Strong Starts for Children

A GUIDE FOR PUBLIC DIALOGUE AND ACTION
STRONG STARTS FOR CHILDREN

This discussion guide was developed and produced by Everyday Democracy. We help people of different backgrounds and views think, talk and work together to solve problems and create communities that work for everyone. We work with neighborhoods, cities and towns, regions, and states, helping them pay attention to the connection between complex public issues and structural racism.

Designed as a tool for dialogue-to-change programs, this guide can help communities make decisions about how they will address issues around early childhood development. It is based on views and ideas that many different people hold, and is a starting place for open and fair discussions.

Strong Starts for Children is available in English and Spanish on our website and, in print, from Everyday Democracy.

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## CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why Should We Meet to Talk About the Youngest Children in Our Community?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding Dialogue Circles to Create Change</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Can This Lead?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Dialogue-to-Change Process</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### DISCUSSION SESSIONS

| Session 1: How Are We Connected to the Children in Our Community?   | 7    |
| Session 2: Creating a Vision of a Better Life for All of Our Children | 11   |
| Session 3: What Holds Some of Our Children Back?                    | 15   |
| Session 4: How Can We Make Progress?                                | 24   |
| Session 5: Moving to Action                                         | 31   |

### SETTING PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Action Forum</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating Charts and Worksheets for Your State</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tips for Facilitators</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About Everyday Democracy and Strong Starts for Children</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Why Should We Meet to Talk About the Youngest Children in Our Community?

This guide will help show people in our community how to get involved in an important issue facing all of us: the well-being of our youngest children.

Here’s why this is so important:

- **Research shows that the first eight years of a child’s life are the most important.** This is when children need the most support for their bodies, minds, and spirits to grow. Starting even before birth, children need a strong base of support for the rest of their lives.

- **Our world will be better if our youngest children have the support they need to do well.** When we give children strong support from the start, they are more likely to have a good future. More of them will do well in school. They will do better as adults and be less likely to get into trouble. And they’ll be more likely to have healthy minds and bodies. That will be good for all of us.

- **Not all children have the same chances to do their best.** Too many children have poor schools and health care. Some don’t even have a safe place to live. There are families of every race who don’t have enough money to live on. And people of color still bear the burden of unjust treatment. Unfair policies affect all of us. We must give our children equal chances to learn and give back to their communities. When we do that, we all win.

- **Some people today are trying to give our youngest children a stronger start.** Already, some parents, families, schools, businesses, faith communities, and social service agencies are working hard to make a difference. But as a society, we can do better. We **must** do better for everyone’s sake.

**Holding Dialogue Circles to Create Change**

We all need to become better informed. And people from every part of our community need to work together on this issue. If we do, we can make a better future for our children and for ourselves. We can do this work locally and at the state and national level.

We need dialogue among people from many backgrounds that is based on democratic values and gives everyone a voice. These are the guiding principles:

- **Listen with respect, and learn from each other’s lives, cultures, values, and traditions.**

- **Learn about the issues.**

- **Look at all sides of the issues and talk about common concerns.**

- **Come up with ways to bring about change in our community.**

- **Join forces with each other and with public officials.**
This guide will help us talk about the kind of change our community needs. It will help us:

- Look at how we are connected to the lives of children in our community.
- Create a vision of a better life for every child.
- Talk about why some children are not doing well and how we can help them.
- Learn about the “invisible” effects of racism and poverty and what we can do about that.
- Develop plans for action and decide where to start.
- Work on action ideas with others.
- Build on what is already working.

**Where Can This Lead?**

In our talks, we will be creating a vision for change. During the last session, our group will decide on some key actions. In many places, groups will be able to share their ideas at a large “action forum.” Those who want to stay involved will work with others to carry out these ideas.

By taking part in this process, we can have a real impact on the lives of the youngest children in our community. It will take all types of action and change to make the kind of difference we need.

We can focus on one or more kinds of change. For example, some of us might change our minds about what young children need. Others might work with community partners on specific early childhood issues.

Some may work on changes in public policy at the local, state, or national level. And some may try to change the way institutions work with young children and families.

When you start planning your “dialogue-to-change” program, please go to our website, www.everyday-democracy.org. You will find tips on how to organize your work. And you can read stories about results in other communities.

You can also call Everyday Democracy for help. We can share what others have learned and done. We can put you in touch with people who are running similar programs. Everyday Democracy can offer help that fits the culture and needs of your community. We want to learn along with you. Working together, we can create new ways to make a difference for all our children.

**Each Small-Group Dialogue…**

- is a diverse group of 8 to 12 people.
- meets together for several, two-hour sessions.
- sets its own ground rules and helps the facilitator keep things on track.
- is led by a facilitator who does not take sides. He or she is not there to teach the group about the issue.
- starts with personal stories, then helps the group look at a problem from many points of view. Next, the group explores solutions. Finally, it make plans for action and change.
Overview of the Dialogue-to-Change Process

Organize
- Involve people from all walks of life.
- Engage community leaders.
- Plan for dialogue and the action that will follow.

Hold Dialogues

Act and Make Your Voice Heard!
- Carry out action ideas.
- Assess the change that is happening.
- Tell the story. Show how people are creating change.

Session 1: Meet Each Other
- Get to know one another.
- Set ground rules for our work together.
- Talk about how we are connected to the issue.

Session 2: Create a Vision
- Talk about our hopes for the children in our lives.
- Create a vision of a community where all children can reach their potential.

Session 3: Study the Challenges
- Talk about why some children are not doing as well as others.
- Explore why some children don’t have equal opportunities in life.

Session 4: Find Solutions
- Talk about ways to create a community where all children can blossom and thrive.
- Start a list of ideas for action.

Session 5: Plan for Action
- Talk about the assets in our community.
- Talk about how to make our ideas from Session 4 happen.
- Prepare for the Action Forum and the next phase of work.

Making Policy Choices
- Identify shared ideas about how to shape state policy.
- Talk about how we might pay for early childhood programs.
- Share concerns and ideas with decision makers.
SESSION 1
How Are We Connected to the Children in Our Community?

Goals
- Get to know one another.
- Review the guidelines for our discussion.
- Talk about how we are connected to this issue.

Facilitator Tips
This session has four parts. Use the amount of time suggested as a guide. You don’t have to cover every question in the session. Choose the ones that you think will work best for your group.

Collect ideas for action
- From the start, people may come up with ideas about how to help young children get a strong start in life. Ask the recorder to make a list of Action Ideas, and add to it during each session. (Please see Note-Taking Tips on page 53.)
- Post the list where all can see it.
- Tell the group they will talk more about action ideas in Session 4 and Session 5.

Help the group work well together
- Make people feel welcome. Be sure each person has a chance to speak and to hear others.
- Some people find it easier than others to talk about this subject. Give everyone time to relax and feel safe.

PART 1: Getting Started (45 minutes)
1. The facilitators will give a summary of the introduction.
2. The facilitators will say what their role is. They are not teachers. And they don’t take sides. Their job is to help us talk and work together so that every voice is heard.
3. Most sessions take about two hours. If the group agrees, we can talk longer. There are many questions in each session. We do not have to cover every question.

Each person will answer these questions:
- Who are you? Tell people a little about yourself.
- Why do you care about how the youngest children in our community are doing? Why is this important?
- Why are you here? What made you decide to come?
- What do you hope our dialogue will lead to?

