

Module Three: Strengths-based Attitudes

This module is designed to support group learning for a lead facilitator and participants. It offers interactive activities and reflective exercises. Individuals may also complete the activities and reflective exercises on their own.

Why This Matters for Subsidy Staff

By using a strengths-based approach in their work with families, subsidy staff can build rapport and trust with families. This rapport and trust helps families feel more comfortable sharing the questions, concerns, and goals they have for their child and themselves.

When families share information about their strengths, needs, and goals, subsidy staff are better able to offer information and support that families value. Staff can also feel more confident in their abilities and satisfied with their work.



Goal

Subsidy staff use a strengths-based approach to build rapport with families and to help families feel more comfortable sharing the questions, concerns, and goals they have for their child and family.

Learning Objective

Subsidy staff can identify Strengths-based Attitudes and opportunities to apply them in their work with families.

Key Competency

Subsidy staff apply Strengths-based Attitudes and build rapport with families.

Teaching Tips for Group Facilitators

Preparing for the Training

Review the module and the handouts carefully. The handouts are: the Discussion, the Activity, and the Reflective Practice Exercise. Copy the handouts for yourself and each participant. Gather other materials (e.g., chart paper, markers, pens).

Think of the Goals, Learning Objectives, and Key Competencies as guideposts. They indicate the purpose of the training and the knowledge, skills, and practices the training is designed to enhance.

Create a pleasant learning environment free from distractions. For example, ensure that participants have comfortable seating and a work surface for writing (e.g., a table or clipboard). Consider allowing or serving drinks and snacks or hosting a breakfast or lunch meeting.

Dedicate time for the discussion. Avoid situations where staff leave the discussion to answer the phone or attend to a family.



Estimated Time

60 minutes



Materials

Handouts for each participant

- **Module Three: Handout 1—Discussion**
- **Module Three: Handout 2—Activity**
- **Module Three: Handout 3—Reflective Practice Exercise**

Supplies for Groups:

- Chart paper and markers
- Pen or pencil for each participant

Supplies for Individuals:

- Pen or pencil



Instructions

Group Facilitators

1. Present the Discussion. Distribute and use **Module Three: Handout 1.**
2. Facilitate the Activity. Distribute and use **Module Three: Handout 2.**
3. Facilitate the Reflective Practice Exercise. Distribute and use **Module Three: Handout 3.**

Individual Learners

1. Read **Module Three: Handout 1.**
2. Follow the Individual Learner instructions to complete the Activity. Use **Module: Three, Handout 2.**
3. Complete the Reflective Practice Exercise. Use **Module Three: Handout 3.**

Presenting the Discussion to a Group

Have the participants read **Module Three: Handout 1**. Ask if they have any questions. Use open ended and critical thinking questions to check and enhance their understanding of the material.

Sample open-ended and critical thinking questions:

- What do we mean by “building rapport”?
- What can subsidy staff do to build rapport and trust in their relationships with families?
- What is a strengths-based approach?
- What is the definition of “attitude” used in this module?
- What are some examples of Strengths-based Attitudes?
- What is the difference between Strengths-based Attitudes and strengths-based messages?
- How does this information relate to your personal experience working with families?
- How does your personal knowledge and experience affect the way you respond to this information?
- What would it look like if you were to focus on adopting Strengths-based Attitudes and communicating strengths-based messages?

Consider and support participants’ ways of learning. Some people find it easier to stay focused and interested when people in the group take turns reading aloud. Others prefer to read silently and then discuss what they’ve read with the group.

Consider the characteristics of the group you’re working with (e.g., their literacy levels, languages, and speech or hearing differences). You may need to present the Discussion in multiple ways.

People tend to learn better when they move from the general to the specific. Encourage participants to begin by skimming the information. Suggest they pay special attention to the Learning Objectives and any bold or italicized words. They may note any headings, charts, or graphics.

Then ask participants to read through the material a second time more carefully. Encourage them to highlight, underline, or otherwise note any important definitions, concepts, or ideas.

Instructions for Facilitating the Discussion and Activity

For Group Facilitators

1. Use **Module Three: Handout 1** to facilitate the Discussion.
2. Distribute **Module Three: Handout 2**. Be sure that participants also have **Module Three: Handout 1** available for reference as they complete the Activity.
3. Encourage participants to share an example of a recent interaction or event that might have been influenced by their attitude, or by someone else's attitude or feeling in either a positive or negative manner. Chart the responses.
4. Summarize the conversation by highlighting how the examples shared by the group demonstrate how our attitudes can affect our behaviors and the outcomes associated with an experience.
5. Divide the larger group into smaller ones, or have the group divide into pairs. Give each group or pair a sheet of chart paper and markers.
6. Encourage each group to review both handouts.
7. Ask each group to identify a note taker and a reporter.
8. Ask each group to answer the following questions:
 - What are some examples of a feeling or a way of thinking that may influence our interactions with families seeking subsidy assistance? You might want to consider not only your own attitudes but the attitudes of family members as well.
 - Which of the Strengths-based Attitudes listed in Handout 1 of this module might be helpful to consider in your interactions with families? Why?
9. Allow each group a few minutes to discuss. Instruct note takers to chart their group's responses on chart paper so that the reporter can review those responses with the larger group. Encourage participants to also make notes individually on **Module Three: Handout 2**.
10. Ask the reporters to share with the larger group a summary of their group's work.
11. Conclude by reflecting on the suggestions offered by the group and talking about how they might support each other in their efforts to promote a strengths-based perspective.
12. Share **Module Three: Handout 3**. Encourage participants to review the Goals, Learning Objectives, Competencies, and "Thoughts From the Field" in **Module Three: Handout 1** as they complete the Reflective Practice Exercise.
13. Encourage participants to save their handouts to use as references for completing the summary exercise after they have finished all modules.

