

Wisconsin Forces For Four-Year-Olds CONSENSUS BUILDING FACILITATOR GUIDE

Spring 2003

I. The Purpose of Collaboration and Consensus Building

An important goal of WFFF efforts is to expand the community collaborative approaches to serving 4-year-olds in Wisconsin. To that end TEE liaisons, coaches and resource and referral consultants will be gathering stakeholders in communities throughout Wisconsin to gain consensus on how to provide services through a community collaborative approach. The purpose of gathering various stakeholders at a 2-4 hour session is to gain a better understanding of the issues and concerns facing these organizations and build consensus for moving forward. Consensus is reached when each member of the group agrees to support a strategy, decision, or solution.

II. Beliefs

- Most people are behaving reasonably given their experiences and vantage point.
- That each problem is a learning experience, which helps us come together as individuals or as a community.
- When people have healthy relationships, they are able to legitimately hear information that is important to solving conflicts.
- Conflicts are a sign of caring.

III. How Does It Work?

- All participants sit in a circle of chairs (no tables, papers, etc.). Everyone is included and is an equal participant.
- The process attempts to equalize power in the group by speaking in turn and not interrupting.
- It creates community, and a community response.
- It allows a group to move from: some of us vs. others – to - all of us vs. the issue.
- It addresses issues on both thinking and feeling levels (combining mind and heart).
- It emphasizes deep listening; understanding the verbal and non-verbal messages.
- It presumes that solutions are in the room.
- It views disagreement as evidence of caring/concern.
- It presumes everyone is behaving reasonably from their view.

IV. Consensus Building Process Guide

Room set up & equipment: circle of chairs ONLY; PowerPoint projector (if needed), enough flipcharts and stands to accommodate small groups of 5-7 people, markers.

1. Introductions and overview of the session

20 minutes

Grounding: (each person speaks in turn, no recording)

- “Give your name and your relationship to _____.” (the organization, the situation, the conflict, etc.)
- “What are your expectations for this session?”
- “How do you feel about being here?”

15-20 minutes

2. **Information sharing:** WFFF PowerPoint presentation or a panel of people involved in collaborations. Time for Questions & Answers.

5-10 minutes

3. **Break into Small Talking Circles:**

Break individuals into heterogeneous groups. Ask members of the _____ group to take 2 steps forward, count off by 4's (the # of small groups you want to end up with), ask the next group to take 2 steps forward and count off. Remember your number. After all individuals have counted off – ask them to move to the flipchart with the group number on it and form a circle of chairs.

Worst & Best Outcomes (each person answers in turn, recorder writes)

5-7 minutes for each question

- *What are the worst outcomes of working together to serve 4 year olds?*
- *What are the best outcomes of working together to serve 4-year olds?*

5 “ to report

Each group reports out

Strategies & Actions (each person answers in turn, recorder writes)

5-7 minutes for each question

- *What is one thing you/your organization _____ can do to foster the best outcomes?*
- *What is 1 thing you/your organization _____ can do to foster the best outcomes?*

5 “ to report

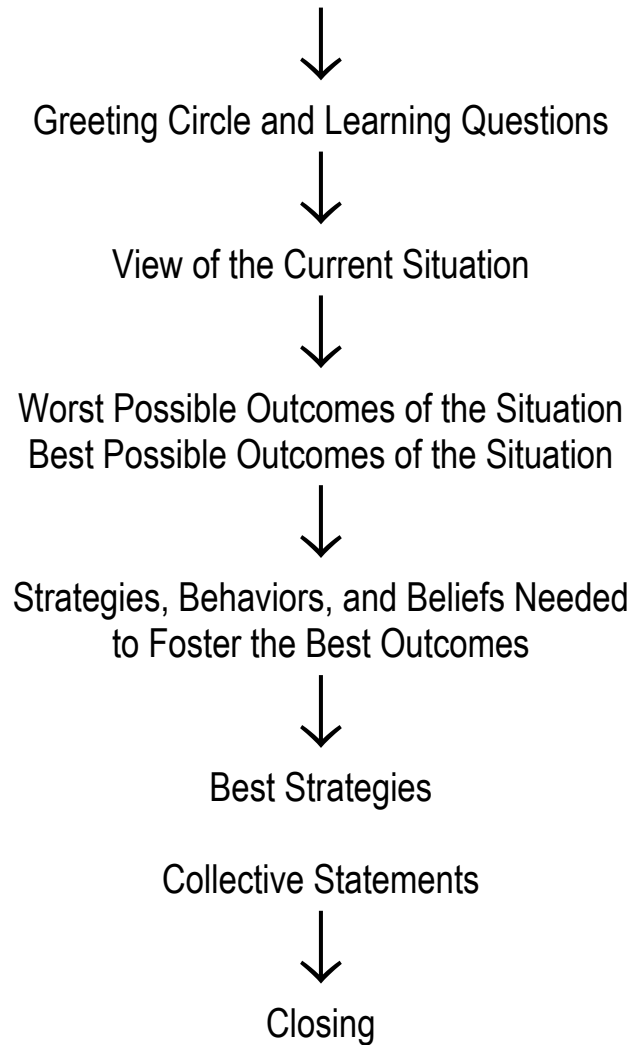
Each group reports out

4. **Closing** (each person speaks in turn, no recording)

