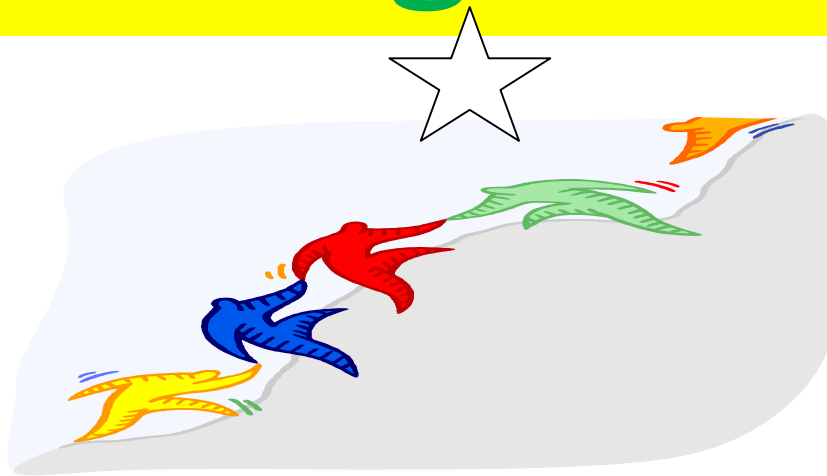


Family Institutes of Bold Hope

Training Manual



A Guide for Multi-Family Group Work

By Anna Ortega, LMSW

Includes activities, agendas, evaluation tools, and more!

Learn strategies to create a mutually supportive therapeutic environment, which can: increase positive communication among family members, support their ability to resolve & reduce conflicts, provide teacher/school staff additional tools to understand children's emotional needs, and offer children an opportunity to turn challenges into opportunities for empowerment and growth.

A Social and Emotional Health Program of the
Red Hook Initiative



This manual is dedicated to the families—parents, children, grandparents, cousins, brothers, and sisters-- who have generously participated in this program out of love and hope. May this work honorably share what we've created, be a builder of strength, and a tool for healing and empowerment.

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Preface

History

The Family Institutes of Bold Hope is the result of a conversation in a coffee shop garden, belief in the power of groups, and trust in the wisdom each family has within. It also emerged from an urgency to transform mental health work in communities facing oppressive conditions. This training guide is the product of hundreds of instances, teachable moments, and reflections that have occurred during the life of the Family Institutes of Bold Hope. In sharing this with you, I hope to offer more than a formula to reproduce a particular group. I hope to share the process I have used as a social worker, along with my co-facilitators and participating families, to generate a subtle and powerful context for multi-family group work. My highest hopes are that these pages inspire you, are useful to families and young people, and make a difference.

I have been a social worker for ten years, nine of which have been in Red Hook, Brooklyn, a neighborhood where the majority of residents live in a New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Development. The residents, primarily Black and Latino, have phenomenal community strength, collective cultural pride, and power. Simultaneously, there are strenuous circumstances that some face, such as: chronic health conditions, housing in ill repair, violence, addiction, lack of employment opportunities, schools that close down, and the loss of children in Family Court. The usual approach to mental health services offered in poor and working class communities tends to be individualized and based on a child protection model. Family Institutes of Bold Hope emerged from the ‘everyday’ extraordinary potential that exists when families are able to connect, provide support and guidance to each other, and thereby increase their resiliency.

My first full-time social work position after graduate school was in a school-based prevention program in Red Hook. Referrals to our program were unstated requests to produce immediate miraculous fixes of classroom disruptions. I felt more like a fire fighter than a social worker. I ran after children who had run out of the building and refused to come back inside. I tried to calm them down enough to stop ripping down hallway artwork or the covers on radiators when they were angry. I advocated for parents and supported teachers who felt frustrated, because they “had tried everything” and didn’t know what else to do. I saw the fortitude, talent, and wisdom within each person young and old, with whom I worked. We were able, one by one, to analyze, reflect, and generate action plans to work through the challenges they

experienced. Often, it was not enough. When I couldn't produce the "miracle fix," children were often referred for psychological and psychiatric evaluations or more restrictive educational settings. According to the Special Education Service Delivery Report of the NYC Department of Education (2009), Red Hook elementary and middle schools, the rate of referral for special education ranges from two to over five times the city average. I knew something had to change.

In my observations, mental health work, especially in poor communities, can be a negative experience. Parents have expressed feelings about being judged as "resistant", "in denial", or "good" corresponding to how much they agree with professional recommendations for their children. I have witnessed adults in general feeling desperate for mental health work to "cure" a child's behavioral concerns, because the frustration is so severe. I have observed children appearing embarrassed, confused, and powerless over their actions. Children have shared with me over and over again that they want to be 'good' and please their teachers and parents but don't know how.

I noticed that so many children and families had similar strengths and concerns but were dealing with their struggles in isolation, or with an individual social worker. I began to wonder what it would be like if instead of getting sent out of the room or into a more restrictive educational setting, children could help each other to notice and unlock difficult patterns and figure out what to do? Could children and parents with similarities and differences practice ways to resolve challenges together? Could parents share lessons and inspire each other, while simultaneously supporting their children's development? Could they increase each other's hope, and help each other survive whatever disappointments occurred during the morning commute to school or the evening routine? Could parents and children remind each other that better times *have happened* and can come again, even when stressful circumstances haven't disappeared?

These questions were already floating in my mind in 2005 when I began working with the Red Hook Initiative (RHI) full time. Jill Eisenhard, Founder and Executive Director, asked me during a planning meeting, "How can RHI add to the way social/emotional/mental health is being approached in our neighborhood?" In that question, the Family Institutes of Bold Hope (FI) found its first breath. The van Ameringen Foundation gave generous support to RHI to launch the first cycle of programming in February 2006.

Today, close to two hundred families have participated in FI. FI is a therapeutic intervention for families with children experiencing emotional or mental health challenges, in addition to needing general support with communication, negotiation, and cooperation. It is an eight-week program that has been used successfully in local schools and community centers in Brooklyn, New York. FI deals with challenges that children and families face all across America. FI creates a space for families to come together to find support in a group setting as opposed to facing struggles in isolation. It is a process of mutual support, in which families build upon their strengths and capabilities. Ideally, FI could also become a space for families to identify issues and organize with each other to transform the social conditions which affect them. The result would be family healing, while creating macro-level societal change and community wellbeing. This part of the work hasn't been actualized yet, but soon to come.

Overall, developing this model was a very human process, which continues to be refined and expanded. I have included, not only the basic structure for creating FI groups, but also reflections of what has worked and what could have been done differently. I hope the stories and reminders throughout this guide will make you laugh, think critically, and inspire you—ultimately, a stepping stone for you to implement a FI in your community. It is derived from group debrief meetings held with co-facilitators and personal reflections.

In conclusion, our desire at RHI is for the Family Institutes of Bold Hope to be offered city and nationwide—wherever families need each other for support. When people make attempts to resolve challenges and “the same thing happens,” feelings of frustration, disappointment, and helplessness can result. Adults and children who feel encouraged and hopeful are more likely to generate possible solutions. This training manual is RHI's way of sharing the FI model of multi-family group work, so families can continue inspiring and supporting each other through difficult times. We are eager to continue learning new ways of creating spaces for individual and family growth. Use this guide as a reminder of your own questions and inclinations. Keep asking how you and your school or organization can add to the resources available for children and parents. Keep creating, collaborating, challenging, transforming, and boldly hoping.

Anna Ortega, LMSW
Red Hook Initiative
Family Institutes of Bold Hope Innovator

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to acknowledge all of the families that have participated in FI. You were so generous, open-minded, and supportive of each other. Thank you for your determination and persistence. Thank you for making space for FI in your full days and lives and giving each group member your best!

Secondly, I would like to acknowledge Jill Eisenhard, Founder and Executive Director of the Red Hook Initiative, for believing in the Family Institutes of Bold Hope as a viable dream that could become reality and make a difference! Thank you for offering space to me to dream and finding funds to actually create it—wow!! Ultimate appreciation to you for your vision and dedication!

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Thank you to Anna Allanbrook and Deanna Diable for being principals so willing to have new programs available to your students. Thank you Luvenia Suber for being a Director committed to offering FI to the families you serve. Thank you Juanita LaBoy and Eduardo Martinez for being Parent Coordinators with great vision and passion. Thank you Yesenia Molina, Mari Gamez, Leon Setton, Tanya Wilson, Andrea Davidson, and Sam Anthony for your creativity, critical thinking, and enthusiasm for group work. You were amazing co-facilitators!

Thank you Myriam Laureano, LCSW, my clinical social work supervisor for being a consistent source of support and inspiration! You have helped me to refine my practice of social work and to ask better questions. Thank you, Esperanza Martell, LCSW and Casa Atabex Ache' for your guidance in connecting mental health with social justice. Thank you, Radical Social Work Group, for creating social work practices that are transformative and radical. Thank you Red Hook Initiative staff for your support, encouragement and love of your own families and community. Thank you to my family for love, humor, and inspiration.

Thank you Dr. Kim Sabo Flores and Dr. Dominique Moyse Steinberg for supporting our development and implementation of program evaluation. It is so important to understand our program's impact with the families we work with and how to do our work better. Thank you! Thank you to the staff and board of the van Ameringen Foundation for believing in multi-family group work and the Red Hook Initiative. Your support gave roots to this program! Thank you Ittleon Foundation for funding the expansion of FI and providing the resources to launch this model as a real city-wide and, promisingly nationwide, resource.

Family Institutes Overview

Multi-Family Group Work: Family Institutes of Bold Hope Model

Family Institutes of Bold Hope (FI) is an opportunity to pause and boldly recreate how social and emotional challenges are confronted and addressed. The purpose of FI is to assist parents in transforming concerns about their children’s behavior into opportunities for healing and empowerment for the entire family. Each group cycle is an *Institute*, because it becomes a space of deep learning for parents and children to notice the patterns which make them feel stuck and collectively figure out how to move forward. Participants determine their own direction and what is a priority, not the facilitators. FI is a place for participants to expand on past successes to work through current challenges.

Children and parents, who once felt either greatly frustrated, discouraged, or isolated, are able to connect with others in FI. Suddenly they aren’t alone and are able to breathe, laugh, and cry in company—which is the foundation of FI. Parents and children meet classmates, neighbors, and others with similar strengths and/or challenges. Mutual support is provided. Hope is kindled. On a larger scale, we aim to promote alternative interventions within schools, decrease the need for restrictive educational settings, and positively impact social and emotional wellness for young people. Ultimately, like the program name states, FI is a space to grow bold hope.

Theoretical Underpinnings

FI draws from a theoretical blend of Insoo Kim-Berg’s Solutions-Focused Brief Therapy, strengths-based social work, Dr. Roselle Kurland’s group work concepts, and Paolo Friere’s popular education model. FI offers families a space to use activity and discussion to notice patterns of interaction, collectively deconstruct it, and explore solutions to current challenges. In this model, behavior is not defined as a linear cause and effect process. Behavior is considered a circular process with observable actions, being employed to reach social and emotional goals. In this context, participants are able to reframe behavior from being “bad”, “permanent”, and “inevitable” to something dynamic and multi-layered. Children especially are given an opportunity to define themselves by their strengths and capabilities, not their unsuccessful interactions. Parents and children become resources to each other across family lines and generations. The practice is short-term, which encourages intensive work and noticeable results.

