



## Professional Development in Home Visiting: What to Do Before, During, and After the Training



Facilitating the transfer of knowledge and skills from the training setting to a real-world environment is one of the most important challenges of professional development (PD). Effective training can introduce new information and skills, but without clear expectations for how these skills will be used, what the opportunities are for honing them, and what follow-up support exists to maintain them, the best designed training is unlikely to produce changes in practice.<sup>1</sup>

It can be challenging for home visiting programs to put in place the systems and supports needed to help participants make the most of their training opportunities. **This resource presents a range of strategies awardees and local implementing agencies can use before, during, and after the training to facilitate the training transfer process.** It also includes a planning tool that awardees can use to guide their own PD efforts and related resources.

The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program supports voluntary, evidence-based home visiting services for at-risk pregnant women and parents with young children up to kindergarten entry. Home visiting helps prevent child abuse and neglect, supports positive parenting, improves maternal and child health, and promotes child development and school readiness.

<sup>1</sup> Lyon, Aaron R, *Implementation Science and Practice in the Education Sector*, SAMHSA Project Aware, Retrieved from <https://education.uw.edu/sites/default/files/Implementation%20Science%20Issue%20Brief%20072617.pdf>



**[Visit the MIECHV Program website to learn more!](#)**

## Why Professional Development?

Home visitors have a complex job that requires a wide range of knowledge and skills, including but not limited to improving parent-child interactions, conducting developmental and other screenings, and working with families to reduce sensitive parenting risks such as substance misuse, intimate partner violence, and maternal depression. Home visitors also play a critical role in empowering families to make changes they want to see in their lives—an enormous challenge that requires communication skills, the ability to develop relationships, and a broad range of knowledge about health, behavioral health, and child development among other topics. Home visitors also need to be able to apply an equity framework to their work, have cultural awareness for the social contexts in which they work, and be sensitive and responsive to clients served.

The ability of home visitors to do this difficult work depends largely on the availability of quality PD opportunities. In fact, a survey of local home visiting programs conducted by the Home Visiting Applied Research Collaborative found that most programs don't expect newly hired home visitors to arrive with all the knowledge and skills needed to perform their jobs when they are hired; instead, programs expect that new hires will acquire the full complement of required skills on the job, through PD opportunities. At the same time, programs must continue to develop the knowledge and skills of their more experienced staff.

To address this range of needs, many home visiting programs offer a menu of PD options comprising a combination of in-person and virtual trainings, coaching opportunities, and technical assistance provided by model developers, funders, and individual organizations. These activities are designed to build the knowledge, skills, competence, and confidence of both new and seasoned staff. According to the Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation (MIHOPE) (2011-2021), home visitors who received training on sensitive topics such as substance use, mental health, and intimate partner violence addressed these topics more often with the families they served.<sup>2</sup>



2 Duggan, A., Portilla, X. A., Filene, J. H., Crowne, S. S., Hill, C. J., Lee, H., & Knox, V. (2018, October). Implementation of Evidence-Based Early Childhood Home Visiting: Results from the MIHOPE (p. 175). OPRE Report 2018-76A. Washington, DC: OPRE, ACF, U.S. HHS. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3jCHNHC>

# Strategies for Supporting Training Transfer for Home Visitors

Training transfer describes the process of taking what is learned during a training, translating it to a real-world setting, applying it in a variety of situations, and sustaining it over time. In the home visiting setting, transfer of learning results in improved outcomes for children and families and ultimately in improved program outcomes overall.

The tables that follow provide strategies and suggestions for supporting training transfer before, during, and after training. It includes separate tips for program administrators, supervisors, and trainers.

## Before the Training

### Establish a culture of support for professional development.

#### FOR ADMINISTRATORS

- **Set the tone at the leadership level** by creating and maintaining an environment that fosters skill-building and knowledge application in multiple areas such as equity, diversity and inclusion, trauma-informed care, services and supports, and social emotional development.
- **Create policies and procedures** that support training transfer, such as preserving time on calendars and agendas for PD and reflective supervision.
- Make sure program budget **includes line items for PD**, both job-embedded and external.
- **Invest in the equitable preparation** of all program staff, especially supervisors who play a critical role in supporting the transfer of training and application of skills for home visitors.
- **Have supervisors attend** trainings with staff when it makes sense to do so.



#### Prepare supervisors!

Invest in building supervisors' coaching and feedback skills to effectively communicate expectations regarding PD. Without prepared supervisors capable of continuously shepherding and grooming trainees after formal training, the training effectiveness may be short-lived.



## FOR SUPERVISORS

- **Review job descriptions** to make sure they include responsibilities related to professional growth.
- **Include feedback** about PD expectations in performance appraisals.

## Assess the PD needs of all staff.

### FOR ADMINISTRATORS

- **Identify opportunities** for growth and gaps in knowledge to ensure that PD offerings meet the needs of all employees.
- **Determine the need for PD on equity, bias, and inclusion** in home visiting.
- Determine if you need to conduct **separate assessments** for supervisors and home visitors.
- Explore ways for learners to **assess their own skills**.