Facilitator Tips for Part 1
- Some groups may want to talk about the story of their community, as well as their personal story. If so, you can begin Part 1 with these questions:
  - What is the story of our community? What was it like in the past?
  - Who are we now? What events have helped shape our community?
- If you use these questions, please allow more time for Part 1.
PART 2: Guidelines (15 minutes)

We need to agree about how to help our circle work well. Here are some ideas. Are there rules you would like to add? Talk about them.

- Every voice is equal.
- Listen to one another. Treat each other with respect.
- Each person gets a chance to talk.
- One person talks at a time. Don’t cut people off.
- Speak for yourself. Don’t try to speak for “your group.”
- It’s OK to disagree. If you feel upset, say so and say why.
- Stick to the issue.
- No name-calling.
- If you talk about people who are not here, don’t say their names.
- Some of what we talk about will be very personal. We will not tell these stories to other people, unless we all say it is OK.
- Help the facilitator keep things on track.

PART 3: Looking at How We Connect to Each Other and to Young Children (45 minutes)

From the time we are born, we learn from other people. Our families often have the biggest effect on our lives. Our connections to other people and places also help us grow.

What made the biggest difference in your own childhood? What about children who are close to you? What affects their progress in the first eight years of their lives?

1. Take a few minutes to think about your childhood. Who helped you learn? Who helped you feel safe and supported?
2. Who has had a positive effect on you or a child you know? If the first people you think of are parents, say so. But also think about others. You can give examples, like other family members, or friends and neighbors, teachers, tribal elders, spiritual leaders, babysitters, coaches, and more.

Once everyone who wants to speak has done so, talk about:

- What stories stood out for you?
- What inspires you?
- How did the racial, ethnic, or cultural background of the people affect their lives?
- What do these stories tell us? Does our community give our children the support they need? Please give examples.
PART 4: Thinking Back (15 minutes)

Our group will talk about these questions:

- How did it feel to take part in this talk? What common ideas did you hear?
- Discuss how it went. Is there anything you would like to change for the next session?

For the Next Session
Bring an item to share that makes you think about the future of a young child you care about.

- It may be a photo, a drawing, an object, a poem, food, music, or whatever you like.
- It may also be...
  - a talk you had with a family member, friend, or co-worker.
  - a movie or TV show you saw.
  - a book or something you read.

Facilitator Tips in Closing
- Thank people for coming and sharing.
- Remind them to attend every session.
- Tell them what they will talk about next time.
- Collect phone numbers, addresses, and e-mails so you can stay in touch.
FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Babies are born ready to learn through their connections with people.

Did you know?

- A newborn can see best at a range of 10 to 12 inches. (When you’re holding a baby in your arm, your face is about a foot away from the baby’s face.)
- A baby can hear before he is born. He will turn his head toward his mother’s voice soon after birth.
- When a mother sticks out her tongue, a newborn will copy her.

Why is this important?

- Babies need to become attached to one or two people.
- Since babies can’t talk, they need someone who can tell what they need by how they are acting.
- The way parents/caregivers respond sets up patterns that help the baby know what will happen next. This makes the baby feel safe.

Best practices

- Babies and young children should spend time with caring adults who pay close attention to how they act and what they need.
- Find ways to reconnect when the bond between child and adult breaks down. Reconnecting is one of the ways babies and young children learn and grow.

This information is based on recent studies about how young children learn and develop.
SESSION 2
Creating a Vision of a Better Life for All of Our Children

Goals
- Get to know one another better.
- Talk about our hopes and dreams for all children.
- Imagine a place where every child can blossom and thrive.

PART 1: Making Connections
(30 minutes)
1. Review the ground rules.
2. Describe what you brought to share with the group. Or tell the group about something you saw or read or talked about with someone.
   - Why is this important to you?
   - Why does it make you think about the future of young children?
3. What do the things we shared have in common? Where are there differences?

PART 2: Our Hopes and Dreams for the Children in Our Lives
(50 minutes, total)

Exercise 1 (25 minutes)
What are our hopes and dreams for our children when they become adults?

Think about three things that you want most for the children in your life. What about all the children in our community?

Look at this list and take a few minutes to think quietly, by yourself. What are three hopes or dreams for the children in your life? Choose from our list or add your own ideas.

I hope that by the time the children in my life are adults, they will...

- be healthy.
- give back to their community.
- have a good spiritual life.
- be hopeful and confident.
- not have to worry about having enough to live on.
- feel connected to their culture.
- care about and enjoy nature.
- be someone you can rely on.
- have a college degree.
- be a good spouse and parent.

Turn to your neighbor and discuss the following:

- Why are these hopes and dreams important to you?
- If you could add one thing to the list, what would it be?
- What made it easy or hard to make your own list? Why did you struggle?

Facilitator Tips for Part 2

- In this part of Session 2, everyone will do two exercises. Allow about 25 minutes for each exercise.
- Explain what “active listening” means.
- Begin the first exercise by reading the list of ideas. People will think quietly. Then, they will talk with the person next to them.
- The second exercise is a whole-group activity. You have two options. Select the one you think meets the needs and make-up of the group.
- Bring one good-sized ball of string or yarn if you plan to do the “web of connections” exercise.
**Return to the whole group** for Exercise 2. Choose one of the two options.

**Exercise 2: Option One** (25 minutes)

**Building a web of connections**

Our goal is to weave a “web” that shows how we are all tied together.

1. Sit in a circle.
2. Give a ball of string or yarn to a member of the group.
3. The person who is holding the ball of string will finish this sentence: “I hope that by the time the children in my life are adults, they will…”
4. Next, s/he will hold the string tightly, and throw the ball to another person in the circle.
5. Repeat the process until each person has had a chance to hold the string and speak.

*Ask these questions about the “web” exercise.*

- What hopes and dreams do we have in common?
- What are the most important connections we can build for our children?
- What might happen if one strand breaks?
- Which groups of children might be left out?

**Exercise 2: Option Two** (25 minutes)

**Reflecting on our hopes and dreams**

These questions will help us talk about our hopes and dreams.

- What hopes and dreams did you and your neighbor have in common?
- Why do you think some of us have different hopes and dreams?
- When we talked, what groups of children did we leave out? Why it is important to think about them too?
PART 3: Creating a Vision of Our Community as a Place Where All Children Can Reach Their Potential
(40 minutes)

1. Imagine a place where all of the youngest children can blossom and thrive. Maybe it looks like the place where we live. Maybe it looks like another place you have visited or heard about.

2. In groups of three or four, talk about your ideal community. What do you see? What does it feel like? How would you describe it? Draw a picture of it.

3. Come up with three or four words or phrases that describe your ideal community.

4. Return to the whole group. Share your pictures, words, and phrases.
   - Which pictures and ideas are alike? Which ones are different?
   - How can we combine our pictures and words to create a vision for our own community?

Facilitator Tips for Part 3

- Supply large sheets of paper and colored markers.
- Remind people that young children should be the focus of their ideal community.
- While people work in small groups, post a sheet of newsprint and label it: “The community we want for our children.”
- As people report on their talks, write down or draw the main ideas on the newsprint. Put a check mark next to similar ideas.
- After all the groups have reported, ask people to identify the most common themes. Circle the words or drawings that sum up these themes. (Use a different color for each theme.)
- Ask the group: “Is anything missing? How can we complete the picture?”
- Sum up the vision by asking someone to finish this sentence: “The community we want for our children is a place where ….”
- Post this vision statement at all sessions, from now on.