Nuts and Bolts of FI Program

FI consists of eight multi-family group sessions, offered weekly, plus program graduation. Sessions are 1.5 hours, which consists of group and dinner. The program setting can be a general room in a community center or classroom in a school, with some sense of privacy. FI sessions can accommodate up to 7 families. However, it is ideal with no more than 10-12 participants, nor less than four. Topics covered in the curriculum encompass communication, negotiation, and emotional awareness concepts and strategies. Children and adults will participate in hands-on activities and discussions, which highlight:

- reframing
- critical thinking
- goal setting
- scaling success
- voice tone
- self-reflection
- finding exceptions to generate solutions
- developing mutual understanding
- evaluation
- identifying strengths
- increasing hopefulness, a positive outlook, and personal motivation

FI Facilitators

The group is generally co-facilitated by staff who have counseling and group work skills and experience. Social workers, guidance counselors, teachers, program directors and/or graduate school interns have co-facilitated FI in our local schools and community centers. A FI facilitator needs to understand group dynamics and process, while being able to utilize active listening skills such as paraphrasing, reflection, and offering interpretations. In addition, a FI facilitator would benefit from being exposed to short-term group work models such as solutions focused brief therapy, to better serve families in this approach. Facilitators with creative arts experience (or at least interest and willingness) in drama, art, and teamwork building games will get the greatest use out of the activities and curriculum listed in this manual. FI facilitation varies as needed from active to passive, as the group necessitates.

FI Participants

In the FI program, youth participants are generally grouped according to age and academic grade level. In our experience, grouping grades 8-6, 3-5 and 1-2 work well. Generally, 4-6 families participate during each cycle. In terms of adult participation, primary caretakers are ideal. However, in one experience a

grandparent was too ill to attend, so an older sibling brought younger ones. It worked well because the siblings were still able to use what they practiced in group at home. The group is an additional activity families undertake because they are truly committed to the outcome. At times, parents may have to arrive late or leave early due to prior commitments. Work with them. Make the group work for families. Create an agreement in the beginning, and if it isn't working, address and revise it together.

Usually siblings can participate (for example, if the group is for 3-5 graders, a sibling in first or sixth grader can join.) However, depending on the age and abilities of the younger siblings this may or may not work. On one occasion, during a group for 3-5th graders, a graduate school intern conducted a parallel group for younger siblings. It worked very well. Therefore, consider what childcare needs exist that can or cannot be managed in the group. Oftentimes, that older or younger sibling is able to gain useful skills, add her/his perspective to family dynamic and strategies to move forward.

In my experience, I have found that families can thrive in the FI setting if they are seeking a change, are interested in the topics, and can consider being in a group. Past participants have ranged in developmental levels, socioeconomic status, and physical or learning abilities. Children or adults who have severe, persistent, and chronic mental illness and/or substance abuse, would benefit from FI in addition to adequate psychiatric and/or drug and alcohol treatment.

FI Resources

Resources needed to host a group include: registration forms for pre-group registration interviews, food, beverages, and utensils for participants, chart paper or dry erase boards for group notes, markers, pens, paper, tape, and any activity-specific supplies (such as crayons, markers, balloons, etc.)

During a FI session, dinner is the first opportunity for interaction that members have with each other. It is usually buffet style, hearty, and healthy. Make sure to find out about allergies and dietary restrictions. Families have offered in the past to contribute to these dinners. Although we encourage families to let the facilitators worry about food so they can just participate, if they insist, we support them in dividing up contributions to ensure families don't feel economically burdened. If your program can provide dinner, it provides a rich moment for participants to get familiar, share stories of the day, connect, and share resources informally. If necessary, find out if soup

kitchens or if neighborhood stores can contribute, thereby cutting down on costs.

Collateral Program Resources

In social work, there are many different paradigms, one of which is the ecosystems approach, which states that each family is a system, connected to many social systems, such as a community and city. Stressors external to a family system, in this perspective, are extremely relevant to one's social and emotional wellbeing (Miley, O'Melia, & Dubois, 1998.) In line with this theory, before, during, and after the FI program, participants are offered assistance with navigating social programs to relieve the pressures they may be experiencing. RHI-based or off-site services such as: short-term individual counseling, educational advocacy, tutoring, employment assistance, referrals for psychiatric and/or medical care, and crisis support are also available upon request or if assessed during the registration interview. Advocacy within institutions such as family court, public housing, Department of Homeless Services, and public assistance is also offered as needed.

Expected FI Program Outcomes

The majority of families who have responded to exit interview surveys report an increased ability to resolve conflicts. Here is a sampling of our data:

- 100% of respondents said behaviors that have been identified as a problem began to improve (or didn't get worse).
- 100% learned to look at a situation or relationship from a different point of view.
- 100% would recommend FI to other families.
- 75% of respondents said, due to participation, children were able to deal with emotions while at school
- 75% of families indicated that they are getting along better
- 75% noted that after participation they are more able to bounce back from challenges
- Aspects of the program most notable to families:
 - Testing out new ways of getting along.
 - Listening to each other.
 - Identifying patterns that work.
 - Understanding each other better.
 - Noticing the strengths of each family member.
 - Increasing personal motivation.
 - Offering advice or encouragement to other group members.

Launching Family Institutes Step 1: Outreach

Directly to Parents:

Flyers should reflect the community being served, in terms of ethnicity and language. It is important to clearly state the group's purpose in lettering that is easy to read and interesting. We actually started out with a picture that showed cartoon non-gendered characters helping each other over a hill. It became a favorite of FI for a long time. In Red Hook, many families speak Spanish and English. I have translated flyers and gotten help from school staff to translate documents as needed. It is important to note if the group facilitator could have the session bilingually, to increase group access, it should be done.

Post in places families will see them—post office, day care centers, and schools. Email list-serves and community boards are useful because the information gets out to community groups that one wouldn't necessarily see a flyer.

Invite participants from other programs in one's agency. Ask staff members if they know of families that can benefit.

Parent Coordinator, Guidance Counselor, Teacher, PTA, Program Director, Counseling Agency Referrals

Referrals from community leaders and school staff who often interact with parents have produced the largest turn-out! Especially, when hosted within the agency/school and is co-facilitated. There is a direct investment from the agency to provide resources, talk with families they have relationships with—because it takes so much trust to deal with the topic! Parent teacher conferences work very well! If the staff member that co-facilitates can offer this to the parents. Past participants can be at a table to offer their experiences to other families if they are interested.

Phone calls: Usually, after a school or agency staff member calls the parent to see if he/she is interested, the group facilitator will make a call to further describe the program and see how it could be a benefit to the family. Sometimes, a host site will just give a list of families to the facilitator without much additional information or introduction. Therefore the facilitator will need to explain how one got the family's contact information and connection to the host site in addition to a thorough program description.

Afterwards, the facilitator can simply ask, these follow up questions: Does this sound like it could be useful to you and your family? If so, in what way? If not,

how come? Are there any other referrals that you think might be useful at this time? Even if the group isn't a good fit for the family at the moment, it could be in the future or perhaps they could use another type of support. It's important to thank the parent for considering the group and for listening to the program description and sharing with you. If your agency is also in the position to offer other resources, which seem to be needed based upon what the parent shares with you, it is important to offer a referral. The point is to be of support, not just secure group participants.

If the parents are interested, attempt to schedule a registration interview with the child and relatives that will be participating and describe the process and intent. Tell them it is an opportunity for the child and other relatives participating in the group to get as much information as possible about the group and truly choose to participate and set goals for participation. It sets the tone for the entire group.

Ask if the parent would like a reminder call for the interview and repeat the group logistics once more. Parents are some of the busiest people on the planet! At the point of sharing group time, meeting dates and location, let them know that it is flexible based upon the majority of the participant's needs. It let's parents know that you are a worker that will consider them. If it appears like the group would be a hardship upon the family, based upon their schedule or life demands, let them know that this group is voluntary, and should be a help not a burden. If parents seem interested in the group, but seem stuck in figuring out how they can manage it, offer ideas or brainstorm with them. I've had parents who were very ill and couldn't attend sessions, so an older sibling or extended relative attended. It's important to make the group accessible if the family sees it as a potential resource.

Challenges in outreach: No school or agency wants to have a duplication of services. Be sure to describe the FI program fully, including how it could compliment the current services. Speaking at staff meetings is also of use. The more people understand the purpose and the clearer the objectives are presented, the better. If an agency/school's administrators are unsure of if a multi-family group program could work in their setting, have your data/explanations ready for how it could. For example, in the beginning FI was a 12 week group. Most counselors who I spoke to felt that their parents wouldn't make the commitment because they were already so overwhelmed, stressed out, or over committed, so they didn't want to make the suggestion. Take these recommendations into account. When the group was shortened to eight sessions, there was a dramatic increase in participation.

In some cases, no matter what outreach strategies you implement, you might have a relatively small turn out. However, if at least two families attend, it's a group! Offer them the very best.

Launching Family Institutes Step 2: Registration Interviews

Outreach begins with the parents. However, if the child isn't consulted and considered to have "the final word" about participating, the group won't work. Once one parent is interested, they often want to consult a spouse and/or the child to see if it is of interest. I cannot tell you how many times a child comes to the registration interview and has no idea why he/she is there. Or, has a negative view of what is about to happen. I immediately explain the group purpose, how valuable their opinions are, and they get to choose if they want to participate. I also share that the registration interview is our moment to figure out, together, how the group can help.

The setting ideally would be private with a closed door. However, it can be done in a semi-private space with at least a partially enclosed section to sit in. It would be great to have a desk that the family can sit around together with the facilitators. If this isn't available, a clip board and chairs in a circle will suffice. I always begin the interview with introducing myself and shaking everyone's hand. Depending on the mood of the children, I either pretend to shake hands and snatch it back or I'll shake hands in a silly way. It is my litmus test/thermometer to see how they are feeling. If they laugh and get into the game with me a little, generally they are somewhat open to the interview process, me as a facilitator, and potentially the group. If they just look at me and seem really distrustful, shy, or downcast, I know that we'll need to take the registration interview slowly and deal with whatever emotions are occurring.

Both group facilitators ideally should be present. I share why I started the group and the group's purpose. We share how the group runs—discussion, games, and activities. I also begin with the logistics for the registration interview, which usually lasts 45 minutes and that we will fill out one form together. I ask if the family can stay for that amount of time so I can know the parameter of our actual timeframe. Facilitators share that this is an opportunity to set personal goals and begin envisioning benchmarks of progress. It is also a useful evaluation tool they will use at the conclusion of the group to see if they've gotten what they wanted from participating.

I begin by asking the parents and children what they would like to get out of the group experience, based upon what I have described so far. In addition, I ask what they wish was better and/or what they want more of at home or school. In talking about what parents and children want more of, participants begin identifying their strengths, some exceptions to the challenges that are

occurring, and acknowledging current successes. If the meeting starts off about the child's issues or problems, this often shifts the conversation.

I let parents know that I usually ask children to speak first, so that they can feel empowered to tell the story of what is happening according to their own perspectives. If they seem shy or hesitant, the parent is invited to share. I have found that children who seem shy to speak at first have felt comfortable interrupting their parents when they feel like they want to include a detail or if something wasn't said according to what they think is true. However it occurs, it is important to get the child's perspective and find out if he/she chooses to participate and why. In social work terms, it is the first time that the family gets to contract.

I've seen participants start off a registration interview feeling like the family's situation was almost the worst it could possibly be to feeling hopeful and smiling. I've also seen the opposite, where tears erupt at the end and the stress that the parents and children have been experiencing floats to the surface. Either occurrence is a good sign of willingness to do deep work and interest in healing.

As a facilitator during the registration interview, I think it is crucial to acknowledge how much courage it took to come to the meeting and share with someone new about feelings, family, friendships, life. Acknowledge the work that they did in setting goals and determining their direction in this group. And, if after or during the registration interview, a child or parent decides this group isn't for them, acknowledge the efforts they made to attend. Ask if they would like a referral to any other type of resource that matches their needs.

At the conclusion of the registration interview, the facilitator should let the participants know that after the completion of the group, the family will have an opportunity to meet with you again to review this "snapshot" form to see what kind of progress has been made and decide together about what is needed next. Let them know about the logistics of the group again, and that reminder calls will be made before the first group session. Remind families here that there are only eight sessions. It is important to be present for each one, because the group members will need each other to achieve their goals. Usually if a family cannot make the first or second session, I encourage them to participate during another cycle because they will be missing too much of the bonding and goal setting that will be occurring.

