

**Activities To Build Resiliency in
Child Abuse Organizations**

ACTIVITIES
Building Resiliency in Child Abuse Organizations

Activities for Self-Knowledge and Insight

1. Sources of Stress (15 minutes)

This activity identifies sources or causes of stress to aid participants in determining which ones are within their control and the best way to address them.

Materials: A worksheet for every participant; pens or pencils.

Instruct participants to think about their work and their lives.

Ask participants to use the worksheet to list the 10 things that caused them the most stress in the last 10 days.

Give them 3 to 5 minutes to work on their lists.

Present the following:

Understanding what causes us stress makes us better able to determine **if** we can do anything about it, and to identify **what** that action is.

Ask participants to identify their stressors by category, marking each with a letter as follows:

- Administrative – functions of the work. (Mark “A”)
- Traumatic – encounters with traumatic material. (Mark “T”)
- Personal life – related to family, friends, pets, home, and so forth. (Mark “P”)
- Everything else – bad weather, car breaks down, and so forth. (Mark “E”)

Ask participants to identify the category where the majority of their stress takes place.

Ask them if they would like to respond to any of the following questions:

- How many of these stressors do you have control over?
- What control do you have?
- What can you do to gain more control?
- What triggers do you have?

Ask if they see a pattern. Is there one issue or event that seems to be the most stressful?

Tell participants now that they have insight into the source of the stress, they’ll be able to think about the best way to address it.

2. Create Your Resiliency Snapshot (10 minutes)

This activity introduces a “sense-of-control” component by enabling participants to tap into skills they already have for practicing resiliency.

Materials: None.

Note that participants will be taking a resiliency snapshot.

Share that visualization is a powerful tool that can move us from a negative mental state to a positive mental state. Remind participants that we can choose thoughts or pictures that can actually energize us.

Ask participants to think about their work and try to remember a specific time when they overcame an obstacle, faced some adversity and showed resiliency, or handled a particularly difficult challenge.

Ask them to visualize this time with as much sensory memory as possible.

- What did they feel like?
- How did they do it?
- What happened when they were strong and capable in the face of adversity?

Invite participants to share their snapshot with the group.

Allow time for a brief discussion.

Summarize by sharing that our resiliency snapshots remind us of times we have succeeded in the face of adversity. The snapshot helps us shift from a state of negativity to a state of positivity and more quickly enter a solution-focused problem-solving mode.

Ask participants to consider these questions:

- What did you do that made you successful in a difficult situation last time?
- Did self-esteem or self-compassion figure in?
- What did your experience with adversity teach you about your own personal strengths?

Adapted from Farrington, E.L., 2009. “Tips for cultivating resiliency in the workplace.” *Women in Higher Education* 18(12): 29–30.

3. Why Do You Do This Work? (5 minutes)

This activity enables participants to reflect on their own motivation for doing this work and its connection to their values.

Materials: Paper; pens or pencils.

Ask participants to take a piece of paper and write down the answer to the question, “Why do you do this work?”

Have participants share with one another, identifying similarities and differences.

Suggest to participants to put the paper someplace where they can see it in their workplace, to remind them of why they do this work.

This exercise can also be done as a T-shirt exercise, which appears in the Sense of Hope section.

Activities for a Sense of Hope

1. Songs of Hope (5 minutes)

This activity helps participants begin exploring the first component of hope (sense of humor) by doing something that makes people laugh.

Materials: Tear sheets; markers.

Ask participants to come up with songs that speak of hope.

Ask them to “sing a few bars” until people recognize the song and “name that tune.”

Write the song titles and artists on a tear sheet.

Suggest that participants create a CD or iPod playlist of songs from the list they generated.

TIP: This exercise can be done during training on the five core elements as a way of reinforcing each of the components. The CD can then be created with all of the songs, and serve as a resiliency mix tape for the organization.

2. Make a T-Shirt (20 minutes)

This activity allows participants to have fun, tap their sense of humor and creativity, and reflect on what gives them hope.

Materials: Tear sheets; markers and other art supplies; clothesline; clothes pins.

Distribute one half of a tear sheet to each participant.

Ask them to design a T-shirt that answers the question, “What gives you hope?” It can be a word, a phrase, a picture. It can be playful or humorous.

Have participants present their “T-shirts,” perhaps creating a clothesline where they can hang their designs as they present them.