## Develop both individual and organization-wide PD plans.

### FOR ADMINISTRATORS

- **Consider program performance, CQI, and evaluation data** when identifying organization-wide priorities for PD to ensure that PD supports program improvement in key areas.
- **Use competencies or standards** to guide PD planning.
- Identify learning outcomes and goals that align with real-life roles and responsibilities.

## Communicate training expectations and anticipated outcomes.

### FOR ADMINISTRATORS

- **Clarify the supervisor's role in the transfer process.** What supports do participants need to successfully transfer new knowledge and skills? What role can the supervisor play in providing these supports?

**Many online systems allow learners to conduct their own self-assessments.**



Some allow individualization of the online learning experience so learners can go straight to modules that best match their needs.

**Don't reinvent the wheel!**



Find examples of online PD plans to use or adapt. Check the MIECHV Awardee Learning Library (MALL) for examples or consult with your TARC Technical Assistance Specialist.

## FOR TRAINERS

- When appropriate, **involve learners in training design and planning.**
- **Engage participants in a pre-training assignment** or background reading to start them thinking about how they might apply the training content to their work.

## FOR SUPERVISORS

- Convey the expectation from the outset that new skills and behaviors should be applied on the job and share how applications will be assessed.

## Lay the foundation for a safe and supportive training experience.

### FOR ADMINISTRATORS

- Consider timing, location, and facilities to **ensure that training is accessible** to participants with diverse needs.
- **Decide if an onsite, off-site, virtual training, or a blended approach is appropriate** given participant schedules, access to technology, etc.
- **Engage trainers that reflect the diversity of training participants** to the extent possible.
- **Make sure training is available in languages other than English** for bilingual/bicultural staff.

## Make sure trainers are well-rested and well-prepared.

### FOR ADMINISTRATORS/TRAINERS

- **Consider pairing trainers for longer trainings.** Multiple trainers also tend to keep participants more engaged!
- **Make sure trainers are not only well-versed in the content but also know their audience.** They should have and demonstrate respect for participant lived experience and have a clear understanding of participant responsibilities.

### Cultivate participant interest

by sending an email “teaser,” disseminating a preview, or marketing the training through social media.



### Consider “just in time” learning opportunities

that allow participants to immediately apply new knowledge and skills.



- For virtual trainings, make sure trainers/facilitators are comfortable using the technology platforms. Never underestimate the value of a dress rehearsal/practice session!

## During the Training: Tips for Trainers

### Establish a safe and supportive environment.

- **Agree on ground rules for participation.** This helps to ensure that training participants have a shared understanding for what is expected, and that they won't be caught unaware.
- Encourage openness by **letting participants know that what they share during the training is confidential.**
- If training is virtual, **encourage participants to turn on their video cameras.** When some people have their cameras off, then it feels like those people are not participating, even if they might be. And if only a few people have their cameras on, then it feels like they are in the spotlight and can make them feel very uncomfortable.
- **Make sure any notes shared from the session are generic** and don't identify participants.

### Incorporate activities suitable for a range of adult learning styles.

- **Don't overwhelm participants with too much information.** Concentrate on what learners "need to know" vs. what's "nice to know".
- **Include techniques to increase learners' motivation and help them retain information.** For example, break content down into smaller parts, present the same information several times in different ways, and use mnemonic devices and visualizations.
- **Invite learners to share their lived experiences.** For virtual trainings, use instant polling apps to gather learner input.

#### **Involve participants in setting ground rules.**



This communicates from the start that their input and opinions matter.

**Be concrete.** Along with general descriptions of purpose, provide clear guidance for how to achieve it.



- **Incorporate practice activities**, role-modeling, and relevant discussions, accompanied by skilled and informed feedback.
- **Include case studies, vignettes, video clips, and other examples to bring the content to life.** Make sure examples reflect individuals from diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds and gender identity or expression.
- **Invite learners to share how topics and approaches align or don't align** with their cultural beliefs and practices, or with those of the families that they serve.
- **Include expert feedback** if the training is about doing something differently.

### **Include time for action planning.**

- Have participants **create action plans and next steps** for applying new knowledge and skills.
- **Explore potential barriers** to the application of new learned skills and tools, and **brainstorm strategies for overcoming these barriers.**
- **Ask participants to share their action plans** to increase the likelihood that they will try out their new skills.

### **For virtual trainings, maximize the benefits of technology.**

- **Provide clear access information** and invite participants to practice using the technology ahead of time.
- **Invite participants to engage in a variety of ways** (e.g., verbally, in the chat, by raising their virtual "hand").
- If possible, **provide real-time technology support** to resolve issues that arise during the session.

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#### **Provide opportunities for learners to problem solve.**



For example, discuss how to integrate new approaches with families with low literacy, learning needs, and cultural and linguistic differences.



