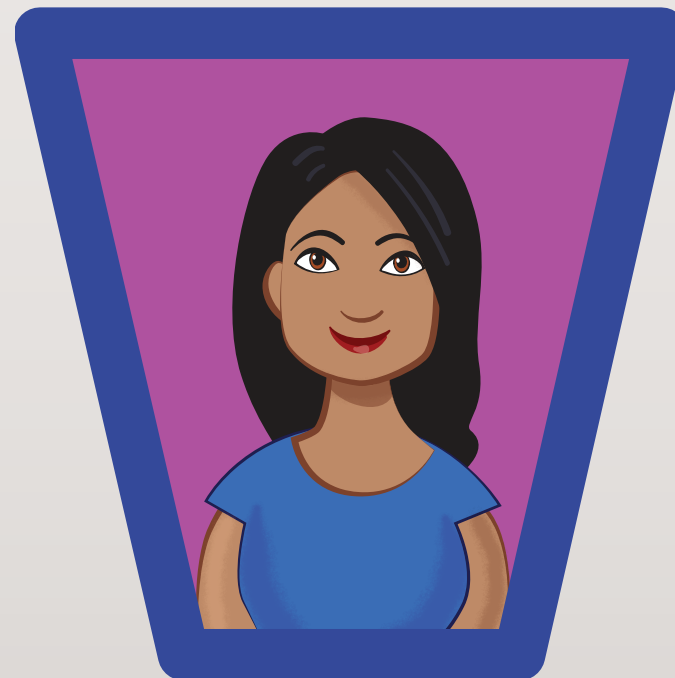


Facilitator Guide Parent Sessions

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Introduction

This guide accompanies the SEEDS curriculum *Strategies for Effective Eating Development* with a particular focus on working with the parent or caregiver. We will provide recommendations for facilitating the adult portion of the program where learning is based on participants' personal contexts and their valued lived experiences. We teach children because their ability to derive meaning from their life experiences is limited, and as adults we facilitate their learning by helping children develop concrete connections with their experiences—children understand concepts based on what they have seen, heard, or felt.

The SEEDs program is designed to be used with parents or caregivers and their young children using a framework developed by Norris (2003) that includes recognizing and internalizing previous knowledge, adding new information, applying what is being learned in the moment, and following up with home-based action and practice. Within this framework, parents and children have continuous engagement with the material throughout the week and the opportunity to ask follow-up questions and to report on outcomes, successes, challenges, and barriers.

Before implementing the SEEDs curriculum, it's important that facilitators spend time inventorying their toolbox of skills, tips, and techniques. Facilitating groups is a fluid experience because of the diversity of experiences that participants bring to the program. Having a robust toolbox is essential to address the

different issues that may arise when facilitating groups. Facilitation inventories are available online with a simple search; identifying the best fit will take time and research.

Facilitator checklists include things to consider when conducting a self-inventory. Facilitators who are self-aware of their strengths and weaknesses have the advantage of being able to prepare adequately before they engage their groups. A passive facilitator is at risk of creating a group learning environment where there is little order and participants control the flow of the session—participants may feel that they are not in a safe learning environment and they may want to retreat from participation. On the other hand, an authoritarian facilitator is at risk of creating a group learning environment that does not value the experiences of the participants and the participants do not feel it's safe to engage — participants will retreat or leave the group altogether. In the middle is a facilitator who welcomes rich and diverse dialogue and honors and values the lived experiences the participants bring to the session. Effective facilitators create and follow agreed upon ground rules to guide the learning process so that there is mutual respect and participation is welcomed and encouraged.



Getting Started

Facilities

Start early to make plans for a location and work through challenges. Planning for a location takes time, preparation, and patience. The location of your program is key to participation. It should be a convenient distance for families to travel to and be located near public transportation, if possible. The right facility will have a room for parents, a room for participating youth, and a child care or child activity room for siblings not participating in the program. We recommend that you have a room with a sink for prep and meal time.