For the Next Session
Think about our vision. Look for examples of these ideas in the community.
FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Things that affect the way a young child’s brain develops

Did you know?

- Eighty percent (80%) of a child’s brain develops between birth and age 5.
- During the first years of life, there are times when children need more attention. How and when adults engage with children is very important. This affects how children talk, see, and listen. And it affects how their brains work.
- Early events make paths in the brain that help children sort out information as they grow older.
- Playing, feeling, and learning are linked. They happen at the same time. That’s how our brains work.

Why is this important?

- Healthy human connections make healthy children.
- The ways we relate to young children are as important as formal learning activities.
- When we meet children’s needs again and again, we create patterns in their brains. These patterns lay the groundwork for all kinds of learning.

Best practices

- Help children explore their world and figure things out. Help them care about what they are doing.
- If you are worried about how your child is developing, get help as soon as possible. It is important to do this when the brain is still forming and adapting.
- Make time for free play. Go outside and learn about nature. Make up games and stories.

This information is based on recent studies about how young children learn and develop.
SESSION 3
What Holds Some of Our Children Back?

Goals

○ Reflect on our common vision.

○ Talk about why some children are not doing as well as others.

○ Look at some facts that show why some children don’t have an equal chance to reach their potential.

In Session 2, we talked about our hopes and dreams for our children. We also talked about our vision for a community where every child has a chance to blossom and thrive. Now we will look at why some children are not thriving.

PART 1: Getting Started
(15 minutes)

1. Think about our common vision for our community. Where is our vision already happening?

2. What gives you hope? Why?

3. What is missing and makes you feel sad or angry? Why?

Later, our circle will talk about solutions. First, let’s look at some of the things that affect our children’s lives.

Facilitator Tips

This session has three parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each part as a guide. You don’t have to cover every question in the session. Choose the ones you think will work best for your group.

○ Post the notes from past sessions where all can see them.

○ Ask the recorder to list major themes from this session on large sheets of paper for all to see. (Please see Note-Taking Tips on page 53.)

○ Save the notes so that you can refer to them later.

Collect ideas for action

As people offer new ideas for action, ask the recorder to add them to the list of Action Ideas.

When people say what is already being done to help young children thrive, list them under Things We Are Already Doing.

Remind the group that they will use some of these notes when they talk about action ideas in Session 4 and Session 5.
PART 2: What Keeps All of Our Young Children From Reaching Their Potential? (45 minutes)

Our children are our future. They are important to all of us.

People have different ideas about why some children are not doing as well as others. We may agree on some things. And we may disagree on others. That is OK.

Here are some different views about early childhood development. Each view is in the voice of a person who thinks it is a very important idea. Use these views to come up with your own ideas.

Someone will read the views out loud. First, we will talk about the views. We will talk about solutions later. For now, if you think of a solution, ask the recorder to write it down on a list of Action Ideas.

VIEW 1
Some people say: Lack of support for parents.

All parents need advice and support. But some people don’t have anyone to turn to. Single parents and others can have even more trouble getting the help they need. And finding good, low-cost child care is very hard for people who don’t have enough money to make ends meet.

VIEW 2
Some people say: Poor use of resources.

Some programs don’t make much difference. We spend time and money creating new programs when we don’t know if the ones we have are working. And government, schools, and agencies aren’t doing enough to work together. What we’re doing is putting small Band-Aids on large wounds.

VIEW 3
Some people say: Not enough focus on early learning.

Experts know children are born ready to learn. But many babies and toddlers don’t have the kind of child care that “feeds their minds” and helps their brains develop. And sometimes the way we teach doesn’t fit the needs of very young children. Our society is making a big mistake by not putting more money into preschool programs. Children need chances to learn before they go to kindergarten.

VIEW 4
Some people say: Poverty and hard times.

Today’s economy makes it hard for all kinds of families to care for their children. When families don’t have enough money for food, shelter, and other basic needs, their children suffer. Some jobs make it hard for people to take time off when their children are sick, or to meet with teachers. And parents working at low-wage jobs don’t have extra money to spend for things like music lessons and sports.

VIEW 5
Some people say: Too many “experts” think they know best.

Most parents know how to raise their children. They know what’s best. Parents and families should not be told what to do by schools, social services, and the government. The way a family raises children is based on its culture and religion. Traditions that children learn at home help them learn and do well.
VIEW 6
Some people say: **Racism and inequality.**

Children of color and poor families don’t have an equal chance. There are too many unfair laws, systems, and policies. For example, children in poor neighborhoods are often exposed to all kinds of pollution and poisons. These cause serious health problems. And in some places, quality care and education for very young children are harder to get. Racism also cuts off many children from family traditions, language, and culture that give them a strong sense of self.

VIEW 7
Some people say: **We don’t support good health.**

Pregnant women and first-time moms with babies need good medical care to prevent problems later on. Children who don’t have health care miss a lot of school, and they can’t keep up. Even when families have health insurance, some can’t find doctors who take Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program. And some live where there aren’t enough doctors. We don’t encourage good habits, like exercise and healthy eating. For some people, healthy food is hard to get and costs too much.

VIEW 8
Some people say: **Unsafe neighborhoods.**

Too many children live where it isn’t safe to play outside. Some see crime and drug addicts doing deals. Children are affected by what happens around them. For example, high levels of stress prevent healthy brain development and limit a child’s ability to learn. Being around violence and abuse can damage a child’s physical and emotional health for a lifetime.

VIEW 9
Some people say: **Some parents and caregivers are not doing their job.**

We don’t ask parents to do their share. Instead, we expect police, schools, counselors, and after-school programs to help raise children. Many people don’t take parenting seriously. There’s no discipline and they use the TV for a babysitter. Even worse, some people abuse the children in their lives. If caregivers need help, they should join a support group or seek spiritual help. It’s good for people to use some supports. But, parents need to do their job.
PART 3: Looking at the Facts about Inequality (60 minutes, total)

Some children have a much harder time. There are laws and practices that are unfair. If we want to give all children a fair chance, we need to learn more about these practices. The next two exercises build on the ideas we talked about in View 6 (racism and inequality). We will look at studies that show us why some groups of people have better chances than others to get a strong start.

Exercise A: Stepping to the line (30 minutes)

In this exercise, we will respond to statements about real-life events. As you move back and forth, look around and see how other people react. Are some groups more affected than others? Think about why this happens.

Let’s begin...

Form a line, side-by-side, in the middle of the room. The facilitator will explain the rules and read the following statements, one at a time. Your job is to think about how the statements apply to you, your family and friends, and people who live near you. Depending on what you think, you will step to the line, or stand still. Repeat this process after each statement.

Facilitator Tips for Part 3, Exercise A

You will need a large open area where people can move around easily.

- In the middle of the room make a line on the floor with string, chalk, or tape. Ask people to line up, side-by-side, about two feet from the line.
- Explain that this exercise is called “Stepping to the line.”
- Read the statements, one at a time. Ask people to step forward to the line if their answer is “yes.” Ask people to stand still if their answer is “no.” If anyone can’t stand (for example, if they are in a wheelchair), invite them to “move forward and back.”
- After you read each statement, allow time for people to think before they step forward or stand still. Ask everyone to be silent until the discussion at the end of the exercise.
- Following each statement, give people time to look around to see how others respond. Then, ask them to go back to where they were at the start. Repeat this process for each question.
- Let people know that this activity may bring up strong feelings, and that’s OK. Tell them they will have a chance to talk about how they feel, at the end.
- After the last question, ask people to return to their seats. Talk about the activity, using the questions provided.