For Individual Learners

1. Find **Module Three, Handouts 1 and 2**.
2. Review both handouts.
3. Reflect on your experiences working with families.
4. Think of an example of a recent interaction or event that might have been influenced by your attitude or someone else's attitude or feeling in either a positive or negative manner.
5. Consider the following questions, and write your answers on **Module Three: Handout 2**.
 - What are some examples of a feeling or a way of thinking that may impact our interactions with families seeking subsidy assistance? You might want to consider not only your own attitudes but the attitudes of family members as well.
 - Which of the Strengths-based Attitudes listed in **Module Three: Handout 1** might be helpful to consider in your interactions with families? Why?
6. Find **Module Three: Handout 3**. Review the Goals, Learning Objectives, Competencies, and "Thoughts From the Field" in **Module Three: Handout 1**. Complete the Reflective Practice Exercise. Consider ways to share this information with your colleagues.
7. Save your handouts to use as references for completing the summary exercise after you have finished all modules.

Module Three: Strengths-based Attitudes

Handout 1: Discussion

Why This Matters for Subsidy Staff

By using a strengths-based approach in their work with families, subsidy staff can build rapport and trust with families. This rapport and trust helps families feel more comfortable sharing the questions, concerns, and goals they have for their child and family. When families share information about their strengths, needs, and goals, subsidy staff are better able to offer information and support that families value. Staff can also feel more confident in their abilities and satisfied with their work.

Goal

- Subsidy staff use a strengths-based approach to build rapport with families and to help families feel more comfortable sharing the questions, concerns, and goals they have for their child and family.

Learning Objective

- Subsidy staff can identify Strengths-based Attitudes and opportunities to apply them in their work with families.

Key Competency

- Subsidy staff apply Strengths-based Attitudes and build rapport with families.

Discussion

Subsidy staff are an important first contact for families. Building rapport with parents can be challenging for many reasons—because of time constraints, for example, or competing priorities. Efforts to build rapport can be especially challenging when the communication method is virtual (e.g., online chat, email). Yet building rapport with parents is an important part of encouraging consumer engagement.

From the moment a parent reaches out to you for information about a subsidy for child care, there are opportunities to build rapport and engage with families. One-way information sharing, a typical component of consumer education, is an essential step towards building rapport. Building rapport, however, goes beyond making information available to families. Building rapport means developing mutually respectful relationships in which subsidy staff and parents can have conversations with one another and communicate well enough to understand each other's ideas, values, and opinions.

Asking parents to share information about their children and their thoughts about the type of child care they are seeking opens the door to a deeper conversation. Once the door is open, you can develop the conversation by asking parents about the goals and interests they have for their child and family. By asking parents to share what is happening in their lives, you also invite them to share any additional concerns, such as their need for housing, food, or health care.

Parents and professionals can foster these conversations by focusing on shared goals for children—for example, safe environments, sensitive caregiving, and opportunities for learning. Other goals may depend on family preferences, cultures, and economic or social circumstances. In general, professionals can build rapport with families by asking questions and learning from the family's experiences and knowledge.

Conversations with families require us to be open to seeing their perspectives. Sometimes we share the same perspective with families, and our conversations go smoothly. At other times, we are surprised by something or feel challenged. And there may be times when your agency cannot accommodate a family's request. No matter the situation, it always helps to approach a conversation with the family's strengths in mind.

A strengths-based approach involves:

- Acknowledging the strengths of families first
- Respecting and learning from differences
- Approaching families as equal and reciprocal partners

Within the parameters of the child care subsidy program, a **strengths-based approach** also involves:

- Showing openness to adapting your practices based on family preferences
- Sharing decision-making

Example: A mother misses a subsidy enrollment appointment. She calls and explains that she is having trouble making and keeping appointments because she's just started a new job. Using a strengths-based approach, you might thank her for calling and congratulate her on her new job. Then you might acknowledge her interest in attaining financial assistance for child care, and work with her to find alternative arrangements for an appointment—for example, by meeting with her at a time or location that doesn't require her to miss work.

