

Levels of Learning: Sequencing Learning Interventions

The acquisition and mastery of new knowledge and skill takes place in a predictable sequence. Training interventions should follow this sequence to develop, present, reinforce and support learning.

Level I: Awareness

Level I provides a broad **overview** of the problem or need, **describes the scope** of the information to be learned, **and clarifies the proposed objectives** or desired ends of the training. This provides trainees with a **conceptual framework** within which to organize the new information, and "frames" the questions within in the context of the trainees' jobs and training needs. Presenting and clarifying the rationale for the training creates **the motivation to learn**.

- **Training Methods:** In- workshop methods, such as presentation, audio visuals, and experiential exercises, or pre-workshop methods, such as questionnaires, pre-reading, quizzes to raise awareness, develop self-awareness, elicit what staff members/foster caregivers already know and identify what they need to learn.
- **Best Outcome:** Trainees should be able to identify the nature of the problems the training is designed to address; describe the pertinent issues; and state the rationale for their needing to know this to effectively do their jobs. Trainees should also be able to state the goals of the training.
- **Competency Language:** "Knows the importance of..." "Understands the importance of..." "Understands the nature and scope of..." "Recognizes the importance of..."
- **Supervisory Support:** Prepare staff/foster caregivers to attend training by: jointly selecting the training with the staff member/foster caregiver; conducting pre-workshop discussions regarding the importance of the training; arranging to cover work crises while staff member attends training.

Level II: Knowledge/Understanding

Level II includes two stages. The first, the acquisition of knowledge, provides trainees with **comprehensive, factual information** about the topic. The second, the development of understanding, enables trainees to **master the relationships and linkages** between the elements of knowledge.

Achieving knowledge means one has acquired, retained, and can repeat factual information. To **understand**, one must be able to fit the elements of knowledge together into a logical framework. One must know the meaning of the concepts, know the relationships between conceptual elements, and be able to identify how the concepts support or contradict each other. When one understands, one can **generalize the information** to other problems or settings and can **manipulate the information** to solve problems.

Finally, understanding the relationships between elements allows one to **predict how these may change in different circumstances**. This provides flexibility in application and enables **modification of the concepts** to assure relevance to a changed situation (that is, can "generalize" to a different environment.)

- **Training Methods:** To achieve understanding, trainees must "work the material," often through **large and small group discussion**. Using and **manipulating the information** increases trainees' familiarity with the concepts; promotes the identification of linkages between the elements; raises issues not previously considered; enables trainees to integrate the concepts into a flexible and logical framework. **Understanding supports retention**, since the knowledge is integrated into the trainee's cognitive system.

Experiential exercises are used to draw parallels between a trainee's personal experience and the learning content. This helps trainees develop empathy, experience a "gut level" response, or put the worker "in the client's shoes". These methods also help to **counteract preconceived ideas and resistance**.

- **Best Outcome:** Trainees will be thoroughly familiar with the elements of the content, and their relationships to each other and to previous knowledge. Trainees should be able to describe how the elements fit together, express logical inconsistencies, cognitively manipulate the information, use the concepts to think through and solve problems, and generalize the concepts to new and somewhat different situations.
- **Competency Language:** "Knows...", "Understands..."

- **Supervisory Support:** Discuss insights, knowledge gained during the workshop during conferences or unit meetings; provide resource materials pertinent to the topic.

Level III: How to Apply Knowledge and Skills to the Job

Level III answers the question, "Now that I understand all this, how does it really apply to my job? What am I supposed to do with it?" Level III defines and describes, in detail, how particular knowledge and skills are applied on the job. This usually includes clarifying the worker's role, describing the steps in implementing a task, and identifying how the knowledge or skill may need to be modified for use on the job, particularly to overcome potential barriers to implementation in the work setting.

- **Training methods:** group discussion; presentation by the trainer; simulations; case examples; audiovisual aids that demonstrate others applying the concepts to practice; and action planning.
- **Best Outcome:** Trainees should be able to **define their job expectations** and articulate the **kinds of skills** they will need to perform to these expectations. Where trainees already have the skills needed to perform the task, learning how they should use them will often be sufficient to promote job behavior change. For example; instructing trainees why certain questions are critical at the intake screening level to determine level of potential risk should prompt the collection of this information. (Trainees already know how to talk on the telephone how to ask questions, and how to record information.)
- **Competency Language:** "Knows how to..." or "Knows strategies to..."
- **Supervisory Support:** Review application of knowledge to specific job or foster care tasks during conferences and unit meetings; ask trainee to explain concepts to other people at the office.

Level IV: Skill Development

Level IV includes the development and refinement of the capacity to perform a task or activity. Skill development proceeds in stages that include: **observation, modeling, practice, feedback, repetition, mastery, proficiency, and eventually, habituation** – doing it without having to think about it. Formal workshop training can generally develop trainees only to a level of modeling and practicing the skill. Further development to achieve mastery and proficiency requires

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considerable practice and direct feedback, and therefore, must take place on the job!

- **Training Methods:** demonstration, modeling, experiential exercises, guided practice, feedback and coaching, self- assessment and action planning.
- **Best Outcome:** Trainees should be able to perform the desired abilities at some level. Proficiency is generally obtained only after on-the-job practice and feedback.
- **Competency Language:** “Can....”
- **Supervisory Support:** Provide opportunities for trainee to shadow experienced staff or foster caregivers; demonstrate skills for the staff member/foster caregiver; provide opportunities for staff members/foster caregivers to practice skills by conducting role plays, and provide feedback; observe trainee working with clients/foster children and provide feedback.