About This Exercise

Trainers often use Exercise A to help people take a look at how race and ethnicity are tied to chances we have in life. This activity also gives us a way to see how laws, systems, and policies affect people in different groups.
1. If you live in a neighborhood or community where most of the people are from your racial or ethnic group, step to the line.

2. If you depend on someone other than the people you live with to help care for your children, step to the line.

3. If you take care of someone else’s children (newborns to age 8), step to the line.

4. If someone in your family helped you buy your first home, step to the line.

5. If someone in your family helped pay for you to go to college, step to the line.

6. If some of your family or friends don’t speak the same language as their doctors and nurses, step to the line.

7. If you have family members or friends who have trouble getting medical care for their children, step to the line.

8. If some of the best elementary schools in the community are in your neighborhood, step to the line.

9. If many of your children’s teachers are from your racial or cultural group, step to the line.

10. If children in your neighborhood can play outside without worrying about crime and violence, step to the line.

11. If someone in your family was treated badly at a school, bank, or hospital because of his or her race, ethnic group, or language, step to the line.

12. If you have family members or friends whose children sometimes go hungry, step to the line.

13. If the people in your neighborhood have easy access to grocery stores with decent food, step to the line.

14. If parents you know worry about how poor air quality affects their children, step to the line.

**Talking about Exercise A**

1. During this exercise, what stood out for you?
2. Did some groups go to the line more often than others? Why?
3. What did you learn about why some of our children and families are not doing well?
4. What did you learn about fair or unfair practices in our community?
**Exercise B** (30 minutes)

Here we will look at three problems in our society: poverty, hunger, and the failure to learn. These are some of the main things that can make it hard for children from poor families and children of color to reach their potential.

These facts can be painful to look at. But this exercise isn’t about blaming people for their troubles.

This data can help us see what lies behind these problems and how they build on one another. It will help us see why it is very hard for some children to get ahead. And it will help us make better decisions about what to do.

**Facilitator Tips**

for Part 3, Exercise B

- List the titles of the three examples on one sheet of newsprint.
- Read the three examples (or ask for volunteers). Talk about the exercise, using the questions provided.
- Help people focus on the big picture. Remind them that this is a snapshot of what is happening across the country. If people question these facts, ask them to check the sources. They can look for data about their own community or state. When they meet again, they can share what they’ve learned.

**Example 1: Many children live in poverty.**

(Based on a 2008 study of children age 6 and younger from across the U.S.)

- More than 2 out of 10 children age 6 and younger live in poverty.
- One out of every 10 Asian and White children lives in poverty. But 3 out of every 10 Hispanic children live in poverty, as do 4 out of every 10 Black and Native children.
- Young children of color are much more likely than White children to be born into poverty.

**Why this is important:**

- Studies show that young children who live in poverty often face hunger and bad health, and live in poor housing.
- Poverty makes it harder for many children to learn and develop in ways that prepare them to succeed in school and in life.
Example 2: Many children and families go hungry at times during the year.
(Based on a 2007 study of homes with children under 18 years of age.)

- Over 1 in 10 White children, over 2 in 10 Hispanic children, and almost 3 in 10 Black children go without enough food to eat at times during the year.
- Children of color are more likely to go hungry than White children.

Why this is important:
- For healthy development, children need healthy food.
- Healthy foods help children resist sickness. They will also have fewer health problems like obesity and diabetes.
- When a child has enough healthy food, her brain works better.

Example 3: Our schools and society are failing to help many children learn.
(Based on a 2009 study of 4th-graders’ reading and math skills.)

- Among children from low-income families, 8 in 10 are not at grade level in reading and math. Of those who are not poor, 5 in 10 are not at grade level in reading and math.
- Seven in 10 Asian and almost 8 in 10 White children from low-income families are not at grade level in reading. Almost 9 in 10 Native, Black, and Hispanic children from low-income families are not at grade level in reading.
- Students from low-income families are more likely to do poorly in school.
- On average, among children from low-income families, children of color have a harder time in school.

Why this is important:
- Math and language skills help a young child’s brain develop in a healthy way.
- To do well in school, children need to talk, read, and write like most children their age by the end of third grade. If they can’t, they may never catch up to their peers. And they are less likely to graduate from high school.
- Children of color are more likely to have problems with reading and math because more of them are from low-income families.

Talking about Exercise B:
1. What stands out when you look at these facts?
2. What reminds you of children you know?
3. What are the key challenges we face in this community? In our country?
4. What laws, systems, and policies might be adding to these poor outcomes?

What is Poverty?
Poverty means many things to many people.

Some people see poverty in terms of money. According to the federal government, in 2008, a family of four that made $21,200 (or less) was considered “poor.” Many people think these numbers are too low. And some think they are too high. Federal agencies cannot agree on a “poverty line.”

Some people say there are different kinds of poverty, like being alone, without the support of family and friends. Or, like not having the skills to handle day-to-day life.

Some people say poverty isn’t always about one person. It can affect a whole community.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th>Session 2</th>
<th>Session 3</th>
<th>Session 4</th>
<th>Session 5</th>
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<td>MEET EACH OTHER</td>
<td>CREATE A VISION</td>
<td>STUDY THE CHALLENGES</td>
<td>FIND SOLUTIONS</td>
<td>PLAN FOR ACTION</td>
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### Facilitator Tips in Closing
- Thank people for coming and sharing.
- Remind people to attend every session.
- Explain what they will talk about next time.

### For the Next Session
Reflect on the work we did today. Find out what other people think about why some children don't have equal chances in life.

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4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.


FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Very young children know how other people feel. They can learn to relate to others in good ways.

Did you know?

- Each child is born with special gifts. These gifts affect the way she sees life. A child’s view of life is shaped by both nature and nurture.
- Children need help understanding their own feelings and how to deal with them. This helps them learn self-control and how to focus.

Why is this important?

- Studies show that older children are less likely to be aggressive if they can figure out why people act the way they do. If they can predict how others might behave, it is easier for them to respond in a healthy way.
- Caring parents, caregivers, and teachers help young children feel good about themselves. To feel special and be understood helps a child learn better.
- A child’s ability to focus and have self-control is a basic skill for success in school and in life.

Best practices

- Help children know what people expect and how they are likely to act.
- Be aware that what we do affects the children around us. Adults should meet children’s needs.
- Honor a child’s first language and culture to help give him a strong sense of self.

This information is based on recent studies about how young children learn and develop.
SESSION 4
How Can We Make Progress?

Goals
- Talk about ways to create a community where all children can reach their potential.
- Make a list of ideas for action. We will work on this list, again, during Session 5.

In Session 3, we talked about what makes it hard for children to thrive. Now, let’s talk about some approaches to this problem.

PART 1: Getting Started
(15 minutes)

Reflect on what we talked about at our last meeting. This will help us prepare for today’s work.

1. What did you see or hear in the last few days that made you think about the future of the children in our community?
2. What did you see or hear that reminded you of what we talked about last time?

PART 2: Making a Difference
(75 minutes)

Now, we’re going to look at the big picture. We will talk about seven “approaches” to help our young children blossom and thrive. These action ideas will spark your own ideas about how to help all the children in our community.