Visit the facility ahead of time to plan the layout of the learning environments. Look at the size of the rooms, lighting, technology options, and furniture sizes. Plan to use comfortable and appropriately-sized chairs and tables for the adults and small-sized furniture for children.

Figure out where you'll place tables for food tasting and where you'll stand in the room. Make sure you know where the screen is and arrange the participants' tables and chairs so that everyone can see the screen. Sit in the chairs to make sure participants have a good view.

Different locations have different requirements. Be sure to address these requirements before you have your first class session. For example, you may need to consider liability insurance. Many organizations and agencies require it when they are hosting programming at their location or with the families they are serving. Start early to negotiate insurance requirements. It may take time to get everything finalized before you can use the location.

Supplies, Equipment, and Technology

Most of the work for successful program implementation takes place before the facilitator steps into the classroom. Make sure you have enough supplies and proper equipment for each week that will help you prepare for each session and avoid interruptions during the class. Keep a box or kit fully stocked in case something comes up and you need to make minor adjustments. For example, if there is no poster board, you may want to have dry-erase markers in your kit so that you can keep the session flowing and stay within the allotted time.

The parent curriculum is heavily driven by video, which can invite possible hiccups (e.g., power failure during a storm). To show the videos in the parent sessions, you should have equipment such as a large television or screen, projector, a laptop, and speakers. Check to make sure that the computer, projector, and sound are working properly. **Be sure to test the videos and projector BEFORE the first day of the program.** Practice playing the videos with the sound on in your location ahead of time. After participants arrive, test the audio to make sure that everyone in the room can hear it.

Place a table near you so that you have easy access to curriculum items. Spend time setting up your space—it will help you feel comfortable in the setting and your families will notice.



Space Needs

To successfully implement SEEDS, make sure you have enough space. The curriculum is structured so that there are 3 separate rooms for each session: parent, child, and child care. A large gymnasium will not work for three groups that are going on at the same time. Noise carries in a gymnasium. Videos, conversations, and activities that are happening all at once add to the noise level and it becomes too loud for successful delivery of the program. A gymnasium is fine for mealtime and child care, and then the parent session and child session can each be held in their respective rooms. For parent and child sessions, make sure that you have enough room so that participants can move around without tripping over each other or the furniture. Some activities require the participants to move to different stations in the room. If you have adequate space it will help with the flow of traffic.

Staffing

To deliver and implement the program, you'll need a team of facilitators and support staff who should have appropriate training and certifications. The parent session requires a trained and experienced facilitator with a background in adult learning and group facilitation. An assistant for the parent session is recommended, but not required. The child session requires two facilitators with a background in early education and experience working with preschool children. The child facilitators will help each other in small group work as well as with classroom management. Child care or child activity facilitators should have a background in child and youth development and should have appropriate child first-aid training certification. Maintaining adequate child-to-adult

ratios may be required through state, agency, and local ordinances—make sure you research and follow regulations when hiring child care or child activity facilitators.

Literacy

Take into account literacy levels when working with diverse communities. The language which the program is delivered in will have specific nuances that add flavor to the experience. You need to take into account participants' reading, writing, and speaking abilities. Facilitators are encouraged to meet with the participants before the first session for introductions and to assess special needs or accommodations. Identifying literacy levels ahead of time will help facilitators prepare for how they will accommodate participants who may not be able to read or write—the facilitator should NEVER call out the participant in front of the rest of the class or create an embarrassing situation where he or she is in the spotlight.

Cultural Relevancy

Honoring our families' cultural and ethnic contexts and narratives enriches the experience of SEEDS. Families have strong and lasting traditions and cultural rituals that they are proud of, and at times, these may conflict with some of the recommendations offered during the sessions. Facilitators are encouraged to learn about the cultural and ethnic contexts their families will bring and how to best incorporate information that respects, helps, and enriches the families' duality in culture, language, and values.



Tips and Techniques

It may have been several weeks or months ago when you attended a training to learn how to facilitate the SEEDS program. Take time to review the overall curriculum content. Before each day of the program, review the content for that week. When you're familiar with the content, you'll be more comfortable and conversant in it. You'll become more confident when you know what is ahead of you.