- *What did you learn about building consensus?*
- *How did you feel about being here?”*

Consensus Building Process Guide

Grounding



Bob Chadwick, Consensus Associates

Grounding

- **“Give your name and your relationship to the conflict.” (the organization, the situation, etc.)**
- **“What are your expectations for this session?”**
- **“How do you feel about being here?”**

This is a simple grounding task that does the following:

- Establishes a model for listening with respect, speaking in turn, not interrupting and knowing that each person will be heard.
- Establishes a verbal territory for each participant.
- Requires access to both the left and the right brain (both thinking & feeling).
- Allows apprehensions and hopes for the meeting to be expressed.
- Allows participants to express hidden agendas (like leaving early, a flat tire, a sickness, etc.)
- Brings people into the "here and now."
- Provides initial information to the facilitator.

Grounding is an important activity to start any meeting with. We all come to meetings with some measure of apprehension or uncertainty about what will happen. Grounding allows this apprehension to be stated.

This activity introduces the circle, equality and the notion of listening with respect to each other. It is important that the facilitator listen fully to each person so they may experience being listened to. Once listening with respect has been established in the room, it becomes a model thereafter.

Using the circle allows each person to occupy the room with the sound of their voice, establishing verbal territory. Once a person's voice is in a room, it becomes easier to speak, especially if they are listened to. The sound of an unchallenged voice is a rare event for people, and this helps to allay the fears of those who are apprehensive.

Greeting Circle

No ritual is older, and none more anxiety ridden, than that of greeting each other. We recognize the greeting as a symbolic gesture of peace, of peaceful intent. It can be a handclasp, a hug, a gripping of the wrists, the touching of the faces and any other gesture in which contact is made.

The greeting circle establishes the opportunity for all participants to meet each other. We meet friends and strangers. It allows the individuals to make the contact so needed before confronting the conflict. The intent is to convey that we are human, with peaceful intents.

The anxiety and apprehension of the individuals is confronted, encountered, and released. Energy, suppressed by the fear and anxiety of the unknown, releases into the room, in the sound of high voices, laughter, slaps on the back, hugs.

Directions: Greet the person on your left for 1-2 minutes. Then greet the next person, moving around the circle to each person in turn. As you move to the third person, the first person you greeted follows you, becoming a greeter, and so on.

After the greeting, ask each participant:

- **“How did you feel about the greeting circle?”**
- **“What did you learn that will help you in the consensus building process?”**

These two questions allow the individuals to be grounded again and to learn from the experience.

View of the Current Situation

Allow the group to explore general issues of conflict and evidence of it in their environment. These neutral questions help the groups build a comfort level and trust with one another.

- **“Define the hard issues,(the situation, the conflict) and tell how you feel about it.”**
- **“What is the evidence of unresolved conflict in your environment?”**

Explore and learn about the current situation. Choose questions that are appropriate to the group needs. Ask each person to answer the following questions and feelings. Use the talking circle only.

- **“What is your view of the current situation and how did it get to be that way?”**
- **“How do you feel about it?”**

Pass out 3 X 5 index cards and ask each member of the group to write down the key issues they heard. This information is then recorded on the flip chart, one idea at a time, speaking in turn until all ideas are exhausted. You now have a shared perception and group memory for the issue, the situation.

- **“What are the issues you heard?”**

This is a time for learning -- learning what the situation looks like from every point of view. That understanding will create a better knowledge base for problem-solving. After all have spoken (often more than once), allowing individuals to write the issues they heard on cards brings silence and reflection into the process.

Worst and Best Outcomes

Exploring worst and best outcomes of resolving conflict helps the participants to recognize “possibility thinking”. This is an acknowledgement that both worst and best outcomes are present and inherent in each moment, up to, and often after the event. This balanced view allows the movement toward desired outcomes.

Worst Outcomes:

Worst Outcomes are feared future outcomes, often based on past experience, with a presently experienced emotion and physical reaction. When people believe them, they affect their perceptions, beliefs, values and strategies. They tend to be self-fulfilling prophecies when strongly held.

- **What are the worst possible outcomes of confronting/not confronting the situation? (OR worst outcomes of this situation?)**

Best Outcomes:

Best Outcomes are hoped for future outcomes, sometimes not previously experienced, but intensely imagined, with a presently experienced emotion and physical response. When people believe them, they affect their perceptions, beliefs, values and strategies. They also tend to be self-fulfilling prophecies when strongly held.