There have been many groups cycles in which I could not interview all participants before the first session, due to scheduling conflicts. Ideally it

should be done at least before the second session, so the information can be used to shape the group activities. On one or two rare occasions, I've led cycles that didn't complete any registration interviews, due to extreme lack of private space and scheduling conflicts. Therefore, during the first two sessions much attention was spent upon goal setting, exploring concerns, and setting the group's direction. It worked, although it wasn't ideal. My theory is this, do what is possible, and when what is ideal can't happen, improvise! What matters most is that participants are able to set goals, work through their concerns together, and build upon their strengths. As long as this is happening, the process is working.

Registration Interview Process: The Basics

The families—the parents and children—are in charge of prioritizing what is most challenging, which is written by the facilitator onto the form where it states “reason for registration.” In asking families about the current challenges they are facing, the facilitators also ask about current problem solving that the family is using to cope. It is an opportunity to hear from the family about their strengths, what strategies have or haven't been helpful. It also gives a sense of what supports are available to the family in dealing with the challenges they are experiencing.

Families are then asked to choose from three categories in which the situation primarily exists—communication, getting along with others, negotiation, attention, or how one expresses feelings. Sometimes children and parents disagree about which category is priority, and that is noted on the registration form. The family then shares with the facilitator more specifically about the strengths and challenges they have as a family in this category. For example, even if a child is having a hard time communicating with parents and vice versa, they may be able to make friends, which shows a capacity to communicate—a strength that can be draw from throughout the group.

The facilitators ask the family to create a scale for the category they selected. For example, if a family is dealing primarily with communication as a concern, the facilitator will say “Let's imagine that (1) is when communication is the most difficult and (10) is when it is the easiest. How would you rate your family's communication right now on this scale?” The facilitator would also ask the families to define 10. It gives the family and worker a sense of the family's world view, perspectives about the concerns, and direction. After the child and parent(s) choose a number and it is marked on the scale, the facilitator asks

them why they chose it over a lower or higher number, which also offers a sense of the family's thoughts about the situation.

The next part of the form asks the family to guess what other important people in their lives would notice when the current challenges begin to resolve. In this reflection, it brings other relatives that couldn't be at the interview virtually into the room. For example, what a grandparent, teacher, or older/younger sibling would observe.

Lastly, there is an eco-map for the parents to primarily complete. It brings into the conversation any stressors that the family may be experiencing with the different institutions to which they are connected. At times, a family may notice at that moment how the different pressures they are experiencing could be affecting their relationships or a child's behavior. It is also an opportunity to offer referrals, assist in making linkages, and/or identify areas that they might need advocacy.

Refer to the appendix to review the actual registration form.

One of the most exciting aspects of self-reflection during the registration interview is assisting a family to clearly define benchmarks. If a family chooses a 5, the facilitator could ask "What will be happening more when it's at 6 or 7?" Oftentimes, we as human beings want to reach our ultimate goal—10—as instantaneously as possible; even if we are at 1 right now. It leads to frequent experiences of frustration and even hopelessness. "I tried that already and nothing happened. Nothing works with her." Perhaps number 10 didn't happen, but the effort jumped from 1 to 4. Could that be a sign of progress?

I once had a family start off a registration interview, deciding they were at a one in communication and by the end of the meeting, felt it should be higher. I have also had families cry during the registration because they chose a one. After acknowledging it, they said "well it can't get any worse, so all we can do is go up." Another family seemed encouraged when I asked why they selected a two and not a one. It gave the parent an opportunity to notice some of the child's strengths. The air around the conversation seemed to lighten. I caught some secret smiles as well, even though they were eager for change.

Launching Family Institutes Step 3: Group Planning and Process

Drafting a Basic Agenda and Curriculum Outline

After families have registered for FI, it is time to tailor the curriculum. Based on the goals that the families have identified, commonalities and themes mentioned, such as communication, working through anger, or getting along with others, plus the general age and developmental stage of the participants, a sketch of sessions can be drafted. One note about activities, children and parents have different ways of learning and practicing alternative ways of thinking or relating through art, drama, play, and discussion during FI sessions. Activities are geared to affirm and recognize all indicators of progress. What appears as ‘small’ or ‘just what is supposed to be done’ is celebrated and recognized, which promotes motivation and inspires hope. Families rehearse and expand upon strategies during activities, which already work in their lives, even if infrequently. For instance, if a child has a hard time bonding with others, an experience of success during recess will be used as an example during an activity, that can be mined for future solutions and strengths *with* the child and group.

In general, the facilitators write all of the agendas. The first two agendas of the program cycle are geared towards building trust, exploring commonalities and differences, participants connecting to and personally defining the group’s purpose and articulating their needs. It is an opportunity for the group to bond, have fun, and set the tone for group interactions and share their expectations. The content for the agendas spanning sessions 3-7 is ultimately set by the participants, although facilitators prepare an agenda with activities, which reflect the needs presented the week before, or during the registration interview. The facilitators usually draft the agenda during the last session’s debrief meeting or during pre-group planning time.

The agenda is written up weekly on dry erase board or chart paper for all participants to see, ask questions about, and decide upon. The group has ultimate power about the agenda. I have co-facilitated sessions, where a parent has said “I don’t want to play drama games today. I really want us to talk about what happened over the weekend.” The facilitators would support the group in having this conversation, by asking other group members if they are interested in doing the same, can relate to the matter being presented, and making space to have all participants share. In addition, the facilitator would use the active listening skills she/he possesses to summarize what was being discussed, share any interpretations or questions for the group to explore and point the

group back to the purpose they agreed upon, if needed. It is a dynamic process, in which the facilitator follows the lead of the group, while also creating activities that support its member's inquiry and growth. The group belongs to the participants and the purpose for which they have registered. If an activity runs over the estimated time, other parts of the agenda can be tabled for another session, if it is logical, or useful.

* * *

Groups are usually 1.5 hours. A typical agenda may look like this:

1. Dinner (20 minutes)
2. Ice breaker with all participants (5 – 10 minutes)
3. Major activity or discussion #1 (20 – 30 minutes)
4. Major activity or discussion #2 (20 – 30 minutes)
5. Closing Evaluation with all participants (15 minutes)

These times are flexible, as is the format. Time may be allotted for bathroom breaks or stretch breaks for children (and parents) who are very active or just need a moment to rest. Breaks are also a good opportunity for co-facilitators to check-in and adjust the agenda as needed.

Planning for Effective Co-Facilitation

Shaping group purpose

Co-facilitation is a fantastic opportunity in multifamily group work. First, it is usually the person at the host site, the guidance counselor, program director, social worker, plus a worker with experience in the FI model. In training a host site co-facilitator, it allows for new relationships to emerge between the participants, the participants and the agency or school that is hosting, and the co-facilitator's agency that is coming onsite. I have observed instances where families have felt isolated in a school or agency and upon completion of the program, have an increased support network of parents and staff members that they can draw from. I have also seen staff members have a new sense of understanding about the children and families that they serve, which enabled them to offer more effective support. In addition, I have witnessed the host-site facilitators in schools share new perspectives with teachers to enhance communication in a classroom. If the co-facilitator is a social work or guidance counselor intern, it is a great training that can travel with the worker wherever

he/she goes next. The ripple effect from co-facilitation is a future area of evaluation for FI.

The co-facilitators conduct the registration interviews together with the families. It is useful for co-facilitators to choose beforehand what sections of the form one would like to present. After completing all of the interviews, the co-facilitators would review the information shared and outline the major themes participants wanted to address. The purpose for that particular FI cycle is shaped by the families concerns and strengths. The co-facilitators will identify initial commonalities and goals, which will be summarized and shared during the first session.

Pre and post group meeting preparation

Dividing tasks and roles:

Tasks for FI include but are not limited to:

- Outreach/reminder calls
- Setting up registration interviews
- Flyer creation and distribution
- Arranging food delivery
- Purchasing snacks, beverages and utensils (including serving spoons)
- Cleaning and setting up the group meeting space (ensuring that there are cleaning supplies)
- Bringing and monitoring attendance sheets
- Creating and reviewing the agenda
- Selecting which part of the agenda one will facilitate
- Eraser board/chart note taking,
- Picking up children and bringing to the room (school setting)
- Communicating with host site about group logistics
- Leading debrief between co-facilitators and taking notes

Co-facilitators can divide up these tasks and can rotate responsibilities. In choosing roles within the agenda, take into account what each facilitator has the most experience in and/or interest in leading and his/her personal style. In my experience, the worker offsite may need to take on more of the tasks for the host site worker because of his/her limited schedule or resources. I have gladly done this because whatever it takes to make the FI cycle possible is the primary goal. The host site worker usually leads most of the outreach efforts and flyer distribution.

Session Debrief

After each group session, the co-facilitators debrief the process of the group. It is a space to reflect upon the needs presented in the group, new themes, reflect upon interactions noticed, and develop as facilitators. If there were activities that didn't seem to flow with the group or difficulties one faced in leading the activity, the debrief meeting is the moment to review and grow. One facilitator usually will type up the debrief minutes along with revising the agenda as it actually occurred. This helps with refining what activities could happen the following week. Debrief meetings are useful for staff development. Facilitators offer each other mutual supervision. *Please refer to the appendix to see the sequence of questions used for the debrief session, entitled "post workshop reflection sheet."*

Complimenting Styles: Challenges and tips

Co-facilitators are human beings. I have been amazingly lucky and have gotten to be co-facilitators with curious, thoughtful, and intuitive people. Our greatest challenge, in my estimation, has been to be aware of each other. For example, not talking over each other or forgetting which person was supposed to lead, or stepping in and assisting when one of us had difficulty summarizing a moment or offering clarification about an activity, or reflecting the feelings arising in the group. It is a dance. The best tip I can offer is to really use the debrief session to clear up any miscommunication or reflect upon what could've been done differently, as well as to acknowledge each other's contribution. It has been a true gift for all of my co-facilitation experiences.

In addition, before the session begins, have an opportunity to relax and connect with each other. The group usually happens at the end of a full day of work. If the co-facilitators need to vent about the day, take a deep breath, and/or laugh to get refocused for the tasks at hand, do it! The communication between the co-facilitators is a presence in the group. It is noticed just as the co-facilitators are noticing the patterns in the group. Also a good moment to regroup as co-facilitators is during a break. So often, it has given me and a co-facilitator an opportunity to reformat an agenda, have someone else take over a part that was intended for another, etc, all in service of what is currently happening in the group.

I will also say that the third facilitator is the group itself! Members will say what direction they need. As co-facilitators, always recognize when the group is facilitating itself towards its purpose. Step back and let it. At the end of each

group session, there is a short evaluation, which is where the group gets to debrief as well.

Support the “third group facilitator” to reflect and collect the gifts of each session.

Group Stages of Development: Beginnings, Middles, and Endings

Group work has three basic stages beginning, middle, and end—akin to any good story. The group’s initial task is to determine its purpose—the reason for participation. Why are we in group together, right now? What do we hope to accomplish as a group? The family’s purpose of participation is defined during the registration interview, which is shared and reaffirmed during the first group session. During group beginnings, members are attempting to build trust and find commonalities. The facilitator provides the fundamentals of the group’s structure, such as group setting, meeting date, time, and place. In short-term group work, beginnings are especially key, since the entire process is brief. The members need to know how the group functions, what the expectations are, and if the group matches their needs. Attrition may occur at this point, or after the second session, if parents and children don’t feel like it matches their needs.

During middles, which can literally occur during sessions 2-7, deep work occurs. Families actively engage their concerns, patterns, and conflicts. They mobilize their strengths, practice new strategies, and expand old techniques.

“Endings” in a short-term group are addressed at the end of each session, as well as at the end of the program cycle. Ending exists formally in the graduation, exit interview, survey, and referrals.

In this section, activities for FI beginnings, middles, and endings are outlined. Know that these are adjustable. Tune into the members, hear what they are asking for, and respond. Good group work practice is sensitive to following and leading. Enjoy the process.

Group Beginnings

The following are examples of group beginnings. These can be used as is, tailored to meet varying group needs, or as a guide to creating new activities.

Group purpose

At the very beginning of the group, facilitators will introduce themselves and the history of the program. In addition, they will discuss why the group came about. At this point it is important to review the logistics of the group, such as meeting date and time. Facilitators will also share how the group can support group members in reaching the goals they each set out in the registration interviews.