This curriculum covers a lot of content and young families are very busy, so being aware of how much time each session takes is important. Honor the families' time by starting and ending at the planned times. The curriculum provides estimated times for each activity. Be sure to note when you have 5 minutes or 10 minutes to complete an activity and keep an eye on the clock.

Sometimes activities take longer than anticipated. It's up to you as the facilitator to take control of the time to get things back on track. You can help with transitions by giving a 1- or 2-minute heads-up to the group. (“Okay, please wrap up your activity/conversations. We'll be moving to the next activity in 1 minute.” Or, “It's important for us to finish up on time, so let's move on.”)

Your curriculum contains materials and supplies that are required to successfully complete the learning activities. Each week, before you come to the session, review the materials and supplies and confirm that you have everything you need. Bring extra handouts in case you get a request for more.

Be in the Moment

Stay present with participants by staying focused on what is happening now. Take a deep breath to help you let go of personal

distractions so you can proceed mindfully. If you get a question that will be answered in another section of the curriculum, delay the answer with a comment like “That's a great question. We'll be learning more soon, so I'm going to ask you to hold that thought for now.” If possible, avoid distractions or conversations that take you down a path in which the content is not addressed in the SEEDS program.

Know Your Participants

Put your name tag on before the first session begins. Have your families complete and wear name tags for the evening. Do your participants read English or Spanish? Being aware of the literacy levels of your participants is important to assure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate and engage during the program. If you are not sure, read printed material out loud after you hand it out. Likewise, if you write information or responses on poster or white boards, be sure to read these out loud. Using these techniques will help you avoid identifying a non-reader in front of the group. If you have forms to complete, assign a helper to assist those who struggle with reading or writing.

Do parents usually bring other family members or friends to the program? It is customary in some cultural and ethnic communities that extended family also participate as they have an integral role in the family home. Are parents divorced and remarried? Are stepparents also attending with biological parents? Sometimes extra people provide transportation or are included as extended family. Welcome all to the program. These additional attendees may not participate, but they may sit and listen and learn as well.



Use Ground Rules

The purpose of ground rules is to provide a safe environment with common behavioral expectations in the group. At the beginning of your first session invite participants to create a list of ground rules with the group. Post these each subsequent week and add more if necessary. Keep the ground rules simple and easy to understand. Some examples of ground rules are:

- Arrive on time
- Put cell phones on vibrate
- Let others speak (don't interrupt)
- Everyone has the right to pass
- All beliefs honored
- Voice by choice (Norris, 2003)

Establishing ground rules with the whole group right from the start of the program helps to create and ensure a safe learning environment.

Try Strategies

The preparation you do for your sessions is the first step in setting up for success. The next real challenge comes the minute your participants arrive. You can use a number of quick and easy techniques to keep the lesson and discussion moving along and to make sure all voices are heard and the group feels safe.

An effective facilitator has a number of tools at her or his disposal that can be used to keep the group engaged. Facilitation of evidence-based material involves giving participants the opportunity to explore new material in a way that respects the wealth of knowledge that group members bring to the sessions.

Here are a few specific techniques that you may already use or that you can try in your classes:

1) Scan the group during active and silent periods to see who is engaged and who is not. A helpful method is to use a Z scan. Imagine drawing a Z with your eyes and move your head slightly to quickly read the group. This is especially helpful if you have asked a question of the whole group and you want to see who is ready to share without going to the first hand that pops up. Take five seconds or so to leisurely check in with the participants. You can also use the Z scan when the group is actively engaged and you are almost ready to move to the next segment. Or you can walk the classroom area in a Z if people are involved in small group sharing as a way of gently asserting your presence and checking in with the participants.

2) Ask open-ended questions when you want more than a nod of the head or a yes or no answer.

Questions that begin with words like *how*, *why*, *when*, and *what* invite more information. Requests that begin with "tell me more" or "describe what happened this week" give the learner permission to share what they know and are learning. Questions that begin "Did you ..." or "Do you ..." or "Who did ..." all invite yes or no answers. One of the elements of this program is home practice. Compare the two approaches to questions:

Open: "What did you learn from this week's home practice?"