As we talk about these approaches, we will think about how they might work here. We will see what we can build on that is already happening. The facilitator will write down our action ideas as we come up with them.
Approach 1: Build on programs we already have.

Talking about the approaches.

Use these questions:

- Which approaches do you like and why?
- Are there other ideas or approaches you would like to add?
- What doubts do you have?
- What concerns?

Parents and families have the biggest impact on the children they care for. We must respect and support them. We need to help all our children.

Here are some examples of what we can do:

**Approach 1:** Help parents and families do their best.

- Create family learning centers that are open at nights and on weekends. Offer child care. Children can go there to get help with homework and use computers.
- Set up support groups for parents who are dealing with issues such as depression and addictions.
- Respect how other cultures raise and discipline their children. For example, the way people discipline their children may differ from one culture to another. And in some cultures, the extended family and community take care of the children.
- Hire staff members who speak the languages of the children and families they serve.
- Urge schools and preschool programs to work together to prepare young children to enter school.
- Support family-friendly policies in the workplace. Employers can give workers time off to meet with teachers or caregivers. They can give parents flexible work hours. And they can provide on-site child care or pay for child care.
- Expand “home visiting” programs where nurses, teachers, and social workers help new parents and family members learn how to take care of their children.
- Set up support groups for parents who are dealing with issues such as depression and addictions.
- Create family learning centers that are open at nights and on weekends. Offer child care. Children can go there to get help with homework and use computers.
- What doubts do you have? Concerns?

Approach 2: Build on programs we already have.

We already have some good programs that help families and children. But money (from taxes and gifts) is drying up. Before we start new programs, we need to know if the ones we’re already paying for are working. We must also help people who want to improve their skills as parents and caregivers.

Here are some examples of what we can do:

**Approach 2:** Help parents and families do their best.

- Find workers who would be willing to help people get to the services they need.
- Ask agencies to work together to study how well they are meeting the needs of families. This will help us know which programs to support.
- Send outreach workers door-to-door to help agencies work as a team. Everyone has a role to play including each of us, businesses, faith groups and families.
- Get the word out about the programs that are helping families with young children.
- Hire staff members who speak the languages of the children and families they serve.
- Find drivers who would be willing to help people get to the services they need.
- Use these questions:
- Which approaches do you like and why?
- Are there other ideas or approaches you would like to add?
- What doubts do you have?
- What concerns?

Here are some examples of what we can do:

**Approach 2:** Help parents and families do their best.

- Support family-friendly policies in the workplace. Employers can give workers time off to meet with teachers or caregivers. They can give parents flexible work hours. And they can provide on-site child care or pay for child care.
- Expand “home visiting” programs where nurses, teachers, and social workers help new parents and family members learn how to take care of their children.
- Set up support groups for parents who are dealing with issues such as depression and addictions.
- Get the word out about the programs that are helping families with young children.
- Urge schools and preschool programs to work together to prepare young children to enter school.
- What doubts do you have? Concerns?

Approach 2: Help parents and families do their best.

- Find drivers who would be willing to help people get to the services they need.
- Ask agencies to work together to study how well they are meeting the needs of families. This will help us know which programs to support.
- Get the word out about the programs that are helping families with young children.
- Support family-friendly policies in the workplace. Employers can give workers time off to meet with teachers or caregivers. They can give parents flexible work hours. And they can provide on-site child care or pay for child care.
- Where do you find workers who would be willing to help people get to the services they need?
- What doubts do you have? Concerns?

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- Where do you find workers who would be willing to help people get to the services they need?
- What doubts do you have? Concerns?
Programs that support learning for young children

Child care/day care: nurturing places for babies and children whose parents are at work or at school. Good day care can be found in private homes or in larger, licensed centers.

Preschool: usually for children between ages 3 and 5. Preschool helps kids get ready for kindergarten.

Pre-K: a program to prepare 4-year-olds to start kindergarten the next year. Some Pre-K programs are part of the public school system. Some are supported by other public funds.

Head Start: a preschool/pre-K program for poor children, ages 3 to 5. Head Start helps children develop the social, emotional, reading, and math skills to succeed in school. Head Start is a federal program that also gets some funding from the state.

Early Head Start: a branch of Head Start for infants and toddlers, beginning with prenatal care.

APPROACH 3
Increase chances for all children to learn, from the time they are born.

The first years of a child’s life are the most important time for learning. Children who begin learning early are more likely to thrive. We need high standards of care and education—at home, in child care, and in early education programs.

Here are some examples of what we can do:

- Increase funding to make early childhood programs possible for more children. Aim to give every child at least one year of preschool education.
- Call on local and/or state government to strengthen standards for early childhood care and learning.
- Support child care and early education programs that make playtime an important part of young children’s learning.
- Find more money and offer rewards to hire our most talented teachers to work in kindergarten and preschools.
- Develop programs that honor other languages and Native cultures. For example, offer translation services for families and bilingual lessons for children.

APPROACH 4
Create healthy places where all children can thrive—at home and in the community.

We must meet our children’s needs—in mind, body, and spirit. And we must make sure they have good food and lots of exercise. We have to stop pollution. Our children and families need clean air and water. And we must get rid of lead and other poisons in our homes that can harm our children.

Here are some examples of what we can do:

- Connect dental, physical, and mental health care services.
- Spread the word to families, landlords, and housing groups about the dangers of lead and other poisons in our homes.
- Call for policies that help more young children qualify for aid. Children with poor eyesight or poor hearing need extra help to develop language skills. Getting help early makes it more likely that they will develop at a normal rate.
- Work with local doctors to set up family-centered health care for children from birth until they become adults. Families are linked with a doctor who leads a team of medical providers and community services. This is sometimes called the “medical home” model for health care.
- Create “farm-to-school” programs. Work with farmers to grow food that can be used for healthy school meals and food banks.
- Create a Community Asthma Prevention Program. Parents and caregivers learn how to help children avoid and treat asthma attacks. They also help worried family members cope with stress.
**APPROACH 5**

**Help families overcome hardship and save money for the future.**

We need more jobs. And we need better jobs that pay people enough to take care of a family. In hard times, we need to help people get the basics: food, a home, and health care. We also need to help people build up “assets”: a savings account, a car, a home, and money for when they retire.

**Here are a few examples of what we can do:**

- Get rid of unfair taxes and rules that make it hard for businesses to grow and hire more workers.
- Create a training program for women. Teach skills that prepare them for new jobs that are in the town or region where they live.
- Provide low-income families with tax credits for child care.
- Create a “Center for Working Families” (CWF). At CWFs, families can learn how to manage money, do better in school, and develop new job skills.
- Start a program that helps people buy and repair their own cars.

**APPROACH 6**

**Make sure our children are safe.**

We must stop crime in our neighborhoods. We want our children to be safe and free to play outside. Children must also be safe from abuse at home. Teach parents, guardians, and caregivers how to keep their children safe.