To close the activity, stimulate a discussion by asking the following:

- What can your organization do to help sustain this hope?
- What can you do as an individual to sustain hope within yourself?
- What can you do for others?

Consider hanging the designs in the lobby or other public space to generate smiles and inspiration.

This exercise can also be adapted for the question: Why do you do this work?

3. Gratitude Exercise (5 minutes class time/3 minutes daily)

This activity enables participants to continue to generate positive emotions and hope over a period of time.

Materials: Journal or notebook, pen.

Invite participants to practice the following exercise in gratitude.

- Every morning for 2 weeks, write down three things for which you are grateful. Each day, you have to name three different things.
- Use a journal or notebook just for this purpose.

Discuss how this exercise might strengthen a sense of hope.

Share that the practice of identifying things to be grateful for is similar to a philosophy called Naikan, an Eastern practice that stems from the belief that we are who we are because of gifts we've received from others. The practice of Naikan asks you to be attentive to the gifts coming your way and be grateful for them.

Ask: How might the practice of naming things we are grateful for every day help us be more attentive to positive things in our workplace?

4. Three Blessings or “Hunting the Good” (5 minutes)

This activity enables participants to generate positive emotions and explore how this activity can be used to offset work stress.

Materials: Paper; pens or pencils.

Ask participants to write down three things that went well today.

Next to each positive thing, ask them to write down the answer to the question:

Why did this happen?

Ask a few participants to share their responses; briefly discuss their responses with the group.

Ask: How can this activity be used in the workplace? Suggestions include staff meetings, case debriefings, etc.

Tell participants the exercise is drawn from the book *Flourish*, by Martin Seligman, and is one of the exercises being used in the U.S. Army resiliency program. Seligman recommends that the three blessings exercise be done every night for a week.

Adapted from Seligman, M. 2011. *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Wellbeing*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Activities for Healthy Coping

1. Identifying Challenges in the Agency (20 minutes)

(One of two parts) Do this exercise in conjunction with the next exercise.

This activity identifies potential areas of stress, and helps organizations sort through how they can stop them from becoming a crisis, or at least mitigate impact.

Materials: Tear sheets; markers; sticky notes; pens or pencils.

Tell participants that they are going to explore the idea of crisis with some examples from their work.

Ask people to identify three things they expect will actually happen in the organization in the next year that will cause them stress.

Give each participant three sticky notes, and ask them to write one potential stressor on each note. Direct participants to the blank tear sheets on the wall. (Have enough tear sheets so that a group of 4–6 people can work with each tear sheet in the next exercise.)

Ask participants to come up one at a time or in small groups (maybe by the month of their birthday) to put each of their three items on one of the tear sheets, grouping those with a similar theme on the same tear sheet.

Participants should be encouraged to use their discretion in grouping stressors together and moving things around to make better groupings.

2. Meeting Challenges in the Agency (25 minutes)

(Two of two parts) Do this exercise in conjunction with the previous exercise.

This activity enables participants to practice healthy coping skills while working as a group to develop strategies for addressing agency stressors.

Materials: Tear sheets; markers.

Create groups with at least 4–6 people in each. Give each group a tear sheet from the earlier exercise. Explain that the first task is for each group to come up with a theme that connects the stressors listed on the tear sheet.

Give each group a blank sheet of paper and ask them to write the theme at the top.

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Explain that the second task is for each person in the group to write on the sheet a solution to the problem the theme represents, and pass it to the next person until everyone has written down a solution. There should be little discussion until everyone has had a chance to weigh in.

The group scribe then copies the theme and solutions on the tear sheet, and the group discusses remedies among themselves, adding more ideas as they go.

Provide time for participants to report back and recap new solutions they found.

Adapted from Robbins, S.L. 2008. *What If: Short Stories To Spark Diversity Dialogue*. Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.

Activities for Strong Relationships

1. Warning Signs of Relationship or Teamwork Challenges (15 minutes)

(One of three linked exercises) Do this exercise in conjunction with the next exercise.

This activity enables participants to explore some work-culture links.

Materials: Tear sheets; markers; package of red dot stickers.

Ask participants to brainstorm aloud some of the warning signs they are aware of or have experienced that illustrate that some aspect of performance or team collaboration is not as effective as it should be.

Record their responses on a tear sheet.

Post the tear sheet(s).