Group purpose example:

1. Facilitators will draw a picture symbolic of the Family Institutes of Bold Hope, simply some stick figures helping each other over some hills and valleys with the word life written underneath the ups and downs.
2. Ask participants to share their understanding of the program purpose derived from what they see happening in the picture. Answers will be charted up along the picture.
3. Facilitators will state the purpose, tying in all of the responses that participants shared. The overarching purpose of the group is for parents and children to understand each other and themselves better to therefore have smoother relationships (at home and school).

Ice breakers

Ice breakers are short activities that can be done while families are finished with dinner. The “ice” that is being broken is literally the cold feeling that occurs between strangers. To do the work that you hope will occur during this group, participants need to feel like they can relate to each other and have some trust. In taking the small risks present in icebreakers, participants begin finding out commonalities, differences, and knowing each other’s names. It is an entry point for teamwork and having fun.

Ice Breaker Examples:

- **Name and Motion:** Ask each participant to state his/her name, plus make a motion. The entire group will repeat the person’s name and motion, until everyone has had a turn. Variation: Ask one or two participants to repeat everyone’s name and motion, at the conclusion of the game.
- **Balloon Bop:** Ask participants to hold hands. The facilitator will introduce

a balloon to the group. The object of the game is to keep the balloon in the air without using hands or letting go of each other. Safety rules will be created by the group. For example, no kicking the balloon because someone might get hurt. Variation: If participants have physical disabilities, or difficulties ambulating, the game can be modified. The balloon can be placed upon a large sheet. The goal of the group could be to keep the balloon on the sheet for as long as possible. The first round will set the time to beat in the next round.

At the end of each ice breaker, debrief the process quickly. Ask one or two participants to say what they liked or disliked about the game. Ask someone to appreciate someone else's effort and share what they noticed about the group's teamwork—what helped? What got in the way? This process increases participant interaction and reflection, thus preparing for more in-depth activities and conversations.

Energizers

As a group facilitator, it is important to pay attention to the group energy level. I discovered during a group session, that I prepared an agenda with too little movement and too much talking. The children seem bored and the adults looked tired. First, I shared my observations with the group. The children easily shared their boredom. We decided as a group to do an ice breaker, which increased the level of energy needed to complete the session. Parents welcomed the stretch break and the children had fun. I also found that the concept we were exploring, made more sense through play, than through the discussion. Always have a variety of icebreakers on hand, which lend themselves to the concepts or skills of the day.

Warm-ups

Warm-ups can be defined interchangeably as ice breakers. However, warm-ups in FI are usually short activities (about 15 minutes) that provide items for discussion or theater later on in the session. Warm-ups and ice breakers can be used during the same agenda.

Warm-up Examples:

- **Family Flags:** Cut up pieces of construction paper into long colored triangles. Ask each family to take one colored 'flag' 1) each family member can draw something that he/she enjoys doing, 2) a personal strength, and/or 3) a family strength (something at which they are good.) Share results in larger group. Variation: can be a family button or an improv that is shared in the group.

- **Feelings Paired Share:** Each person will take two minutes to think or draw about a time today, or this week, when she/he felt happy, sad or mad. Talk about it in pairs. Share what participants had in common in the larger group. Variation: Can be shared in small break out groups or done as a collective drawing, or announced like a weather report “I’m feeling cloudy and rainy because...”)

Creating a Safe and Purposeful Space

In group beginnings, participants look to the group facilitator and the group itself to set rules for safety and to set a tone. Creating these norms, what the group expects from itself, is time well spent. In FI, there are adults and children present. Creating visuals are much more engaging to children. The more colorful and participatory the activity can be the better.

- **Community Heart:** Group “ground rules”
 - A large heart drawn onto colorful paper will be placed in the center of the room. Participants will be given post-it notes and pencils to draw examples of what makes them feel happy, appreciated, and welcomed in a group. The post-its will be placed onto the community heart. As each person puts the post-it on, he/she will be asked for a specific example. For instance, if someone states respect, the facilitator will ask “What does respect being shown to you *in this group* look like?”
 - A second blank heart will be placed in the center. A piece will be ripped off as each participant says an example of a put down, or whatever else could make a group member feel isolated or uncomfortable.
 - Facilitators will ask if participants can agree to taking actions in the group that builds-up, not tears down the community. The heart will be hung up in a visible location.
- **Group Wish:**
 - The facilitator will draw a large cloud or shape onto chart paper or an eraser board. Underneath the shape, the words “group wish” will be written. The facilitator will ask participants to share what they would like to achieve from group participation. The facilitator will share about the general common themes that families mentioned during the registration interview, that they wanted to address.
 - The group wish will be used as an evaluation tool for families at the end as a guide for facilitators throughout the group. It will be posted in a visible place during each session.

Group Middles: Digging Deep

During the “middles” of individual group sessions and the entire FI series, families are ready for deeper work with each other. At this point they may have conflict in the group, or share about frustrations and disappointments that are happening at school. The activities, usually lasting approximately 20-30 minutes long, are opportunities for more intensive self-reflection and feeling exploration. As early as the third session, children and parents can be separated into their own groups for an activity block (20-30 minutes.) At the end of the “break-out session” they can “report back” what they would like the other small group to know that they have discovered. Participants have mentioned how invaluable this is for them. Parents and children have an opportunity to vent and speak candidly without fear of offending the other.

Activity Examples for Group Middles:

- ***Thought Tags: Gaining Awareness***

- The facilitator will write out different thoughts and beliefs on an index card that could make interactions “stuck or smooth” such as: “everyone likes me,” “no one wants to play,” “I’m bored,” “I’m silly,” “nobody likes me,” “this is fun,” “I have to win,” “I might lose,” “if I practice, I will get better,” “I’m doing my best.” Ask participants if there are other thoughts that people “have on” while attempting to work as a team. Facilitator will ask the group to demonstrate the body language and voice tone that someone with the ‘thought tag’ might have. Participants will play a simple game like catch.
- Debrief the activity with questions such as: What was it like wearing this thought tag? Have you ever experienced that thought before? What kind of thought seemed to get in the way of playing and having fun? Variation: Play a game and then ask participants to look at the thought tags to see which ones they may have been “wearing” while playing. Reflect upon the outcomes. Each person can choose one for the next round of play. Explore the differences.

- ***Labels: Gaining Awareness***

- Facilitators will define the word label “According to the Webster’s New College Dictionary, to label is the defining of someone based upon judgments, assumptions, or opinions” and ask for common examples, such as “plays too much”, “pretends to be your friend”, “friendly”, “likes to have fun”. Participants will ask for other labels that they feel have been given to them by others, or those that they have given to peers. A list will be generated on the board.

- Facilitator will explore “I-statements” and “you-statements”: Before playing, the group will discuss these communication skills.
I-statements: I feel____ when____next time, I would like____. You-statements: You make me feel____when you____, next time you need to____. Facilitator will revisit these skills during the activity.
Source: Resolving Family Conflict—A Parent’s Handbook from Channing Bete Company, Inc. See References.
- Participants will wear an index card taped onto a paper head band, which will have a label listed upon it. Each label will be different. The person wearing the headband will not see what is written. The participants will be asked to not to tell someone what his/her label says.
- The group will attempt to play balloon volley ball. They can create the rules as a team and play one round with the labels. After participants can guess their labels and share how it felt to wear the label, and describe how they were treated. The group will process how labels affect relationships and communication.

Group Endings:

A group that understands its purpose begins with the end in mind. In the beginning of a FI group, the facilitator works with members to define the purpose—the end which each family hopes to reach. The end gets clearer and the wishes more refined as the group develops trust and intimacy. FI is a short term group, so the end becomes a driving force. The facilitator reminds families, “only x # of sessions remain, so you don’t want to miss a single moment.” Active participation in any given session creates the conditions needed for gaining insight, the courage to practice a new strategy, or being able to offer another person relief. Heightening awareness about the proximity of the end of the sessions seems to energize participants, and make the commitment of attending group feel possible, even with a busy schedule.

In addition, each group session has a definite beginning, middle and end. I have found that the ending of a group session provides ample space for participants to evaluate the session, notice what their learning was and share it with the group, and seal the session, so they can complete the session. Below are some activities that I’ve found helpful that were often created from the context of themes discussed in the group. For example, the activity “compliments without strings attached” emerged from a session in which parents were struggling with acknowledging the positives they noticed in their children, *while* being frustrated with certain behaviors. It lightened the moment, supported the release of some tension, and seemed to strengthen the bonding available in the moment.

Activities for Session Endings:

- ***Compliments Without Strings Attached:*** The focus of this activity is appreciation. I like this activity at the end of session one or two, because it sets a tone for the group’s communication. It is also funny and produces immediate insight into communication patterns currently operating within families.
 - Using a physical object with a string attached, the co-facilitators will demonstrate how to affirm someone with and without taking it back. For example, one facilitator could say “I appreciate the way you cleaned off the utensils after group, BUT I hate the way you didn’t wipe off the table” (which can feel like a negation of the first compliment.) Or, “I appreciate the way you helped me today” and letting it stand alone. Both parents and children really have enjoyed this game.

- **Show Your Talent:** Depending on the amount of time remaining, during a session, two members can have an opportunity to show off a talent. It is a fun way to close, and builds connections at the end of sessions in the beginning of a cycle.
- **Check-Out:** I think an evaluation activity at the end of each session is vital feedback. Facilitators will ask participants in a fifteen minute discussion, What did you like? What did you notice about yourself or the group? Is there anything that you would have changed about today to make it better? What are you looking forward to next week? It has often produced some acknowledgment for a participant that was struggling or some insight that moved the entire group. *Once we tried to employ the use of a reflection sheet instead of a dialogue. It failed because it seemed too much like homework. Parents appeared especially worried about it looking “right.” We acknowledged it and quit the sheets.*
- **High Fives:** Simply, ask participants to give “high five” hand claps to each other and pats on the back while saying “good job.” Humor goes a long way in group bonding. Usually participants laugh, make eye and physical contact with each other in a safe way. It has worked on numerous occasions to round off a highly energetic session or intense emotionally charged work.

Activity Examples for Program Cycle Endings (Review and Graduation):

Formally, the ending of a FI cycle occurs at the seventh session, which is usually a review, includes a discussion of strategies practiced during the program. The review also begins with restating the families’ goals and ‘wishes’ set in the first two sessions and the registration interview. It is an opportunity to acknowledge the steps each person has made throughout the cycle, even if it appears slight, and *how* it was accomplished. The eighth session is the graduation, which offers families an opportunity to invite guests to learn about their achievements—relatives, teachers, and friends can attend. Review and graduation are framed with self-reflection, appreciation, and evaluation activities. The facilitator asks participants to select one of their favorite activities from FI to do with the guests. At graduation, families share how they will continue utilizing the skills and concepts they have practiced with each other. The graduation lauds the program’s completion and much gratitude is extended to each group member for the effort they put forward.

- ***Sharks in the Water:*** There are many team building games, which can be looked up on the internet. I got this from www.wilderdom.com. Every group that has played this game, requests it at the graduation for their guests. It's a great ending activity after a review session, or early on in the cycle to build trust.
 - If the group is very large, participants will be split into two teams. It could be kids versus parents, or randomly selected. If the group is small, just one team. The object of the game is for everyone to make it from one side of the room to the other, using a limited amount paper or cardboard per team as stepping stones. For example, if there are six team members, they will be given five stepping stones.
 - The facilitators, youngest children, or children with lots of energy can be the sharks,. It is a fun role. The sharks have to guard the stepping stones and snatch them up if they aren't being stepped on.
 - The group will be encouraged to use collective problem solving and create ways to support each other across the 'dangerous water'.
 - Debrief the process at the completion of the game. Ask participants what helped them to get across as a team. What was challenging when working together? How did they resolve the challenges that arose? During the seventh group review session, the activity could be used to reflect upon how the group has been a source of teamwork and support since the beginning.