An attitude is a way of thinking or feeling about someone or something. Attitudes can influence our ability to build relationships through conversations and interactions. We often see attitudes reflected in a person's behavior. **A Strengths-based Attitude can encourage collaboration.** Adopting a positive, Strengths-based Attitude does not mean avoiding challenges; instead it shows families that we want to work together to find a solution. The chart below lists several Strengths-based Attitudes for you to consider when working with families.

Strengths-based Attitudes

All families have strengths.	Each child and family has unique strengths that can be the foundation of our discussions and partnership. Always start with strengths first, even when there are challenges.
Families are the first and most important teachers of their children.	Parents and family members are the most important constant presence in children's lives, and children's healthy development relies on sensitive and nurturing interactions within the family and the community.
Families are our partners with a critical role in their child's development.	Families make choices every day that affect their child's development and learning. These choices are rooted in their belief systems and cultural identities.
Families have expertise about their child and their family.	Families understand their children best and make decisions for their children's well-being. When families share what they know, children, families, and providers benefit. Families' contributions are important and valuable. Being open to families' suggestions and requests helps us do our best on behalf of their children.

Source: National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement. (2018). *Strategies for Family Engagement: Attitudes and Practices*.

Subsidy staff can convey Strengths-based Attitudes by incorporating strengths-based messages in communications with families. Incorporating key strengths-based messages builds rapport. These messages encourage consumer engagement and promote positive outcomes for family consumer engagement.

Strengths-based messages reflect families as:

- Effective decision makers
- Resourceful users of comprehensive services that support child and family well-being
- Trusted sources of information in their families and among their peers
- Leaders to advance quality for their child and their community

Strengths-based messages recognize the important roles of parents. Strengths-based messages can be enhanced with suggestions for action. For example:

- “You are your child’s first and most important teacher. As you search for an early childhood or school-age care and education program, consider which program best matches your family’s and child’s approach to learning.”
- “You are the expert on your child and family. Look for an early childhood or school-age care and education professional who asks for and respects your input.”
- “You have a critical role in your family’s development. Talk with your early childhood or school-age care and education professional about your family’s strengths, needs, and goals.”
- “Your contributions in decision-making for your child are important and valuable. Work with your early childhood or school-age care and education professional to find ways that together you can support your child’s learning in child care and at home.”

- “If you have a school-age child, look for before-school, after-school, and summer programs that provide learning opportunities, promote health and safety, and welcome your involvement.”

By building rapport with families and applying Strengths-based Attitudes, subsidy staff can affirm parents’ roles as their children’s first and most important teachers and as engaged consumers of early childhood, school-age, and comprehensive services.

Leaders can support staff by:

- Creating a positive organizational culture and climate that fosters a strengths-based approach
- Ensuring that staff understand and have opportunities to practice applying and reflecting on Strengths-based Attitudes (e.g., providing reflective supervision, protecting time for staff to share ideas that enhance their practices)
- Creating policies and procedures that promote the application of Strengths-based Attitudes
- Working with families and staff to incorporate strengths-based messages into agency communications (e.g., print materials, website content)

Reflective supervision refers to a collaborative relationship to support professional growth. Supervisors facilitate staff’s reflection by offering time for dialogue about performance and by asking them to evaluate themselves. The process of reflective supervision helps identify staff’s strengths and challenges, and it addresses their needs for training or support.

Adapted from: Early Head Start National Resource Center. (n.d.) *A Collection of Tips on Becoming a Reflective Supervisor*.

Thoughts From the Field

“When I am waiting for a family to come into my office, I take a deep breath and think to myself, ‘All families have strengths, no matter what challenges they face.’ Bottom line: all families want what is best for their child. I want to encourage parents to share their hopes and maybe their fears with me.

When families feel comfortable enough to do that, I can offer assistance based on what they are asking. Sometimes it is hard work. But when I take a positive attitude, the conversations seem to flow because families sense I am truly listening and looking for the positive.”—*Subsidy staff*

Use this space to note ideas or questions.

Plan to save copies of these handouts. You will have an opportunity to use them to create a summary reflection after completing all of the modules in this series.

Module Three: Strengths-based Attitudes

Handout 2: Activity

1. What are examples of feelings or ways of thinking that may influence your interactions with families seeking subsidy assistance? Consider not only your own attitudes but also the attitudes of families.

Hint: Think about opportunities you might have had to interact with families. For example, a father mentions that he's looking for a highly rated program for his infant son. He'd like the program to be close to his work. He needs care in two weeks. How do you feel? What do you think?

2. Which of the Strengths-based Attitudes (explained in **Module 3: Handout 1**) might be helpful to consider applying in your interactions with families? Why?

Use this space to note ideas or questions.

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Handout 3: Reflective Practice Exercise

Learning a new approach, skill, or activity is a process. Reflective practice is a way of thinking about your actions—what you do and how and why you do it. The purpose of this kind of examination is to continuously learn by enhancing your skills and practices. Answer the questions below to guide your reflections on Strengths-based Attitudes.

Reflective Practice

Question	Your Reflections
What did I hope to learn?	
What did I learn?	
What action will I take because of what I have learned?	

Use this space to note ideas or questions.

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For more information about this resource, please contact us:
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