Give each participant three red dots and have them go up and mark items on the tear sheets they have seen within the organization.

2. Addressing Relationship or Teamwork Challenges (15 minutes)

(Two of three linked exercises) Do this exercise in conjunction with the previous exercise.

This activity allows participants to apply a strength-based approach to address issues affecting strong relationships.

Materials: Material from the previous exercise; tear sheets; markers; package of green dot stickers.

Ask participants to brainstorm aloud some of the strengths they personally possess to address the challenge points on the tear sheet(s) – perhaps calling for strengths to address the “warning signs” that have the most red dots.

Ask participants to identify strengths the organization has. In other words, what do we do well when we are at our best?

Record strengths from both sets of responses on a tear sheet.

Give each participant three green dots and have them go up and mark strengths from both lists – individual and organizational – that they believe should be tapped first. .

Stimulate discussion:

- Where do these strengths come from?
- What are they mostly?
- How do we get from being surrounded by the warning signs to using our strengths? That is, how do we tap those strengths?

3. Work Plan for Strong Relationships (10 minutes)

(Third of three linked exercises) Do this exercise after the previous two.

This activity exercise lets participants consider what they can do to foster strong relationships within the agency.

Materials: Paper; pens or pencils.

Ask participants to look at the warning signs and strengths the group identified in their agency.

Ask them to answer this question: What can I do?

Instruct participants to:

- Identify one tangible step they can take as an individual and one they can take as a team member that uses their strengths to make change happen.
- Identify three tangible milestones (e.g., set up a meeting, ask clarifying questions) to make progress in meeting that challenge.
- Identify when they will take that first step.
- Identify which team member(s) they will work with to bring about this change.

Sources: Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillan, R., and Switzler, A. 2002. *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When the Stakes Are High*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill; Latting, J.K., and Ramsey, V.J. 2009. *Reframing Change: How To Deal With Workplace Dynamics, Influence Others, and Bring People Together to Initiate Positive Change*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

4. Tell Me More (10 minutes)

This activity enables participants to explore issues that may be keeping them from communicating clearly, making meaning of what they're hearing.

Materials: None.

Ask participants to count off in groups of two.

To start, the "1s" talk for 3 minutes, telling the "2s" about a time they had a conversation that made them feel connected afterward.

The only words the "2s" can say are, "Tell me more."

After 3 minutes, the teams shift: the "2s" do the talking and the "1s" can only respond, "Tell me more."

Stimulate discussion:

- What was it like to be the one talking?
- What was it like to be the one only saying "Tell me more?"
- What does this activity teach us about having conversations that can help us communicate more clearly, and speak up for a change?

Activities for Personal Perspective and Meaning

1. Reflecting on Meaning Making (15 minutes)

(One of two parts) Do this part in conjunction with the next exercise.

This activity enables participants to journal and reflect on how they develop their own personal perspective and meaning.

Materials: Paper, journal, or notebook for each participant; pens or pencils.

Ask participants to use their journal (or paper if journals not provided) to reflect on how each of the components figure in their own meaning making. Reflect on the following:

- What coherent life meaning do you draw on?
- What role does your morality and integrity play in making meaning of this work?
- What role does spirituality play in making meaning of your work?
- What specific spirituality or philosophy of life keeps you balanced and helps you make meaning of the work you do?
- Do you have a perspective on human suffering? If so, how does that help you make meaning of your work?

2. How Do You Make Meaning of This Work? (20 minutes)

(Two of two parts) Do in conjunction with the previous exercise.

This activity allows participants to share how they make meaning of this work.

Materials: Journal or writing from previous exercise.

Invite participants to share how they make meaning of their work, noting that the previous journal activity was an opportunity to practice self-reflection. This exercise is an opportunity to share those insights aloud and learn more about your colleagues' personal perspectives. Sharing personal perspective is a powerful tool.

Depending on who is in the group and agency dynamics, the activity could start in dyads or small groups at tables and then move on to a big group, or it could start in the large group.

Facilitate discussion, giving people an opportunity to share. Model the importance of listening to each other's meaning making.

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Summarize the activity:

Remember the power that came from listening to each other's stories and reflecting on your own meaning making. The process identifies a lot of shared values and commitment to service. Being a part of this community engaged in similar work is another strength you can draw on, and it can energize you to remain resilient.