- ***Mutual Appreciation:*** During the graduation, facilitators will give certificates to each family. If families have come to the majority of group sessions, it can be a certification of completion. If a family participated even once, I have given a certificate of participation. It acknowledges each family, and that each moment of participation is meaningful.
 - Facilitators will give each family an envelope to decorate and label with their names. Each family will be given the certificate of another family and an index card to write an affirmation for them. One person from each family will read the message to the other family and present them with the certificate. The facilitator can offer affirmation prompts to help, such as: "In this group, I noticed...", "I appreciate that you...", "Thank you for..."
 - Each family will have an opportunity to appreciate their own family members, as well.
 - Facilitators will offer words of appreciation to all the families. Specific observations and moments of triumph are usually the most meaningful for families. Guests are also invited to share. Usually a grand potluck concludes the event.

FI is Complete: Where do we Go from Here?

After graduation, each family is asked to participate in an exit interview with the facilitators. Children and parents review what initially brought them to the group and their goals, using the registration interview form as a guide. I ask children first so their voices can be heard as the only young people in a room of adults. They scale their responses as they did during the registration interview. Families can request individual, couple or family counseling at any point during the group. However, referrals usually arise during the exit interview. Surveys are also administered at this point, to get a global sense of program effectiveness and recommendations.

Referrals have ranged from wanting counseling, to needing support in family court, or identifying resources for educational advocacy. The off-site group facilitator usually assists the family with making a linkage to a referral source, which could include: researching appropriate agencies that match the present needs, assessing the availability of the resources within the referred agency, advocating for the family, attending an appointment with the family if needed. The referral is considered complete once the family is satisfied with the resource and determines that progress and/or assistance is occurring. If it isn't, the group facilitator will continue to perform those duties until a sufficient referral is established.

In the past, many families have expressed interest in taking part in FI again. It is up to the co-facilitators and the family. The main goal is to offer programming to as many new families as possible. However, if there is space, and a family has expressed interest, I think it could work. I have seen this work with a family participating again when there are different major themes being addressed by the new families, or after a year or so when new concerns are present. Once a family participates in FI, I imagine it to be a resource that is available to them as long as it is relevant and useful.

One way of continuing to offer support to families is to offer a Family Reunion. We did this in Prospect Park in Brooklyn. Three sites hosting FI sent invitations to past participants. It was a huge success! The day was cloudy and it seemed like rain was inevitable. Families came anyway. They played together, hugged, shared stories and had lunch together. Some families who had lost contact were able to exchange contact information again. I believe this is going to be a lasting tradition for FI.

Putting it All Together: Shaping Curriculums, Topics, and Activities

In my experience, FI topics touch upon every aspect of human relationship. It is the distillation of direct experiences with families; noticing the repetition of similar questions, comments, and themes. Each family ever referred to me wanted at least some support with communication, negotiation, building attention, and working through being angry/shut down. All of the topics are interconnected and interrelated—some more relevant at times than others during a particular cycle or with particular families.

Below you will find a description of the topics, sample activities with variations, reminders, common pitfalls and even frustrations. Curriculum, as defined in this manual, is an outline of concepts and strategies that could be used during an eight session FI cycle, tailored to fit the needs families share during the registration interview. However, the beauty of group work is that activity is important, insofar as it supports the group in meeting its purpose. Completing an activity, as outlined in an agenda, isn't the aim. It is only meant to assist in creating a flexible context in which families can explore their relationships, notice themselves, and expand what they determine works better for them. You may plan an activity that highlights understanding anger, but the group decides that day to focus upon attention—follow their lead, improvise, support and facilitate. Trust the group process, purpose, the families, and yourself.

Topic #1: Understanding Communication

Communication is one of the main concerns that families share during registration interviews. Oftentimes, children and parents express feeling unheard. Some parents have said that their children find it difficult to articulate feelings verbally, so all that is observed are strong emotional responses. Therefore, the communication from adults and children around them becomes focused on calming or squelching an emotional response, rendering the communication ineffective for meeting the actual needs.

In FI, communication is a concept addressed throughout the entire process. Communication is the most basic aspect of how we, as human beings, relate. It shows up in our words, facial expressions, body language, and intentions. Communication exists in the messages we want to relay and how we expect it will be received. The anticipation of a response is imbedded in our expressions of questions, declarations, requests, demands, and complaints. Volumes have

been written about communication. Communication literally is as old as humanity itself.

For the purposes of FI, communication is explored as a language within a group, with and between families, facilitators, parents, siblings, peer groups, school staff, communities, and within oneself. It occurs differently, dependent upon the relationship, age difference, and multitudes of other variables. Communication can vary depending on the presence of authority figures, one's developmental stage, one's level of familiarity and comfort, or with being at school or home. During group, communication and the results are readily available to explore and evaluate. Reviewing a segment of a conversation can unveil many insights and unseen choices. One of the ultimate aims of communication work in FI is for parents and children (including siblings) to develop empathy for each other, which is a solid foundation for working through challenges.

Communication Activity Examples

Communication Sandwich: Reframing Always and Never

- The facilitator will define the “communication sandwich”: top layer is the stated message. The middle layer is one's interpretation and the bottom layer is filled with underlying beliefs/reactions. It will be drawn on the board as an actual sandwich.
- One family will model the communication sandwich, layer by layer, to get unstuck in their communication. The facilitator will guide participants in sharing the actual words used, what they meant to communicate, and the feelings/thoughts present while the interaction was occurring. The facilitator will support the participant in reviewing what could've been occurring for the other person as well (using the sandwich model.)
- Usually, the bottom layer, is a generalized statement that has an “always” or “never” attached. For example, “she never appreciates me.” The facilitator will support the participant with evaluating the underlying belief, by asking: Is it really true? Have there ever been any exceptions? Most families begin noticing exceptions and can begin imagine new interactions as possible.

- Variations: Parent child break out groups (simultaneously working and then regrouping to share insights, which offers room for candid conversations.

A Pea isn't just a Pea. One amazing family in our FI, shared about a recent conflict during dinner. The child didn't want to eat the peas his mother put into the mashed potatoes one night. It became a bitter battle in which the child lost the privilege to attend a fun event. The parent was irritated and fed-up because it seemed like a reoccurring scenario, which ended in yelling. After completing the communication sandwich, they both began laughing. The conflict wasn't about peas at all. The child discovered that he literally felt as if his mother cooked peas on purpose because she didn't care about him. The parent realized that she reacted as if no one appreciated her, when her son refused her peas. When they evaluated whether these beliefs were really true, they both readily admitted that they weren't. It gave them the space to reconsider the situation and communicate what they were really feeling. Routines still were a challenge in the family at times, but the peas became a reference point, reminding them to go deeper than the surface of the conversation.

Bifocal glasses: Seeing Beyond Complaints—Finding Strengths

- Complaints: For two minutes, in pairs, participants will share with each other their top three complaints about family life. Afterwards they will share what they had in common. The facilitator will write all of the complaints shared from the pairs onto a large drawing of eye glasses.
- The facilitator will ask participants to look at the glasses filled with complaints and ask the group how it may affect one “seeing” or relating to another.
- Ask the group if the complaints were on the smaller lens of the bifocal glasses, and the rest of the glasses were clear, what else could they get a chance to notice about the other person?
- Ask the group what they would like to share what they noticed with their children/parents.

Topic #2: Negotiation, Conflict, & Cooperation

One definition of negotiation is to “arrange an agreement.” It is one of the hallmarks of human interactions. We are constantly arranging and rearranging, cancelling and starting agreements. Within families, it is dynamic and multilayered. It can feel perfectly smooth and easy to accomplish at a family meeting, and practically impossible in the middle of a fight between siblings. Negotiation in families, as my mentor Myriam Laureano artistically defined, is chaos. Families need to come to an agreement about every aspect of living for each member! Families deal with how to negotiate wants versus needs, bills, the distribution of resources, equality, feelings of injustice, disappointment, satisfaction, love and happiness, all within a 24 hour day, 365 days a year. It’s like running a country—but scaled down a bit.

Negotiating can be exhausting, but I have noticed nothing weighs down the process more than unspoken expectations, misunderstandings, and resentment. Unlike on TV, where a family can resolve the conflicts that naturally (and inevitably) occur in the span of thirty minutes, negotiation can drag out for what seems like forever. To make it easier to survive, all groups have a way of creating patterns—grooves, short-cuts—which make negotiation seem inevitable, automatic, and predictable.

However, it’s just an agreement that has been arranged, and can be scrapped when needed. “How come it doesn’t feel that way” families often ask during group or the registration interview. It’s because of the grooves, the cycles of interaction, which seem to be permanent. Insoo Kim-Berg offered excellent interview questions to help families notice “exceptions” to the patterns, regardless of how seemingly insignificant. According to Kim-Berg, in her book Family Based Services: A Solution-Based Approach, within exceptions ‘new solutions’ exist, that families have already invented to negotiate and work through conflicts.

Families discovering and unpacking expectations, while noticing the explicit and hidden rules of negotiation within their family during group activities and discussions, encourages a fresh approach to negotiation, conflict resolution, communication and cooperation.

Negotiation occurs readily during activities. The patterns that families desire to explore, will therefore come up readily during the simplest interaction. For example, *two children during group were asked to draw a picture of their family together on a sheet of paper. The eldest said “Do I have to? My brother is really sloppy and always messes everything up.” The brother protested and said she*

was a liar. He seemed embarrassed and vocalized it. The other group members stepped in and critiqued the seeming harshness of her comment. The brother admitted how sometimes he messed up her artwork on purpose in retaliation to her “being mean.” They sorted out their negotiation with the group’s support. They agreed to work together if she didn’t put him down and if he didn’t rip the paper. It was a powerful moment that everyone commented on as a learning lesson at the end. The artwork they did together was something they were both satisfied with and pasted up on the wall.

Ordinary, seemingly simple interactions could be the “last straw,” giving expression to deeper frustrations and pleas. During FI, children and parents stretch beyond current agreements about negotiation and conflict. One mother said her children exhausted her with silly arguments about the TV remote control. Using an actual conflict in group over creating game rules, she practiced not getting involved and letting them figure it out. To her surprise, it didn’t escalate, which was her greatest fear. They were able to handle it independently, without her intervening. In that moment, they all created a new pattern of negotiation to use. The children agreed to work out minor conflicts (which they defined) first, instead of instantly racing to tell on the other if he or she didn’t get the remote. It will take lots of practice to make it a new groove, but well worth it. Now they have a reference they can all use when conflict occurs.

Below are two of my favorite activities to explore negotiation, conflict resolution, and cooperation within a group:

Negotiation Activity Examples

Context of conflict:

- Three circles will be drawn on the board. One word will be written into each circle: location, needs, and relationship. The facilitators explore with group members how the three components interlock.
- For example, the conflict over the remote (same need) happens in the living room (location), between siblings (relationship). In pairs, ask participants to describe the last conflict they experienced. Identify the components. The report-back can be performed. The group will become audience members offering suggestions of how the location or response to the need can be shifted. Variation: common locations, needs, and relationships in which conflict occurs can be written onto cards. A volunteer pair can randomly select from the bag of cards and improv the scenario. The audience members can “tap in” and switch spaces with

the volunteer group to try out various responses and notice outcomes. Follow-up with a discussion.

Voice Tone

- Parents have often highlighted voice tone as an important theme to address in the family, regarding communication and negotiation. In this activity, passive, aggressive, and assertive body language and voice tones are humorously labeled monster, baby, serious/ “normal” voice, respectively. It is an opportunity for parents and children to develop self awareness about their general communication styles.
- The facilitator will ask 3-4 participants to select a voice tone and corresponding posture, and exaggerate it. Next, they will ask someone in the group for something, for example “Can you pass the plate.” The person receiving the question will share his/her impression of the question and their feelings, and probable response if spoken to in that way.
- Variation: If parents mention being yellers or that their children are whiners, have them switch voice tones. Support the families in reflecting upon the feelings that arise and results from the different tones. Support family members understanding the point of view of the other. Ask families to describe the last time there was an exception, an alternative voice tone or style was used, and list the outcomes. Ask if the ‘exception’ could be repeated at least once or twice more between group sessions.