- **What are the best possible outcomes of confronting/not confronting the situation?**

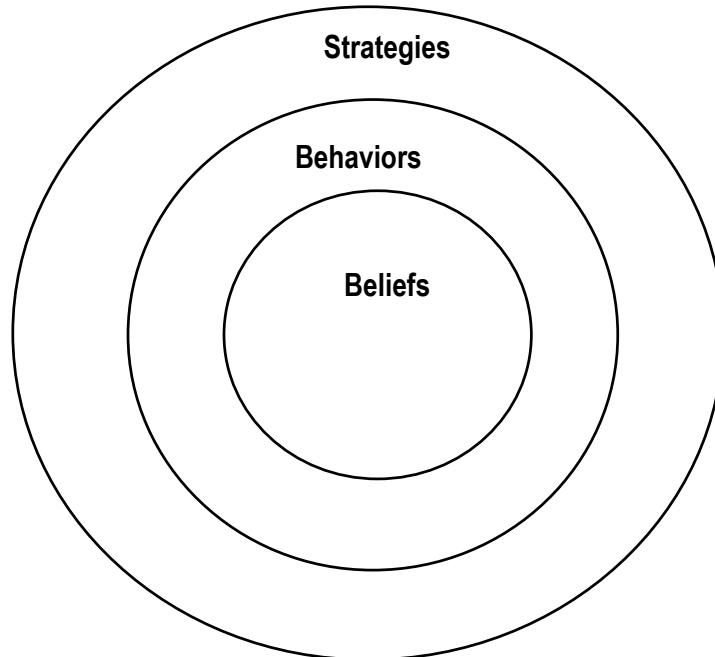
Possibility Thinking: Consciously move to a higher level of thinking

When best outcomes are listed, group members voice outcomes that ARE possible. They are probably present, at some level, in the environment. They will change your mental, physical and chemical make-up so that you can imagine and implement the strategies to foster that outcome. You are now satisfying your needs for growth, for developing your potential.

Once your fears have been adequately expressed, then your hopes seem more possible, easier to express and believe. This leaves the images, emotions and words of

the best hopes in the minds of all the participants. This will guide their thoughts and behaviors in resolving the conflicts.

Strategies, Behaviors, Beliefs



Beliefs

Beliefs are a conviction or opinion. These create the behavior of the person. The group can explore beliefs they are holding that will not foster the best outcomes . . . and beliefs that will.

Behaviors

These are manners and attitudes that are created by the basic beliefs of a person. In this process, the group is practicing the behaviors of civility and responsible confrontation, over and over again. They may want to identify specific behaviors that will foster the best outcomes in their situation.

Strategies

A strategy is intended to carry out a vision or mission. It is also a way of actualizing a belief. Strategies are often developed that are incongruent with the person's beliefs. The behaviors will then override the intent of the strategy.

Action

The process or act of doing something. These are specific deeds that carry out the intent of the strategy. If they are not congruent with a person's beliefs, their actions and demeanor will nullify them.

Strategies, Behaviors, Beliefs (continued):

Once the best outcomes have been established, the next step is to develop the movement to make them happen. Fostering the best outcomes requires looking at beliefs, behaviors, strategies and actions. Each of these is a different focus:

Explore new and adaptive beliefs and behaviors.

- **“What one belief or behavior do we need to let go of in order to foster the best outcomes?”**

Record all input, without judging. This is a menu of options.

Explore strategies and actions.

- **“What are some specific solutions or strategies to make the best outcomes happen?”**
- **“What is the solution we seek that would foster best outcomes?”**
- **“Which of these strategies can you support?”**

Record all input, without judging. This is a menu of options.

Identify conditions.

- **“What are your conditions for moving forward?”**

Closing

The Closing is an important activity to end any meeting with, like the Grounding was important to start the session with. The closing allows participants to checkout with the group and give their closing thoughts. Each person is encouraged to speak in turn, allowing verbal territory for each participant.

It also creates an opportunity to develop lifelong learning. Each person answers the questions:

Closing

- **“How do you feel about the process we have used?”**
- **“How do you feel about the progress we have made?”**
- **“What have you learned that ... will help you confront conflict in the future? Or that will help us solve other issues?”**

Optional – to gain individual commitment:

Identify conditions

- **“What are you willing to do to foster the best outcomes?”**
- **“What do you need form others?”**

Collective Statements

These statements show community and emphasize that each individual has been heard. A collective statement process is based on the notion that we all have different views of a situation, and all views are right. Each of us perceives the world through our experiences, our values and beliefs and our desires.

In some tasks, statements made by each individual participant are recorded as accurately as possible. These statements are first segregated into common groups. The individual statements are then added together, keeping each person's words to the best extent possible, creating a statement of the total group.

At times it is necessary to add words to the brief recorded statements to clarify the intent. Or, a word might be added to bridge two or more statements together. This is kept to a minimum in order to retain the original recorded thought. While some grammatical improvements may be made, the original statement and the original words are kept as close as possible.

The Process

1. Categorize statements into like groups.
2. Link like statements into a sentence.
3. Put sentences into paragraphs.
4. Use all words.
5. If you add words put them in (parens).
6. Record on flip chart for all to see.

Create community. Develop collective statements of the evidence of conflict in your environment, the situation or hard issues that you face, worst and best outcomes, beliefs and behaviors and strategies and actions. Read the collective statements, which has now become a coherent story to the group.