**Here are a few examples of what we can do:**

- Find ways to build trust between police and community. Make sure to include young people.
- Offer trainings, open to everyone, to prevent child abuse. Teach people what to do if they think a child has been abused. And teach them how to help a child who has been abused. Teach people about physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal abuse, as well as neglect.
- Insist that elementary schools put a stop to bullying and violence. Teach children to respect each other. Show children how to deal with conflict, develop self-control, and stop being violent.
- Join with your neighbors to form a parents’ support group or children’s play group. Neighbors who know each other are more likely to look out for each other.
- Form a group to help clean up a playground or park. Ask teens to help. Work with the police to find and train neighbors to keep an eye on the area and keep it safe for children.
**APPROACH 7:**

**Work for equal opportunity for children of all races, ethnic groups, and cultures.**

Studies show that many children and families of color don’t have the same opportunities that others have. *(Please see Session 3, Part 3.)* For our common future, we must make sure that children from all racial, ethnic, and cultural groups have a fair and equal chance to succeed.

*Here are a few examples of what we can do:*

- Require schools to tell parents about the rules they use to decide who is placed in lower level classes.
- Improve the public services where people of color and poor families live. Look at things like schools, public safety and the police, water quality, and trash collection.
- Protect farm workers from insect sprays and other harmful chemicals. *(Most of these workers are immigrants and many are people of color.)*
- Create or expand programs that help Native people get housing and credit.
- Train health care workers and other social service workers about the needs of local racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Help them see how stereotypes might affect the advice they give.

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**Talking about the approaches**

*Use these questions:*

- Which approaches do you like and why?
- Are there other ideas or approaches you would like to add?
- How will these ideas help all our children?
- Would these approaches leave some children out? Why? How could we prevent that?
- Is this possible here? What would it take to make these ideas happen?
- Do similar ideas already exist in our community?
- What doubts do you have? Concerns?
PART 3: Brainstorm Action Ideas
(30 minutes)

Think quietly for a moment. What do you think could help our community make progress?

Brainstorm a list of action ideas. Try to come up with different kinds of ideas. Some actions might be things we can do on our own, with others, with community groups, or with government.

Action ideas are things we can do. Be specific. For example:

**Not this:** “We need healthier school lunches.”

**Try this:** “Meet with school officials to talk about healthier school lunches.”

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<tr>
<th>Action Ideas</th>
<th>On Our Own</th>
<th>In Groups</th>
<th>With Government</th>
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Facilitator Tips for Part 3

**Brainstorm**
- Help the group brainstorm action ideas.
- Record all action ideas on newsprint. Use the speakers’ words.

**Sort Ideas**
- Sort the ideas into the three groups. (See Action Ideas chart on this page.)
- Tell the group that they will decide which ideas are the best, during the next session.

Facilitator Tips in Closing

- Thank people for coming and sharing.
- Remind people to attend every session.
- Tell them what they will talk about next time.
FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Young children can handle some stress, but they need help.

Did you know?

- A little stress in children’s lives can be good. Solving problems on your own is part of the process of learning.
- Severe and constant stress is harmful. It affects the health of a child and can have long-term impacts.
- When young children see or feel violence, it has a serious and long-lasting impact on them.

Why is this important?

- Studies show that we need to detect and deal with harmful things early in children’s lives.
- Poverty, abuse, neglect, and violence can lead to health problems later in life. These include diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and addictions.

Best practices

- Help children learn how to handle hard times. Children who have at least one, stable and caring adult in their lives will usually be alright.
- Make sure children get regular checkups during the first years of life.
- Protect children from things that can scare or harm them.

This information is based on recent studies about how young children learn and develop.
SESSION 5
Moving to Action

Goals
- Review the action ideas that came up in Session 4.
- Talk about the assets we have in our community.
- Choose a small number of action ideas we can get started on.
- Prepare for the Action Forum and the optional large-group session on public policy, as well as for the work that will follow those meetings.

In Session 4, we talked about ways our community can help all of our children blossom and thrive.

In this session, we will talk about what we can do—on our own, in groups, and with government—so that all children can reach their potential.

PART 1: Getting Started
(10 minutes)

Turn to your neighbor. Working in pairs, talk about the following

1. What are the most important issues or ideas that we have talked about since our circle began?
2. What are your hopes for this final session?

PART 2: Reviewing Action Ideas
(15 minutes)

Let’s take another look at the list of action ideas from Session 4.

1. What ideas would you like to add to our list?
2. Do we have enough different kinds of ideas (things we can do on our own, in groups, or with government)?
PART 3: Listing Our Community Strengths (Assets)
(30 minutes)

Every community has strengths or assets. Assets can be people, places, or institutions. They are things that we have or use to help ourselves and each other. Every group and every person has them.

In some communities, taking care of one another is a way of life. This is an asset. Assets can be handed down in families, or from group to group.

Talking about our assets:
1. What are some things you know a lot about?
2. What are some of the talents or skills we have in this group? How about people in the community?
3. What groups do you belong to? How can they help?
4. What groups in the community affect the lives of children? How can they help?
5. What assets do we have—like land, buildings, space, tools, or even money?

The facilitator will write our answers on the page labeled Community Assets.

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<th>Community Assets</th>
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<td>People</td>
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PART 4: Connecting Action Ideas with Community Assets
(15 minutes)

Put the list of ideas for action next to the list of community assets. Compare the lists and look for strong links between them.

1. Which assets could we use to support our ideas for action?
2. Are we sure that we can draw on these assets?
**PART 5: Choosing Ideas for the Action Forum** (40 minutes)

We will choose three action ideas to take to the Action Forum.

**How to pick our best ideas**

**Step 1:** As a group, talk about all of our action ideas. If some of the ideas are nearly alike, combine them.

**Step 2:** Answer the following questions:

- a) Which ideas really address the issues we care about?
- b) Which ideas might have a long-term impact?
- c) Which ideas seem most “doable”?
- d) What would it take to make this happen?
- e) What can we do on our own, in groups, or with government?
- f) What kind of support do we need to take these steps? Who else could we link up with?

**Step 3:** Narrow down the list.

- a) Each person will get three votes. Our facilitator will give each of us three colored stickers or markers for this.
- b) Each of us will vote for the ideas we like best. We can use all three votes on one idea, or we can spread them around.
- c) Look at the ideas that have the most votes. There will probably be about eight.

**Step 4:** Narrow down the lists again. Look at the ideas that you picked in Step 3. To help us think about this, refer again to questions under Step 2.

**Step 5:** If you have only three ideas left, you are finished! You are ready to go to the Action Forum. (Skip Step 6 and go on to Step 7.)

**Step 6:** If you still have more than three ideas, vote again. (Repeat Steps 3a and 3b.) Then, select the three ideas that get the most votes. These are the ideas you will take to the Action Forum.

**Step 7:** Write down your final three ideas. Select someone to speak for your group at the Action Forum.

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**Facilitator Tips for Part 5**

- **Steps for picking our best action ideas:**
  - Use Steps 1-7 to help the group set priorities for action.
  - Repeat this process until you have only three ideas left.
  - Help the group choose someone to present these ideas at the Action Forum.
  - Explain how the ideas that weren’t selected will be used.
  - Label a piece of newsprint **Other Ideas**, and list the ideas we talked about today that weren’t selected for the action forum. This list will be posted at the action forum.
  - If there are no plans for an action forum.
  - Ask the group if they would like to keep on meeting to carry out their action ideas. If so, have them share each other’s phone numbers etc. Ask someone from the group to set up the next meeting. Let the organizers know your plan.
PART 6: Wrapping Up (10 minutes)

Thank you for taking part in this important dialogue. You are making a difference in our community. Let’s sum up:

1. What has surprised you?
2. Have you changed your mind about these issues? If so, how?
3. How will you stay involved to help all the children in our community?
4. Is there anything you will do differently because you took part in these talks?