That’s Mine: *One day during a 2nd grade FI group, two children came bursting into the meeting room. They decided roasted chicken wasn’t as good as chicken nuggets and choose snacks instead of dinner. As they headed towards the table, they both realized that they wanted the same wooden chair. Mind you, there were other chairs present that were cushioned, had arm rests, and small comforts that many would’ve preferred over the old wooden chair with paint splotches. They both grabbed a hold on the chair and began a tug-of-war. Both parents jumped up and began coaxing their children to let go and to share. Neither child did. In fact, their grimaces became deeper and grips stronger. It was the perfect moment to practice what we had been learning in the moment.*

I asked the parents to give the children a moment to figure the situation out together. Both children stated that they got to the chair first and should have it. I asked them what voice tone they were using. They began to laugh and said the monster voice. I asked if the situation was working out. They both agreed that it wasn’t because they weren’t successful in overpowering each other and winning

the chair. We explored the context of conflict—and identified the competing needs to win and have the chair. Before we could finish the conversation, one proposed that they were both small enough to sit on it at the same time (which the adults laughed about.) Both agreed, sat together and finished their snacks. The parents reflected about their instinct to intervene in a matter that was “small” enough for the kids to figure out, which happened at home as well—which was exhausting. Both parents agreed to give their children more time at home to figure out the situation and attempt to resolve it before intervening.

Topic # 3: Peeling the Onion: Working Through Anger & ‘Shut Downs’

Anger is a natural emotional response. It is a warning signal that often has very noticeable physical expressions. It is a reaction to feeling threatened. Most people don’t think clearly when they are angry.

In FI, children and parents decipher anger, review the thinking and actions which preceded the situation, and ‘paint a clearer picture’ of what happened. In this self-reflection, participants identify options that might help when and if a similar situation reoccurs.

In FI, families are reminded about their own body signals. As a group, participants discover choices through role playing. Often, anger and being ‘shut down’ or withdrawn is an experience of powerlessness. In group, participants can explore what appears to be threatening and find out if it is “true.”

Group reflection addresses not just the experience of anger, but also acknowledges the impact of anger on other people, when to get support, shaping where the situation goes next, what escalates dangerous situations, and how to be heard. The fight or flight response is useful physiological information to share, in addition to exploring the differences between gender expression, which may be different and responded to differently by parents and teachers. For example, some teachers have expressed feelings of frustration and “not knowing what to do when the student is like that.” During activities and discussions, parents and children begin to learn more about their particular expression of anger and locating ‘triggers’. Participants practice constructive alternatives, which help their ultimate goals to be met. Children and adults, as needed, practice “cool down” techniques, so they can more effectively express themselves and deal with the situation.

Working Through Anger and ‘Shutdowns’ Activity Examples:

Steps of Conflict:

- This activity is a strategy of self-reflection. When one is angry, it is often difficult to slow down and review the situation. Physiologically during a state of anger, body functions are speeding up—heart rate, respiration, and nerve cell interactions. The facilitator will share how hindsight can be the best foresight to work through or side-step the next trigger for an angering or conflict-ridden interaction.
- Ask participants to work in pairs. Ask one participant to draw a staircase onto a colorful sheet of paper. Person A will share his/her example of a recent moment of being angry or feeling “shut down.” Person B will attempt to outline the steps of the apparent conflict. For example, two brothers had a fight afterschool. The pair would figure out which interactions occurred, step by step to lead to the fight.
- They will switch. In doing this for each other, participants will be able to see similarities and differences. The person reflecting will have an opportunity to analyze the patterns in an interaction and, in partnership, notice if there are ways to shift the situation, if it should occur again.

Peeling the Onion Dialogue:

- This is a step-by-step method of self-reflection about anger/being shut down. Usually children are first asked to describe anything that has layers. Mangos, birthday cake, clothes, onions, whatever comes to mind.
- Afterwards, the facilitator guides participants in thinking about anger, as well as other feelings, as having layers. The outer layer is what you can see on the surface—the peel. Participants can act out and exaggerate typical outward responses, such as stomping, yelling, throwing soft objects. It is a good energizer for such an abstract conversation.
- The middle layer is what can’t be seen but can be identified after consideration, which are the thoughts and feelings right underneath the physical reactions, such as anger, frustration, or pain.
- The innermost layer, the core, consists of beliefs, which the facilitator will share often goes unnoticed, and could be at the center of the reaction. Because this is very abstract, the group can come up with an example that can be “peeled.” The group will make guesses about what is inside of each layer of the reaction. The form below has been used with limited success with children, but great success with parents. A conversation, drawing or demonstration, has worked much better for children. Peeling the Onion creates a common language about anger or

feeling shut down that families can refer back to and use to work through it. *Please refer to the Peeling the Onion worksheet in the appendix.*

FI aims for participants to notice the patterns that exist in their interactions, and choose new ones if the old ones aren't producing sought after results. Ultimately, the wish is to generate hope that such a shift is possible. Affirmations and positive thoughts are defined as tools that can produce different results. Affirmations are best played within the activity "Thought Tags" (refer to the section about group middles.)

For No Reason: *One child said he couldn't stand his stepbrother, who seemed to always "pick on him." The boys were the same age and in the same grade. The one who felt picked on said it always happened for no reason. In general conversation, the event appeared to be a big blurry background, with a crystal clear foreground of him being antagonized. After empathizing and exploring the context of conflict, I asked if he wanted a new outcome, to which he agreed. I told him that I needed to get a better sense of what happened step by step to assist him in figuring out the situation.*

He drew the outcome of the conflict first, which I asked him to put onto the higher up steps. In detailing the steps before the conflict, literally in drawings on a hand-drawn staircase, he noticed that he often tapped his brother on the head or started wrestling with him before a conflict began. He didn't realize that this step, his action, could be a trigger for a certain response within his step-brother. Once we acknowledged that he didn't deserve to be hit and that his step-brother chosen a different response, he seemed more comfortable admitting that one of his actions caused a reaction. He agreed to not tap his step-brother on the head to see if a different outcome would occur. The arguments continued, but he noticed that there was less fighting. The child recognized his power to shift the situation, by noticing the outcomes of his interactions, which was invaluable.

Note: What this is not—It is not anger management! Not every angry situation escalates or is dangerous. Encourage participants to know their own physical signals and methods, to slow it down and become able to think it through. Angry interactions between children can be triggering to adults, who seek to manage the situation. As a group facilitator, support parents and children to trust themselves to work through the feelings arising, and find ways to get calm reflect afterwards. Remember as a facilitator, to also practice self-reflection. Your lessons in this can be a good use-of-self in the group. In the case of a young person or an adult experiencing anger as an emotion that persistently and consistently overwhelms their daily functioning and results in

violence often towards oneself and others, assist them in connecting to more intensive support services.

Topic #4: Building Attention

Attention is a state of awareness. There are different types. This topic arose for FI in particular, because often parents and teachers commented that children didn't LISTEN. "You don't listen, pay attention, learn, memorize, follow rules, give eye contact." The list could go on. The attention adults are requesting is more complicated than merely listening. For example, attention could be defined as having multiple aspects, such as focused, sustained, selective, alternating, visual and auditory. So which one is exactly being requested? It could be unclear for the adults and children. In addition, the physical, cognitive and speech development of the child is important to highlight for parents. Support parents in locating milestones appropriate for their child's age. If an evaluation is needed because delays are detected, make appropriate referrals.

In FI, attention is approached as an ability that is developed. It is built into all activities that the group performs. Attention is affected by many circumstances, such as learning or developmental disorders, age, allergies, chemical sensitivities, and one's setting. Highlighting these factors allow parents and children to create expectations that match the reality of their lives.

In group, attention is used actively in making observations during self-reflection. In what we call 'noticing', attention is drawn from a particular part of the "background noise" of interactions to the forefront for review. For example, the scaling done in the registration interview, allows the family to hone in and gain perspective, which is a form of noticing. Children especially have found relief in this practice, when discovering their own power to make newly encountered choices.

Noticing the patterns of interaction inside and outside of group—around the T.V. and remote control, during morning routines and playtime in the yard—gives one power in determining how the interaction *could* go. In a FI session, participants practice noticing their actions, the impact it has upon the group, and themselves. It moves participants from being objects acted upon or reacting—"he made me angry, she always acts like that, or I got in trouble for nothing" to active subjects with power to cause and participate in events—"I don't like when you do that. I got angry. I did snatch the game, which led to us arguing." It becomes a collaborative process of evaluation that each member of

the group participates in—invigorates and invites. In the moment, children and adults get to choose a new ending based upon what they have evaluated.

Building Attention Activity Examples

Gardening:

- Gardening, touching the earth, seeing colors, smelling different scents, and even tasting crops can be extremely engaging. Having activities that engage all of the senses, is interesting, and fun is a great way to build attention within a group. Notice the way participants attend to something of interest, so they can observe that strength within themselves and apply it during a less engaging, but needed task.

Following Sequences:

- During activities, instructions are used constantly. They are either created by participants or facilitators. Parents may observe their children having a hard time following instructions at home, which could often be attributed to being stubborn, lazy, or defiant. In reality this could be because the instructions were unclear. Practice multiple forms of delivering instructions, at least in visible and audible ways. Encourage children and parents to play with creating instructions for each other. It could assist them in developing empathy for each other and figuring out which style works best. For example, have a parent and child make instructions for the same activity, such as cleaning the room. Notice which steps each may have been included or left out. It could help clarify expectations.

Dance:

- Ask participants to write out dance steps like “The Macarena” and have the other group members follow the steps exactly. Debrief what was difficult in giving or following the instructions. Variation: Mother May I with a younger group or Follow the Leader. This can even be done blindfolded in a space with furniture pushed back.

Craft Projects:

- Crafts are a great way to practice generating an idea, planning steps, and following instructions, while practicing how to initiate and complete a task. Frustration comes up often during these types of activities. This is a good activity to do during the middle stage of the group. If frustration

comes up, address it, process it, have the participants notice their reactions. It will help at home and at school.

Frame for a Loved One: *One family who participated in FI had a deceased parent (the parent died many years before.) One of the children was having a truly difficult time in school, and was said to be inattentive and angry. During group we did a craft project, a frame for the parent. The child seemed so relieved to talk about the parent and share favorite memories. In doing the craft, the child worked through anger about the sticks not fitting ideally at first and began again many times. The project actually took two-three sessions to complete. At the end of the cycle the child was more able to verbalize feelings and thoughts, start and complete tasks, without giving up on himself. The project was a success that could fuel more for the future.*

Topic #5: Group-Reflection and Evaluation

Evaluation is commonly thought to occur during the end of a program. However, evaluation and self-reflection occur formally and informally throughout the FI group's life. It is discussed during registration, the first group meeting in which the purpose is collectively defined, at the end of each session, at the graduation, and the exit interview. It occurs between co-facilitators upon completing each group and at the end of a program cycle. Evaluation is a core principle of FI. It is a process, in which participants exercise power over program implementation and development.

Initial Evaluation

Families often enter the interview process feeling somewhat overwhelmed. During the conversation, what the family wants to work on becomes more specific and measurable. The challenge often gets reframed during the registration from being about a child struggling at home or school, to one the whole family system is experiencing. The purpose then becomes how the family, school, or community groups to which the child and parents belong that can shift, 'get unstuck', and develop.

During the first and second sessions, the group as a whole begins to set goals and identifies benchmarks for its progress during the wish activity (*see group beginnings.*) The participants' wishes are charted up and referred to throughout the group, especially sessions 3-7. In this way, the goals are an actual member of the group too, that provide guidance and support.

Ongoing Evaluation: Post-group session evaluation

At the end of each session, the group has the opportunity to evaluate its experience and learning for the day. One to two people are asked to volunteer to answer each of the following questions, given of course the amount of time remaining in the session:

- Ask participants to share what worked, could've been done differently, what was learned, and anything that they are looking forward to in the next session.
- Ask participants to share what they noticed about themselves and the group today.
- Ask participants to affirm each other's efforts.

