

Bringing Change to Life in Early Childhood Education

Team Building Exercises and Games

Change in early childhood programs involves more than policies, procedures, or new teaching approaches. It also affects how people feel about their work, how they collaborate with colleagues, and how they understand their roles within the program. Leaders who recognize the emotional and relational aspects of change can better support staff through transitions.

Interactive activities, storytelling, and reflective exercises can help educators explore their reactions to change in a supportive environment. These experiences create opportunities for open dialogue, strengthen relationships among staff, and help teams navigate change together. This tip sheet highlights practical exercises that directors can use during staff meetings to foster psychological safety, encourage reflection, and build team cohesion as they implement change.

Create Psychological Safety

Before asking staff to reflect on change, leaders must create an environment where people feel comfortable sharing honest thoughts and concerns. Psychological safety exists when staff trusts that their voices will be respected and that questions or disagreements will not be criticized. When educators feel safe speaking openly, programs can learn from multiple perspectives and strengthen decision-making.

Practical strategies

- Establish expectations for respectful listening and open discussion.
- Acknowledge that change can bring uncertainty, discomfort, or defensiveness.

Activity: The Status Quo Story

Storytelling can help staff reflect on long-standing practices and assumptions in a lighthearted way.

How to facilitate

Share the story of a person preparing their first holiday roast who cuts an inch off the end of the meat because that is how their parent and grandparents always did it. Eventually, the grandparents explain that the original reason was simply that their roasting pan was too small.

Ask the following questions:

- Have you ever followed a practice without knowing why?
- Are there routines in our program that exist simply because they always have?
- What might we discover if we became more curious about our practices?

This story encourages reflection and helps staff see that questioning routines can lead to improvement.

Activity: Four Corners, Learning Something New

This activity helps staff explore how they prefer to learn new things, which can influence their responses to change.

How to facilitate

Ask staff the question: "When it comes to learning something new, I usually..."

Assign one response to each corner of the room:

- Read a book or manual
- Ask another person for advice
- Observe a model
- Jump in and try it

Participants move to the corner that best represents their learning style. Invite volunteers from each group to explain their choice.

This game helps staff become more aware of their own learning preferences and those of their colleagues. Leaders can then provide various types of support—such as coaching, observation, or written guidance—when introducing new practices.

Activity: Songs, Exploring Responses to Change

People respond to change in different ways. This playful activity encourages staff to reflect on their emotional reactions when asked to try something new.

How to Facilitate

Ask participants to move to the corner of the room representing the song that best reflects their response to change:

- “Hi ho, hi ho, it’s off to work I go...”
- “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen...”
- “The itsy-bitsy spider...”
- “If I had a hammer...”

Participants then explain why they chose their song. Recognizing these differences helps leaders pace change thoughtfully and provide appropriate support

Activity: Ten Things in Common

Building camaraderie helps teams navigate change together.

How to Facilitate

- Divide the staff into groups of 5 to 10 people.
- Assign one person in each group to record responses.
- Groups have ten minutes to find ten things they all have in common.
- Each group then shares its list with the larger team.

This activity often leads to laughter and surprising discoveries. It reminds staff that although change may feel difficult, they share experiences and strengths that can help them support one another.

Activity: The Four P’s Discussion

When leaders propose changes, staff may have questions or concerns. A structured discussion can help gather feedback in a respectful and productive way.

How to Facilitate

Write the following headings on a whiteboard:

- Project
- Purpose
- Particulars
- People

Ask participants to write one concern or question for each category on a sticky note and place it under the appropriate heading.

- Thank the staff for sharing their concerns.
- Avoid responding defensively in the moment.
- Take time to reflect on feedback before addressing issues.

When staff feel heard, they are more likely to participate positively in the change process.

Additional Resources

[Change Readiness Assessment](https://www.pacb.org/uploads/1/3/0/6/130641935/module_5_change_readiness_assessment.pdf)

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[A Short Activity on Change](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DDZBIRNdjk)

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