The Action Forum

When the program ends, people from all the circles will meet at the Action Forum. Here we will start putting our best ideas for action to work.

At the Action Forum, someone from each dialogue will share the three top ideas from their dialogue. (Before we go, we will choose someone to speak for our dialogue.)

The next step will be for everyone at the Action Forum to agree on a few ideas to put into action. Some people will form action teams right away. Others may want to write a report for public officials, leaders, the media, or the government.

At some action forums, people might suggest priorities for the state government in early childhood policy.

Over the last few weeks, we came up with lots of solutions. We will take the lists of all our action ideas to the Action Forum. All of the circles will post their long lists for everyone to see.

NOTE: See A Sample Action Forum Agenda on page 35. The facilitator will explain how the meeting will work.

Thank you for working to help all the children in our community blossom and thrive.
THE ACTION FORUM

An action forum is a large meeting that takes place after all the dialogues are finished. Some action forums are open to the public; others include only those who were in the dialogue.

At this event, people pool their ideas, pick a few of the best ones, and make plans for action. Action teams form to move these ideas forward. There will be many ways for people to stay involved.

When programs last a long time, more and more people take many kinds of action. To learn more about moving to action, please visit Everyday Democracy’s website at www.everyday-democracy.org.

A Sample Action Forum Agenda (Approximately 3 hours)

1. Snacks, social time, music or poetry, and time to read action ideas from each circle.
   (Post action lists from each circle where everyone can see them.)

2. Welcome and thanks
   - Review agenda.
   - Talk about the dialogue-to-change program.
   - Thank facilitators and other key people.

3. Reports from the dialogues
   - Ask one person from each dialogue to make a brief report about the group’s action ideas.
   - Or, when the group is large (more than 60 people), post summaries from the dialogues for all to see. Invite people from a few dialogues to report out.

4. Overview of community assets
   - A person from the organizing group reviews key assets. These assets will help the community move action ideas forward.

5. Moving to action
   - The MC (Master of Ceremonies) states the main ideas from all the dialogues.
   - People sign up for an action team or task force.
   - Action teams meet and begin their work. They also set the date for their next meeting.

6. Closing remarks
   - Closing remarks (including how our efforts will be tracked and tied to the program in the future).
   - Next steps (including plans for another round of dialogues, celebration, or check-in meeting).
   - Thanks to all.

Adding a Policy Discussion to the Action Forum

At some action forums, people make suggestions for setting priorities on early childhood policies at the state level. Please see the session on “Making Policy Choices: What role should state government play in supporting our youngest children?” on pages 36-45 in this guide. You can also download free copies of this policy session at www.everyday-democracy.org.

The best place to insert the session on “Making Policy Choices” is between Steps 4 and 5 in this sample Action Forum agenda. If you include this session in the Action Forum, add 2.5 hours to your schedule.
MAKING POLICY CHOICES
What Role Should Our State Government Play in Supporting Our Youngest Children?

Goals
- Identify shared ideas about how our state policies should support our youngest children.
- Talk about ways to pay for early childhood programs. Should we raise taxes? Cut other spending?
- Get ready to share our ideas with public officials, the news media, and other leaders. These ideas can also help action teams with their work.

This session works best as part of a large-group event. It can stand alone, but we suggest that you build it into your action forum. Allow extra time for this session which takes about 2-1/2 hours.

There may be people at the Action Forum who did not take part in all the sessions. The MC (Master of Ceremonies) should explain how we will build on the first five sessions in Strong Starts for Children.

Introduction

In our dialogue-to-change circles, we looked at a range of ideas about how to give all children a strong start. We saw what we can do locally, on our own, with businesses, nonprofits, other groups, and government.

There is a lot we can do at the local level. But many of us think we should talk about how our state government can help our youngest children. This session will help us think about making changes in government policy.

We know that many resources (including funds) are limited, so we must ask ourselves:
- What are the best steps we can take to give our youngest children the support they need?
- What can we do to give all our children equal chances to learn and thrive?
- How should we pay for early childhood programs and services?

This session was adapted from “The First Five Years: A Dialogue on Early Childhood in New Mexico,” a workbook created in 2010 by Viewpoint Learning for “Common Ground,” an initiative of the “Our Voices, Our Children” project of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.
PART 1: Getting Started
(20 minutes total)

Step 1 (5 minutes)
Speaking to the large group, the MC will talk about the agenda for the day.

Step 2 (5 minutes)
Working in small groups, say your name. Then, talk briefly about one concern you have about our youngest children.

Step 3 (10 minutes)
Speaking again to the large group, the MC will give an overview of Part 2.

Facilitator Tips for Part 1
- The MC will refer to the goals and the introduction to this session to help set the stage for today’s work. You may want to use a sample PowerPoint presentation from our website. Click on the “Tools” tab of our Early Childhood Development page at www.everyday-democracy.org.
- Explain that small groups will meet twice during this session. Each time, each group will choose one person to record ideas and report back to the large group.
- Tell people that the results of their work will be used by action teams and shared with policymakers and the news media.
- If possible, the MC should use PowerPoint to display the 3 approaches on pages 38-39 and the reasons for and against on Worksheet A. If you do not have a projector, ask people to refer to these pages.
- To keep the small-group intros brief, ask for a volunteer to keep track of time. Limit each speaker to 30 seconds.

PART 2: What State Policies Will Make the Biggest Difference for Our Youngest Children?
(Small-groups: 50 minutes total)

We will look at three approaches to creating state policies that help our youngest children. Each approach focuses on ways to solve a specific problem. These are not our only options. But each approach is a point of view that many people support.

Step 1 (10 minutes) Review the three choices by yourself. Then, using Worksheet A on page 40, review the reasons for and against each approach. Check the “reasons for” that you think are most important.

You can pick “reasons for” from one approach or from all three. Limit yourself to five “reasons for.”

Step 2 (20 minutes) Talk about the reasons for and against the approaches. Select the three ideas the group agrees should be part of our children’s future. If something important is missing, please add it.

Our goal is to find common ground to build on. We will not try to settle all our differences. If you can’t agree on something, note it and move on.

Step 3 (20 minutes) Each group will report its three “reasons for” to the large group. The MC will write each group’s ideas on a flipchart.

It is OK if you repeat points that other groups have made. That will help us see which ideas have the most support.

Facilitator Tips for Part 2
- Remind people that it is OK to add ideas that are not on the list of “reasons for.” It is also OK to change them to reflect the group’s thinking.
- Explain that the list of “reasons against” is there to help the group think about the “reasons for.”
- Help the recorders keep track of their group’s decisions. And give recorders time to say what they think.
- As the group picks its final three “reasons for,” ask people to talk things through, rather than vote.
- Give a 5-minute warning before it’s time to present to the large group.
- As each group reports its 3 “reasons for,” ask the MC to write them on newsprint labeled Common Ground Ideas. Post the list where everyone can see it.
- Add a check mark each time a new group lists the same “reasons for.” When people see many checks by an item, they can tell which ideas have the strongest support.
- After all the groups have reported, the MC will read the list. Note the most popular ideas. At the end, ask if the list covers all the ideas that were reported.
SETTING PRIORITIES
FOR ACTION

APPROACH 1
Support struggling families

Poverty and hard times are the biggest problems. Helping low-income families will do the most to help children. It will also help us address some unfair conditions that harm children of color.