The above format was derived from one of my mentors, Esperanza Martell, LCSW.

Evaluation at the Program's Conclusion:

After the graduation, each family ideally participates in an exit interview, during which the registration form is reviewed. The family decides what the current scale is, for example, if they felt they were at a 2 when they started, what are they today, higher or lower and how come? Most families mention that they are higher or the same. Some families have stated that they are lower than when they started, which is often when additional referrals are made or they would continue with separate family counseling. One parent surprised me in her reply when she said her family's scale was lower. She remarked that "while it has gone down, we are better able to meet the challenges from with what we gained from being in the group. For that, I am grateful."

The exit interview is a powerful moment for parents and children to notice the steps they have made. It is motivating because families at their core want to succeed and thrive! As a facilitator, to support families in noticing their strengths and accomplishments for what they are—not small, but actual significant movement, is a huge contribution. I have watched this occur during group as well, which is thrilling, because progress then becomes undeniable, present and witnessed. Supporting participants to notice steps forward is a rich and meaningful experience that families have remarked lives beyond the group.

Parents and children then complete the program survey, which is a post-only design. It offers family a broader opportunity to assess gains from participation, and offer feedback that will be used for program development.

Refer to the appendix to review examples of a registration form, facilitators' post-session reflection, and post-only design program survey.

Facilitator Tips: Reminders, Common Pitfalls & Frustrations

Overall Reminders for Communication, Negotiation and Working Through Anger & ‘Shut Down’, and Attention Building Activities

- Deciphering non verbal communication during group is a useful tool in heightening awareness of one’s communication strategies and whether or not it is effective in that moment. It can even be a game the group can use to practice verbalizing what they, or others, are feeling.
- In group, evaluate the outcomes of communication together. What is the ripple effect? Was it what one wanted? How could it have been said differently?
- Group provides a space where people can experience a window of time together, in which their communication styles and behaviors can emerge. Whatever conflicts occur in their lives could occur in group. Remind families that this is a great opportunity and a safe space. In group, everyone is committed to work with each other and through difficulties. It is during this work, that the skills are practiced. Unfortunately, at first, parents or the child may feel embarrassed. Assure them that in this context, power comes from being able to notice patterns and outcomes. A chance exists to see a common occurrence have a radically different ending than it does usually. It can be incredibly inspiring for the group, family, and individual.
- Be sensitive to what is being expressed. Create opportunities for teachable moments, but know when not to interfere. Real life communication is happening in the group right now. If a family is having a hard time in communicating you can support as it is useful for the family in the moment and group.

Common Pitfalls & Frustrations

- Be mindful of managing time well. Going too far with a “light bulb” moment could result in losing the group. Create space for the participants to be experts on their own feelings and needs.
- All parents want their children to succeed. During group, children and parents may feel pressure to come up with “smart” comments that always “make sense”. Parents in particular may feel this pressure because their children’s contributions (or apparent nonparticipation)

seem to reflect upon them. Children may experience this because they want to please. Acknowledge this probability in the beginning, so everyone can relax and do it less, eventually.

- It is important to recognize any attempt that participants make to contribute or to communicate. They are showing willingness to take risks. Bring non-verbal communication into the room.
- Be curious about non verbal communication. Ask questions and don't assume that you understand. Reserve conclusions. Don't step over the impact of communication in group. Explore it with the group as a learning moment for everyone to notice patterns.
- Don't take it personally when the plan that you have laid out becomes obsolete. Go with it.
- If a child is continuously attending to something else—like a handheld video game or cell phone—and a parent tries to snatch it away, ask first if the parent can share the impact of the child's actions upon him/her (if it seems appropriate and constructive for the group.) Ask parents to share with a child why a request for attention was made. It will help the child to later integrate the result with the attention given. As a facilitator, ask the group to relate to both the child and the parent. It makes for a learning moment for the group.

Epilogue

The Family Institutes of Bold Hope (FI) began five years ago. I had the fortunate opportunity to begin drafting this manual three years ago and just finished my last edits today. Throughout the writing process, I began and ended many cycles. I actually just finished a FI cycle yesterday. I continue to be humbled by the impact of this work. If you could've been in the room with us during any of the cycles--heard the words of deep appreciation and encouragement parents and children alike shared with each other, or witnessed the freshly felt freedom present --you would understand why I cherish this process. Families need each other. They need to hear each other's stories and feel the support that only someone able to truly relate can provide. The activities are continuing to evolve, as are the strategies for implementation, even just in shades. However, the core values and commitment to families have remained the same.

I am honored to have offered this work to you in the form of this manual. It is the first version. I want to give special thanks to Baylah Wolfe, Yesenia Molina, Yolanda Holland, Dr. Carol Cohen, and Myriam Laureano for being part of my first peer review of this manual. I appreciate their wisdom and guidance. They encouraged me to make sure the manual is: 1) user friendly for the web, 2) takes into account the context of oppression primarily poor Black and Latino families experience in NYC, from which this manual arises, and 3) discusses how the Bold Hope community can impact the larger community as a "democratic process that creates a new family and community conversation." To these mentors, I commit to developing this work further and better addressing these points, especially as we secure more resources for this project. I am thankful for their feedback.

In conclusion, my wish to all who use this manual is that you now feel supported in creating spaces with families, which give birth to connection, healing, power, and growth—step by step, poco a poco. Trust the group to carve its way through what can seem insurmountable. Trust yourself. Trust resiliency. Trust love. Trust hope.

AO—May 2011

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Appendix

Program Registration Form

Family Institutes of Bold Hope

The Family Institutes of Bold Hope are therapeutic-learning groups for families. We will use this form to support family goal setting and noting achievement. The program purpose is to promote emotional healing, empowerment, and transformation within families, school systems and the community. If you have any questions please contact us at _____.

1. Registration Date: _____ 2. Referred by _____

3. Primary Adult(s) registering:

3a. Name _____ 3b. Relationship _____

3c. Name _____ 3d. Relationship _____

Address:

Phone Number _____

4. Primary Child(ren) registering:

4a. Name _____ Grade _____ Class _____ DOB _____

4b. Name _____ Grade _____ Class _____ DOB _____

5. Reason for registration (current challenge, past problem solving, what was helpful, current support?)

6. Which of these areas are of priority for your family right now? If there is more than one please rank in order of priority.

___ 6a. COMMUNICATION (awareness of voice tone, eye contact, verbal expression, getting point across)

___ 6b. EMOTIONAL/ANGER RESPONSE (Verbal/Physical: passive, aggressive, withdrawn, self-reflection)

___ 6c. ATTENTION (distraction, completion of tasks, focus, ability to follow directions, and carry out tasks step by step)

___ 6d. NEGOTIATION: (cooperation, compromise, teamwork, express needs)

7. Child (ren) feedback

7a. Strengths (personal/family):

7b. Challenges (personal/family):

8. Parent feedback

8a. Strengths (personal/family):

8b. Challenges (personal/family):

9. How close would you say your family is to resolving the above challenge? (far) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (close)

9a. Child: What number did you choose and how come not higher or lower? 9b. Child: What would happen if you were one step closer?

9c. Parent(s): What number did you choose and how come not higher or lower? 9d. Parent(s): What would happen one step closer?

9e. EXIT INTERVIEW: How close is your family now to resolving the challenge chosen during registration for FI? (1---10)

9f. EXIT INTERVIEW: How and to what extent was your family able to resolve the priority challenge?

10. What difference would other people in your life, including your teacher or other family members, notice when the challenge begins to resolve?

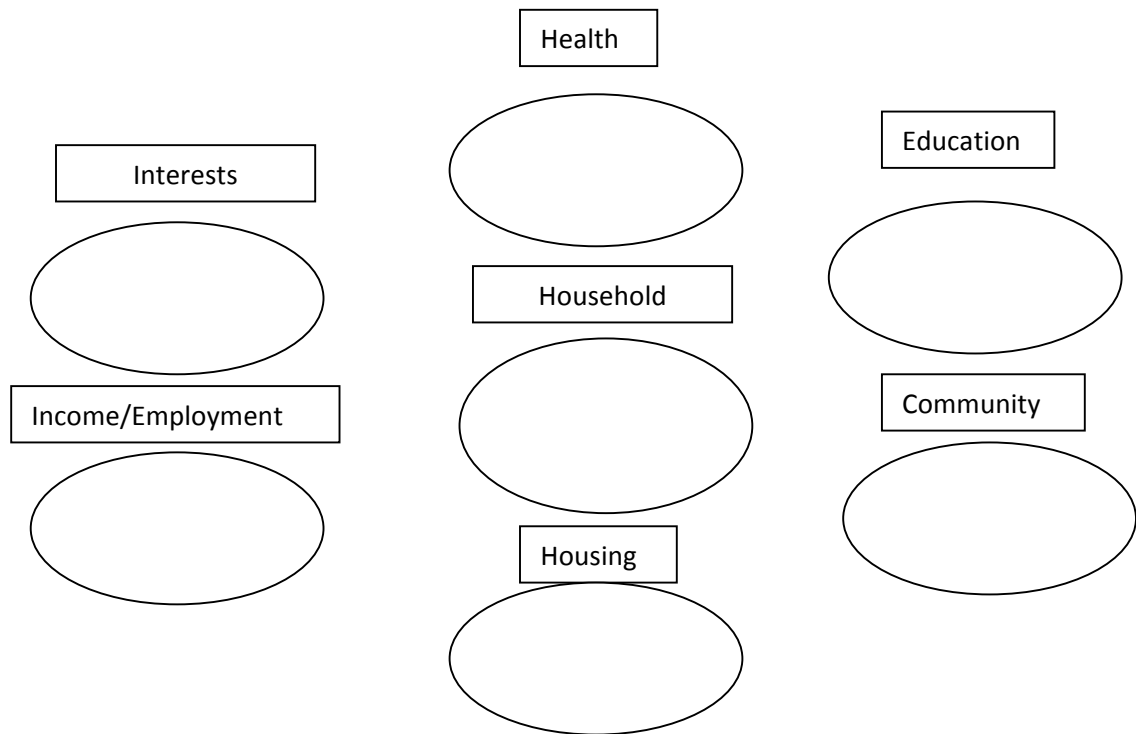
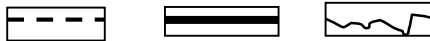
10a.

10b.

10c.

11. Eco-Map: Relationship to resources

Key: 11a. distant relationship 11b. strong relationship 11.c "tough" relationship



This form is used solely for the purpose of empowering children and families toward reaching their goals. Everything contained in this form is confidential.

Child's Signature

Date

Parent's Signature

Date

Facilitator's Initial Recommendations & Referrals	Facilitator's Concluding Recommendations & Referrals
<p>Are there services that your family would like to access?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Accessing and navigating social services. ○ Increased access to mental health services and referrals. ○ Increased access to legal services ○ Other RHI/citywide services: _____ 	<p>Which service did you access during the program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Accessing and navigating social services. ○ Increased access to mental health services and referrals. ○ Increased access to legal services <p>Are there additional services that your family would like to access (RHI or Citywide)?</p>

Curriculum Outline Sample—Including Agenda Drafts

Family Institutes of Bold Hope Fall 2009

Learning Map: Where We Are Going!