Closed: "Did you do the home practice this week?"

Which of these questions invites participation?



Let's consider another example. In one of the lessons you will be discussing portion size.

Open questions: "What questions or concerns do you have about measuring food for your child?" "What are some challenges you face with portion control for your family?"

Closed questions: "Do you have any concerns about portion control for your children?" "Did you grow up with portion control at mealtimes?"

A good strategy is to review the questions that are in the curriculum and to write a few of your own that you can use in facilitating a discussion. It is sometimes easier to ask a question that you have already formulated. Remember to ask yourself—is my question open or closed?

3) Honor the wisdom of the group. This is essential when engaging adult learners. The learners bring a lot of life experience to our groups and we need to let them contribute. One way to do that is to make sure that all voices are heard. Small group activities provide participants with opportunities to share what they know. Your job is to manage the time and the transitions between large and small group work, but not to manage the content of the small group work. Sometimes the shyest group member who will not share in the large group will share in a one-on-one discussion with a partner or two. The group wisdom can also be used if someone poses a question to you that you would like to have feedback from others in the group to answer. Turning to the group as a resource, and establishing them as resources for one another, is a powerful technique.

4) Make sure, as the facilitator, that your statements are not biased toward any one participant. The comments the group leader makes after someone has shared can have an impact on the person who has shared and can have unintended consequences for other group members. Here is an example.

Facilitator Suzy is a very enthusiastic and warm person. She loves what she does and is excited to be in class each week. She has a tendency to excitedly respond to a comment made by a parent participant, "That is an excellent example!" or "Well done." Unfortunately, another parent may not get the same response to her sharing. She may have said something that Suzy was unsure about and Suzy responded by saying, "Okay, that's one way to see it." The group becomes aware immediately that Suzy is evaluating their comments. In the latter example, the person may not choose to share again.

This can be corrected very easily by the facilitator responding with "Thank you." or "Thanks for sharing." The personal sharing can also be honored by reflecting back what you think you heard and then following up with a thank you. Sometimes recording comments on a flip chart will help you give all the responses equal attention. (Note: The impact of writing down what is shared may be different for learners with low literacy levels.)



5) Timing, transitions and redirecting are essential elements of moving the group through the material. The challenges of maintaining fidelity to an evidence-based program is to stay within the parameters laid out in the curriculum. Each activity has a suggested time, and if that time is not followed fairly closely, the opportunity to finish the lesson will be lost. Using a timer can be intrusive at times, but it can be helpful to both the group and the facilitator. It can help if the facilitator sets an expectation in the beginning that her or his job is to make sure that the content in each lesson is covered. Most people have easy access to timers on their phones or watches. Sometimes it's easier to use a wall clock and to let the group know when one activity will end and the next will begin. Timing issues can arise for both the facilitator-led activities and the small group discussions. Once the timing issues are addressed, sometimes it takes the experience of going through the lessons more than once to develop the art of transitioning the group from one activity to the next. Skilled facilitators use a number of strategies to steer the group through the curriculum.

Here are a few ideas to try.

1. End a discussion time with “**Thank you all for sharing about _____. Join me as we move to the next topic/activity about _____.**”
2. “**We have just finished exploring _____ and now we will learn about _____.**”
3. “**It has been a joy to see you all engaged in this topic. I think we can all keep learning about it. Let’s move to our next activity.**”

Finally, the hardest thing for some facilitators is to redirect a group that has gotten off topic and the discussion is threatening the timing along with the transitions that have been planned. The job of the facilitator is to protect all of the learners and to honor the reason that they have come, that is, to learn about the topic for that session.

Redirecting can happen in a number of ways. Some of the same examples that were just given for transitions can be used to redirect. A facilitator can make a reflective statement that the group has wandered far from the topic at hand and gently move the group back to the curriculum.