#### **Consider the tech capacity of your learners.**



Technological 'bells and whistles' can be fun, but if your audience has limited technology capabilities (e.g., unstable connections), be prepared to pare down your menu of options.

## After the Training

### Set clear expectations for supervisor follow-up.

#### FOR ADMINISTRATORS

- Remind supervisors to **embed lessons from the training into practice and daily routines.**
- If supervisors don't attend the training, **make sure they know and understand the training objectives and learning outcomes.**

### Provide constructive feedback.

#### FOR SUPERVISORS

- **Communicate support of and recognize participation** in professional development activities.
- **Review participants' action plans** to develop a shared understanding of next steps.
- **Establish a timeline for measuring whether new skills or behaviors are being applied on the job.** Be realistic about expected changes (e.g., what will you see them doing differently if you observe them, and how soon can you expect to see changes?)
- **Schedule role-playing and supervised practice sessions.** Provide few if any suggestions for improvement initially—unless it seems that the home visitor is confused (or inaccurate) about what they are trying to do. As the home visitor becomes more confident, in private, offer supportive suggestions for improvement, if required, along with next steps.

### Use reflective supervision and coaching.

#### FOR SUPERVISORS

- Discuss how participants might **incorporate into their home visits** what they learned during the training. Be prepared to listen for needs that arise as a result of the training.



**Provide feedback that is positive, specific, non-judgmental, and immediate.** Affirm early attempts to use new skills and progress because they can feel risky and awkward.



- Ask questions such as, **“How are you using what you learned?”** or **“How does it feel to use what you learned?”** or **“Are you having any problems or concerns?”**
- **Discuss any challenges participants are having** using their new skills, encouraging them to be as specific as possible.
- End feedback with a **final question or reflective prompt.**

## **Create opportunities to reinforce lessons learned.**

### FOR SUPERVISORS

- **Observe home visitors during a home visit.** Model best practices, as appropriate. Describe the actions and behaviors you observe. Focus on what is going well when home visitors are still developing their confidence in using the new learning.
- **Create opportunities for joint home visits among home visitors.** For instance, a new home visitor can shadow a more experienced one, or peers can observe each other using a new practice and provide feedback.

## **Create opportunities for participants to share with others what they learned.**

### FOR SUPERVISORS

- Include discussion of PD content as an **ongoing agenda item** at staff meetings, featuring home visitors who have begun applying their new skills.
- **Convene regular peer sharing opportunities** and/or small-group discussions.
- **Create a buddy or mentoring system.**



### **Film home visits**

(with permission from the family), then review the video together and reflect on what you saw.



# Training Transfer Checklist

Use the chart below to strengthen your current professional development activities. Review the strategies above. Which are you implementing already? Which would you like to add?

## Before the Training

Strategy	What We Do Now	New Ideas
Establish a culture of support for professional development		
Assess the PD needs of all staff		
Develop both individual and organization-wide PD plans		
Communicate training expectations and anticipated outcomes		
Lay the foundation for a safe and supportive training experience		
Make sure trainers are well-rested and well-prepared		

## During the Training

Strategy	What We Do Now	New Ideas
Establish a safe and supportive environment		
Incorporate activities suitable for a range of adult learning styles		
Include time for action planning		
For virtual trainings, maximize the benefits of technology		

## After the Training

Strategy	What We Do Now	New Ideas
Set clear expectations for supervisor follow-up		
Provide		
Use reflective supervision and coaching		
Create opportunities to reinforce lessons learned		

## Selected Resources

### [Checklist for Facilitating Training Transfer in Organizations](#)

#### **International Journal of Training and Development**

Presents suggestions for facilitating training transfer before, during, and following a training. The article also makes a case for using both self-paced and collaborative activities to support transfer.

### [The Decisive Dozen: Research Background Abridged](#)

#### **Work-Learning Research, Inc.**

Identifies a variety of factors that can improve learning results by supporting content retention and use.

### [Getting Beyond "Good Job": How to Give Effective Feedback](#)

#### **American Academy of Pediatrics**

Defines what we mean by feedback, why it is important, barriers to effective feedback, and strategies for overcoming these barriers.

### [Let's Be PALS: An Evidence-Based Approach to Professional Development](#)

#### **Infants & Young Children**

Describes the Participatory Adult Learning Strategy (PALS), which emphasizes active learner involvement in all aspects of training opportunities and instructor/trainer-guided learner experiences.

### [Measuring Training and Technical Assistance](#)

#### **Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation**

Infographic presenting the five stages of training and technical assistance: content development, use, response, learning, and results.

### [Strategies for Transfer of Quality Practices](#)

#### **Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, Vanderbilt University**

Recommends practical transfer strategies for before, during, and after professional development activities; explores four critical levels for evaluating professional development activities; and presents a sample post-training action plan template.

### [Training Transfer: An Integrative Literature Review](#)

#### **Human Resource Development Review**

Focuses on three key aspects of training transfer: learner characteristics, intervention design and delivery, and work environment influences.

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