Workshop Date & Activities	Concepts	Skills
<p>#1 10/14/09</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Icebreaker • Community heart: building up • Group Purpose: Drawing the ups and downs of life and family wish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group work • Group norms: “ground rules” • Self-reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying a common purpose • Identifying commonalities
<p>#2 10/21/09</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Icebreaker • Human Knot • Community heart: tearing down • Reviewing group purpose and structure • Sculpting Clay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring conflict and feelings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflection • Evaluation: Shaping the group process through providing feedback
<p>#3 10/27/09</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Icebreaker • • Drama: role play family scenarios 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Context of Conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passive, aggressive, and assertive body language and voice tone (monster, baby, serious, “normal” voice) • Identifying components of conflict
<p>#4 11/04/09</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Icebreaker • Parent/child groups “Bifocal glasses” “Thought tags” • “Labels” • Balloon games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiation and communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compromising and taking turns • Self- reflection • Noticing

#5	11/18/09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiation: win-win, win-lose, lose-lose • “Communication Sandwich” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I” and “You” statements • Evaluation of conflict: What matters most to me? • “Stress breaker” for family stress relief and fun
#6	12/02/09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Signals • Identifying feelings and triggers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical awareness • Emotional awareness • Reframing
#7	12/09/09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Affirmation & appreciation • Recognizing view points and beliefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Self-reflection • Evaluation: Is it true? Explore “always” and “never” complaints
#8	12/16/09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation • Affirmation & appreciation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Reflection • Evaluation: Provide group feedback , schedule exit interviews. Group put-up cards

Agenda Drafts

Family Institute of Bold Hope: Day #2 Family Communication

Icebreakers: Balloon Bop (15 min)

- Facilitators will ask participants to join hands and form a circle. They will have to keep a balloon in the air for as long as possible, without letting go of each other's hands. Rules: no knees or kicking.

Human Knot (10 min)

- Facilitators will ask participants to join hands with different people across the circle. The group, without talking, will have to find a way to communicate to unravel the knot.

Activity One: (Review Group Purpose & Wish for new families: Why are we here? (15 min)

- Facilitators introduce themselves and the history of the program. In addition, discuss how the group came about. State logistics: Group meets every Friday, except 12/25 and 1/1/10, until 2/12, which equals 8 sessions + graduation 5:30-7:00pm.
- Describe how the group can help:
 1. Invite participants to look at the picture of Family Institutes purpose (stick figures helping each other over some hills and valleys with the word life written underneath.) Ask participants to share their understanding of the program purpose derived from the picture. The purpose will be stated: **for parents and children to understand each other and themselves better, have stronger relationships (at home and school) and an increased ability to reach ones' goals.**
 2. Facilitator states:
 - "What happens during group is a miniature version of what happens in everyday life, at school and at home. The goal is to take what you learn in group use it!"
 - "In this group **parents and children** support each other: share strategies, wisdom and experiences, to make it through the ups and downs of life."
 - "No one here needs to be fixed." **Ask the group to repeat and discuss this statement. Remind the group that we will be working on relationships and communication based on the strengths already present.**

- “Here, we **think about what is going well or is difficult and practice actions and thinking which may be more successful: we learn ways to get unstuck.**
- Mention past group successes.
- **Ask participants to share what was understood in their own words, plus what they wish to get out of the program.**

Community Heart: Ground rules activity: (15 min)

- A large heart will be placed in the center of the room. Participants will be given post-its to draw examples of what makes them feel happy, appreciated, and welcomed in a group. The post-its will be posted on the community heart. As each person puts the post-it on, he/she will be asked for a specific example. For instance, if someone states respect, the facilitator will ask “What does respect being shown to you in this group look like?”

Closing: (15 min)

- Check-Out: What did you like? What did you notice about yourself or the group? Is there anything that you would’ve changed about today to make it better? What are you looking forward to next week?
- Ask participants to give “high fives” hand claps to each other and pats on the back while saying good job.

Peeling the Onion Worksheet

Core Beliefs	Thoughts & Patterns	Feelings & Triggers
<i>"I am not smart."</i>	<i>"I will probably fail."</i> (thought) <i>"I won't study."</i> (pattern)	<i>"I threw pencils during the test because I felt mad."</i> Trigger: test Feeling: anger
Affirmations	Thoughts & Patterns	Feelings & Triggers
<i>"I am smart."</i>	<i>"I will probably do well."</i> (thought) <i>"I will study."</i> (pattern)	<i>"I tried my best and I felt happy."</i> Trigger: trying Feeling: happy

Post-Workshop Reflection Sheet

1. Did the workshop go how you thought it would? What were the surprises?
2. Did anything work very well?
3. Did anything not work or could've been done differently? Were there any pieces that were not well received by the group?
4. If there was one thing you could change about this session what would it be (i.e. flow, amount of energizers, etc.)?
5. Did you notice that was missing from the agenda?
6. Did you notice any pieces that needed clarification?
7. Was the time allotted for each section appropriate?
8. Is there anything that the families seemed to want to discuss more?
9. Were there any interesting tangents?
10. Do you have any other comments? Are there any reflections about your facilitation?

Post-Only Design Program Survey

The following questions are designed so that the co-facilitators can improve the Family Institutes of Bold Hope program. Please give us your honest answers, which will be kept confidential. We will use this information to better serve families in the future.

PART ONE: Demographic Information

1. **Adult Participant(s) Name(s):** _____
2. **How many of your children participated in this group?**
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. Other _____
3. **Ages of your children who participated in this group. [Check all that apply]**
 - a. 6–8
 - b. 9–11
 - c. 12–14
4. **Gender of your children who participated in this group.[Check all that apply]**
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
5. **Where did your family participate in this group?**
 - a. School
 - b. Community Center
 - c. Other: _____
6. **What is the ethnicity of your family? (Check all that apply)**
 - a. _____ Black/ African American/ Caribbean
 - b. _____ Hispanic / Latino
 - c. _____ White
 - d. _____ Asian
 - e. _____ Native American
 - f. _____ Other: _____
7. **Does your child who participated in this group have an Individual Education Plan (IEP)?**
Please circle
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know
 - d. Other _____
8. **Does your child who participated in this group receive counseling at school?**
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know
 - d. Other _____
9. **Does your family participate in counseling outside of school, besides the Family Institutes of Bold Hope Program?**
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Other _____

We would like to ask you some specific questions about your experience as a member of the Family Institutes of Bold Hope. Your answers will support how the program is designed and delivered in the future. We appreciate your time and honesty.

14. Would you recommend this program to another family? If yes, what benefits would they get? If not, what else would you suggest?

15. Do you feel that your relationship as a family has improved, stayed the same, or gotten worse as a result of this program? Why?

16. Has this group encouraged your family to try something new? If so, how?

17. What was the most important thing your family got out of being in this program?

18. What would you recommend to make this program better for children, parents, and families?

Family Institutes of Bold Hope Logic Model

Logic Model for the Red Hook Initiative Family Institutes of Bold Hope

Goal:

- To assist parents in transforming concerns about their children’s behavior, into opportunities for healing and empowerment for the entire family.

Program goals

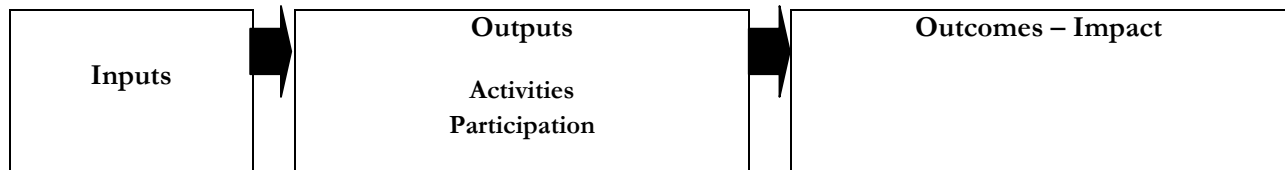
- Reframe and redefine problematic behavior to generate solutions.
- Expand upon concepts and skills used to successfully solve challenges.
- Promote an increased sense of self-worth and hopefulness for participants.
- Promote alternative interventions within schools, which increase social and emotional wellness.

Program Impact

- Participants will gain useful reflection, communication, and problem-solving skills to achieve noticeable progress in daily interactions.
- School staff will be supported in identifying techniques, which contribute to short and long-term family goals.
- Families and children will gain a sense of hopefulness and motivation towards self-determined success.

Future Program Goals:

- School staff and administrators gain a new perspective when working with children who are experiencing behavioral, social or emotional challenges.



<p>What we invest:</p> <p>Individual:</p> <p>5 - 7 families (per institute) with a child 9 – 14 years old from the Red Hook community and/or local schools (primarily Latino/and African American & low ses).</p>	<p>What we do:</p> <p><u><i>Access Services and Resources</i></u></p> <p>--Provide an intake interview for each family, which includes an assessment of health, income, housing, and education needs.</p> <p>--Referrals to counseling, psych</p>	<p>Who we reach:</p> <p>Child/Parent</p>	<p>What we see happen: Short-Term</p> <p><u><i>Access Services and Resources</i></u></p> <p>--Increased support in accessing and navigating social services.</p> <p>--Increased access to mental health services and referrals.</p> <p>--Increased access to legal services, as needed.</p> <p><u><i>Learn New Skills</i></u></p> <p>--Increased utilization of conflict</p>
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<p>Children who have challenging school experiences (IEP, parental concern, teacher/ counselor intervention).</p> <p>Organization: Licensed Master Social Worker.</p> <p>Supervision for SW with outside consultant.</p> <p>Assessment tools/ curriculum.</p> <p>Evaluation team/ Specialists.</p> <p>Social Work Interns.</p> <p>Office, supplies, technical support.</p> <p>Staff training and support (varies throughout year).</p> <p>RHI planning</p>	<p>evaluation, parenting support, as necessary.</p> <p>--Education advocacy provided with the school, as necessary.</p> <p><u>Learn New Skills</u></p> <p>--Provide an 8 week multi-family therapy program.</p> <p>(Program includes training in reframing, critical thinking, goal setting, scaling success, communication, negotiation, self-reflection, finding exceptions to generate solutions, developing mutual understanding, evaluation techniques, identifying strengths, increasing hopefulness, positive outlooks, and personal motivation.</p> <p><u>Unconditional Support</u></p> <p>--Individual family counseling, as</p>	<p>5 - 7 families (per Institute) with a child 9 – 11 years old from the Red Hook community (primarily Latino/ African American & low ses).</p>	<p>resolution strategies by teachers.</p> <p>--Increased positive communication among family members.</p> <p>--Increased ability to problem-solve and reduce conflict.</p> <p>--Increased teacher/school staff knowledge of how to deal with children’s emotional needs.</p> <p><u>Unconditional Support</u></p> <p>--Parents receive support from other parents.</p> <p>--Participants provide mutual aid to each other.</p> <p>--Parents and children feel supported and that they have an ally in program facilitators.</p> <p>What we see happen: Long-term</p> <p><u>Courage to Take Healthy Risks</u> Increased parent networking and access to school based resources.</p> <p>--Increased communication between family and school staff.</p> <p>--Increased ability to access school /parent community as a resource.</p> <p><u>Have a Positive Sense of Self and Future</u> Increased emotional and social well being.</p> <p>--Increase in positive attitude and sense of hopefulness.</p> <p>--Increased ability to work with and get along with peers.</p>
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<p>meetings, twice a month.</p> <p>Monthly reports.</p> <p>Funding to support Family Institutes.</p> <p>Host Agency / School:</p> <p>Classroom space.</p> <p>School guidance counselor or SW staff.</p> <p>Staff time for outreach.</p> <p>Food/ supplies (depends on site, may come from RHI).</p>	<p>necessary, during program.</p> <p>--Post-program case management and counseling provided as necessary.</p> <p>--Court related support services and advocacy provided.</p>	<p>5 - 7 families (per Institute) with a child 9 – 11 years old from the Red Hook community (primarily Latino/ African American & low ses).</p>	<p>Increased family bonding.</p> <p>--Increase in family resiliency.</p> <p>--Willingness to work through problems or hard times versus giving up.</p> <p>--Increased likelihood of family remaining intact.</p> <p>--Decrease in tension between family members.</p> <p><u><i>Self-Efficacy</i></u></p> <p>Improved performance in school.</p> <p>--Increased ability resolve conflicts and get help.</p> <p>--Increased socialization with peers and staff in classroom.</p> <p>--Improved academic performance.</p> <p>--Improved relationships with school staff.</p> <p>--Behaviors that have been identified as a problem begin to improve (or don't get worse).</p> <p><u><i>Community Impact</i></u></p> <p>--Children find hopefulness in the educational setting and feel included, not isolated.</p> <p>--Parents increase likelihood of getting involved in the school and/ or support programs.</p> <p>--More children from the Red Hook community are able to achieve and maintain success in a general education setting</p>
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