Sometimes a difficult participant will try to take over the group. Perhaps this person is someone who wants attention and is not sensitive to the group and will just keep talking. A powerful yet gentle way to redirect these participants is to walk over close to where they are sitting and to redirect from there. Depending on the situation and the space, you might either sit or stand. A gentle touch on the arm is also a way to assert control if needed. But be aware that in some cultures and ethnic communities, touching the participant’s arm may not be an acceptable practice.



The Unexpected “Stuff”

Correcting Misinformation

Facilitators who are working with adult learners and with evidence-based programs walk a fine line between honoring the wisdom of the group and stepping in when something that is incorrect and/or unhelpful is shared. The SEEDS program encourages an authoritative parenting approach to feeding young children. The skills that are being encouraged throughout reflect the authoritative style. The facilitator has the same responsibility to be authoritative and not authoritarian (“You’re wrong!”) or permissive/indulgent (nodding your head and taking no action).

Facilitators can approach this challenge in several different ways. The first is to create a rule in the first class that if misinformation is shared, it is the facilitator’s job to correct it and assure the group it will be done in a non-blaming or shaming way. Developing a plan with the group up front and making an agreement that can be used in each session from the start may help prevent problems. If a question or discussion is outside your area of expertise (e.g., human nutrition), simply state, **“I don’t have sufficient information about this to give you accurate information.”**

Sometimes the participant who is resisting the new information and insisting that their way is the “right” way is stuck for one reason or another.

Jean Illsley Clarke and Connie Dawson (1989) present a model for moving a participant from a place of denial and discounting their ability to change to becoming empowered to use a new skill. The four stages are listed in the table.

First Stage	Denial	Person does not believe that there is a problem and therefore there is no reason to change.
Second Stage	Discounting the problem	Person believes “There is no problem.” Or “So what? It’s just a little problem.”
Third Stage	Discounting a solution	Person believes “It is a universal problem.” For example, “What can anyone do about a three-year-old?” Or “What can you do about a grandmother?”
Fourth Stage	Discounting power to change	Person believes “I do not have the power to do anything about this—it is beyond my control.”

Your job as facilitator is to help participants see that

- the problem is real;
- there are solutions;
- they can take steps to change it; and
- they can be empowered to try a new skill or technique.



A facilitator is often faced with the challenge of offering support or giving facts. The two are not mutually exclusive, but it can take practice to do both at the same time. Facilitators need to practice this duality. Active listening is a good way to begin with the support role. **“What I heard you say is_____.” “It sounds like you’re really confused, frustrated, anxious, etc.” “I have some information that may help you at home.” “Please let me know after class if it was helpful for you.”** If someone is really activated emotionally, it is unlikely they will be able to focus on learning new skills or taking in new information until they have discharged a little of their feelings. Acknowledgment of those feelings is important and can be done fairly easily and might be followed with a quick physical stretch, some deep breathing, or another technique that respects the challenge and allows the group to move into the next activity. Using a physical activity or some breathing to help the whole group process is often more effective than just addressing one person. Give yourself a pat on the back for managing feelings and offering both support and information!

Note about Last Session and Graduation

Part of the success of parents completing the sessions is making sure you have a formal graduation with a certificate at the end of the program. Take photos throughout the sessions of all the families so that you can present the photos in a slide show in the last family session (Session 7). Make sure you have signed photo permission forms from your organization or institution before you take pictures of the families. There are more suggestions in Family Session 7 for other things you can do to make this an important milestone for the parents and children.

Conclusion

Becoming an effective facilitator takes time and practice. As with learning many other skills, you need to learn from hands-on experience with different groups. After a while, many of the strategies we’ve talked about in this guide will become second nature. That’s not to say you won’t encounter surprises and new problems, but if you have the basic techniques and strategies at your fingertips, it will be much easier for you to face challenges and forge new solutions.

Many facilitators talk about the rewards they’ve gotten from doing this kind of work. They feel a real sense of accomplishment when participants in their group are excited about learning something new and trying out a skill they haven’t used before. And, when success comes, it’s not only exciting for the participant, but for the facilitator as well. After all, helping parents and their children become successful in their daily lives is the ultimate goal and there can be shared satisfaction in reaching this goal.

References

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