and other colleagues. Dialogue is centered around children and child outcome data, and data are embedded in the dialogue in accessible, meaningful, and relevant ways.

Learning Leaders that Engage in Reflective Dialogues Demonstrate Practices that Include:

- **Collaborating to make meaning of data:** providing opportunities to reflect with others who may have varied perspectives, including giving voice to families to support making meaning of data; having conversations about data that are learning-centered rather than evaluative—focused on what is observed and help to explain the scenario from the children’s or staff’s perspective; and meaningfully applying data to decision making process.
- **Engaging in impromptu and planned discussions on building equity and further understanding of anti-racism:** supporting the entire team to look inward and self-reflect about their experiences and biases; asking *are we being equitable and inclusive*; welcoming and setting aside time for honest discussions about any signs of injustice and bias the staff observes; and appreciating children’s ability to identify bias and racism and guiding staff to address it in meaningful ways.
- **Integrating data into planning:** cultivating an awareness of and energy for the role and meaning of data within the program; digging deeper into summative or qualitative data to examine its meaning; and leading the team to not just see numbers but see the value in data for informing teaching practices and understanding children’s learning.
- **Challenging, clarifying, explaining, and provoking thoughts to celebrate children and adult learning:** helping educational staff identify when they are effective so they can feel it themselves; taking time to observe children communicate what they are learning; helping educational staff recognize that a single set of strategies does not work for all children and helping staff individualize for each child; and supporting consideration of alternative.



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Reason Overview

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Reason

Learning leaders inspire shared commitment by critically thinking about the why or the rationale for practices, knowledge, and policies. They underscore the child development that undergirds the practice, raise issues of educational justice, and address the role of safety and health in early learning. They build and use their understanding, awareness, and knowledge to play a key role in supporting staff to meet instructional program goals and objectives. They ask is there another way we can achieve a similar or better outcome for children and families?

Learning Leaders that Engage in **Providing the Reason** Demonstrate **Practices** that Include:

- **Inspiring conviction to practice by providing the *why*:** earning credibility by explaining, defining, and providing meaning about the essential components of best practice; understanding and modeling how to think through actions and their impact on children; and asking educational staff critical questions and providing meaningful reasons for asking.
- **Centering the perspective of the child and family:** always considering the perspective of the child within the context of the child's family; and supporting knowing about the child to meet the child's expressed needs.
- **Asking why are we doing this and does it meet our vision?** explaining to families and educational staff the importance and purpose of data by using simple visual illustrations and incorporating data conversations into formal and informal meetings; and positioning data as working to support rather than undermine family values and learning goals.
- **Ensuring that social and emotional and trauma care needs inform the work:** focusing on a healing approach, offering lessons and training focused on the impacts of trauma; and helping staff to focus on individual children to meet each child's individual needs.



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Recognition Overview

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Recognition

Learning leaders recognize individual educational staff's learning and growth through informal descriptive acknowledgment and/or formal structures that provide incentive for educational staff to continue to grow and flourish as professionals. Recognition is an ongoing endeavor.

Learning Leaders that Engage in **Recognition** Demonstrate **Practices** that Include:

- **Acknowledging individual needs, growth, successes, and challenges:** providing meaningful feedback grounded in expertise and content knowledge; recognizing large and small successes; ensuring that all educational staff feel seen, heard and understood; giving praise that is descriptive and contingent on effort; and seeking opportunities to show trust and give gratitude to educational staff.
- **Celebrating small wins:** conducting daily informal walkthroughs; leaving positive messages for educational staff; noticing, and acknowledging the positive; and asking questions.
- **Leading with heart:** communicating trust in educational staff; and understanding challenges in the classroom, home visiting, or family childcare learning setting and sharing challenges.
- **Respecting individual differences and cultural roots:** honoring each educational staff member and child's uniqueness by cultivating ongoing discussions that promote understanding of origins, home culture, cultural beliefs, and values.
- **Making sure each person is seen, heard, valued, and respected:** striving to know each educational staff member as an individual; balancing support of individual's personal circumstances with work demands; and understanding the importance of providing support for staff's mental health and self-care.



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Resources

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Resources

Learning leaders provide resources, including materials, training, and professional development. They create the conditions for educational staff to engage in teaching, home visiting, and learning groups to use each other as resources. Their organizational processes and policies (e.g., budget, scheduling, planning time, education support) are reflective of a priority value on supporting educational staff's growth.

Learning Leaders that Engage in **Providing Resources** Demonstrate **Practices** that Include:

- **Providing responsive resources and varied, concrete presentation modalities:** offering responsive, professional development that uses a variety of presentation modalities, active engagement, and builds on prior learning; establishing goal-setting associated with specific teaching and home visiting practices and priorities; simplifying complicated theories; and welcoming interactive professional development learning.
- **Translating theory to practice in doable chunks:** translating theory into practice through modeling, breaking down elements of practice into small steps and meaningfully connecting the steps to the big picture of weekly goals and positive child and program outcomes; and giving educational staff time to assimilate steps—to name them, claim them, and build on them.
- **Providing peer learning opportunities:** offering cross-training for the entire staff to build common language and understanding; providing many opportunities for dispersed learning and formal training with time for application with children; embedding peer learning opportunities into all professional training experiences; and focusing on small chunks of professional development content within peer learning groups.
- **Seeking external and internal supports for identified needs in the learning environment:** conferring with and observing other programs to gain from a different perspective and learn more strategies and options that may be helpful for the program; bringing external expertise in to support specific issues arising in classrooms, during home visiting, and in variety setting of programs; and meaningfully responding to educational staff's requests for support.



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