

REFLECTIVE DIALOGUES

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 5Rs (Responsive Relationships, Reason, Resources, Reflective Dialogue, and Recognition).

REFLECTIVE DIALOGUES

Learning leaders check in regularly, both 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 support 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 their 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



responses to children when current strategies are falling short.

- **Creating a safe space for trying new strategies:** capitalizing on educational staff's desire to do more by having a *let's try this* attitude; accepting mistakes as an opportunity to problem-solve; and revisiting prior learning to encourage use of new tools and strategies.