Here are some ways to do this:

- Increase funding for quality child care for low-income parents and families while they work or go to school.
- Create family learning centers. Help low-income parents learn how to manage money, get new work skills, do better in school, learn English, and look for jobs.
- Offer “home visiting” programs for poor families with a child under age 3. Families who ask for help can meet with nurses, teachers, and social workers at home. They can learn about things like parenting, nutrition, and how to help a child be ready to start school. Or families can visit the advisors’ offices. These advisors can help families get other benefits like mental health services and prenatal care.
- Require employers to keep family needs in mind. Employers can give workers time off to meet with teachers or caregivers. They can give parents flexible work hours and longer family/maternity leave. And they can provide on-site child care, or pay for child care.
- What other ideas could we add to support struggling families?

APPROACH 2
Let local communities take the lead

Give resources to communities. Help them carry out their plans for young children. Local people know what their children need. And people are more likely to help out if they have a say in the planning.

Here are some ways to do this:

- The state sets goals and guidelines for early childhood programs.
- Each community—large and small—gets money from the state for early childhood programs. Low-income communities will get more money per child.
- Each community decides how to use money from the state to meet children’s needs. They will decide what the biggest needs are. And they will look at the resources they already have.
- Ask local employers to help support programs for young children. They might:
  - Run programs themselves.
  - Donate money to local nonprofits.
  - Pay a tax to help fund services.
- What other ideas could we add to help local communities take the lead?
**APPROACH 3**  
**Invest in first-rate early learning programs for all**

Every child deserves first-rate child care and preschool. This is the best way to help them learn and develop. Our state must invest much more in child care and preschool for all children.

*Here are some ways to do this:*

- Allow every 4-year-old to attend a year of public preschool before kindergarten.
- Help families with younger children pay for quality child care and preschool.
- Programs should be based on what we have learned about helping young children learn and grow.
- Train more teachers and caregivers.
- Require employers to help their workers pay for high quality child care and preschool. Or have them pay a tax that helps support these services for all the children in the state.
- What other ideas could we add to provide high-quality early learning programs for all children?
## WORKSHEET A: REASONS FOR AND AGAINST APPROACHES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPROACH 1</th>
<th>Support struggling families</th>
<th>Reasons for</th>
<th>Reasons against</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td>Learning centers help families in need find better jobs, deal with hardship, and manage money. Poverty is the number one reason children fall behind.</td>
<td>Government programs can’t fix poverty. And, we aren’t sure that fighting poverty helps young children learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td>Our resources are limited. We should use them to help families who need them the most.</td>
<td>It’s not fair to ask the rest of us to pay for benefits for low-income families or families in poverty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td>Employers can make it easier for busy parents to take care of their children. It’s too hard for many parents to balance work and family.</td>
<td>This is hard on employers. They want to make a profit. It’s not up to them to provide social services for their workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td>Home visits can make a big difference for children whose parents are young, poor, or have less schooling.</td>
<td>Home visits cost too much. And they take away our privacy. We don’t need experts telling us how to run our lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROACH 2</td>
<td>Let local communities take the lead</td>
<td>In each community, people should decide how to help young children. They know what their children need and what will fit with community values.</td>
<td>This won’t give all children an equal chance to learn and thrive. Rich communities can raise more money if they need to, but poor communities can’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td>Communities should build on their strengths. That is how real, lasting change happens.</td>
<td>Communities don’t have the resources that the state government has to take on big problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td>Children need everyone’s support. Even strong families don’t always have enough resources.</td>
<td>Some communities just don’t work well. If local leaders lack skills, or if they are corrupt, many children will suffer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td>Businesses will invest more in early childhood programs when their money stays in their own community.</td>
<td>Local businesses, agencies, and other groups are stretched to the breaking point. We can’t ask them to spend and do more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROACH 3</td>
<td>Invest in first-rate early learning programs for all</td>
<td>Every child should go to a good preschool. This is the best way to make sure children do well as they go through school.</td>
<td>It would cost a lot to send every child in the state to preschool. We just can’t afford it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td>Children, parents, and employers all benefit when there is quality child care.</td>
<td>Middle-class and rich families can afford to pay for child care and preschool. We should focus on children who need the most help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td>Good child care and preschool offer ways to learn that many children can’t get at home.</td>
<td>Babies and young children belong at home with their parents. They should not be stuck in day care or preschool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td>Every dollar we spend to improve early learning for young children will come back to us many times over.</td>
<td>Schools are failing. We shouldn’t spend millions to give children one more year in a broken system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td>Is there anything you would like to add?</td>
<td>Is there anything you would like to add?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PART 3: Information about Our State Budget
(10 minutes)

The MC will:
- tell us how the remaining exercises will build on the work we just did.
- share a few ideas about the information below.

To expand early childhood programs and services, it will cost our state money. But money is tight. To add new services for young children, we will have to find new funds.

There are two ways to do this:
- Increase taxes and/or fees.
- Cut other state spending.

More about how states spend money to help young children

- Chart A is a picture of the average way all 50 states spend their general funds.
- Most states spend less than 1% of their general funds for young children. A few spend as much as 2 or 3%.
- Most of the money spent on early childhood programs pays for preschool and Pre-K.
- The amount spent on other programs for young children may vary a great deal from state to state.

CHART A: HOW STATES SPEND THEIR GENERAL FUND DOLLARS
(Average – reflects all 2008 general fund spending by all 50 states)

Data from The National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO) and National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)
PART 4: How Can We Pay for Early Childhood Programs and Services?
(50 minutes total)

In small groups, let's look at how to pay for more programs and services for young children. On Worksheet B (page 43), there is a list of possible new taxes and fees. On Worksheet C (page 44), there is a list of ways we could cut state spending.

Step 1 (10 Minutes)

a) If the MC has not already done so, someone will read Worksheet B out loud.

b) We will take a few minutes to think about this list of taxes and fees. On your own copy of Worksheet B, put a check next to 2 or 3 ideas that you might support.

c) Next, someone will read Worksheet C out loud. Each person will think about the options. On your own copy of Worksheet B, put a check next to 1 or 2 cuts in spending that you might support.

d) Please check at least 2 items in each list, even if you do not think these are the best options.

Step 2 (20 Minutes)

a) Talk with your group about why you made your choices.

b) As a group, talk about the options. Choose 2 taxes most of you would be likely to support, even if you don’t want to raise taxes. Also choose 2 spending cuts, even if you don’t want to cut spending.

c) Without voting, try to get a sense of how your group feels. Would they rather raise taxes or cut spending?

Step 3 (20 Minutes)

Each group will report its 2 top taxes and spending cuts to the large group. The MC will list them on newsprint where everyone can see them.
**WORKSHEET B: TAXES AND FEES**

Which ways of paying for early childhood programs and services would you be most likely to support? (Please try to pick 2 even if you or your group would prefer not to raise taxes.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taxes &amp; fees</th>
<th>Reasons for</th>
<th>Reasons against</th>
<th>How much would this raise per year?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase in personal income tax for the richest people (top 5%)</td>
<td>People with a lot of money can afford to pay more.</td>
<td>People with a lot of money will end up with less money to spend and invest in our community and in our state.</td>
<td>Raise more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in sales tax or consumption tax (Tax on goods and/or services)</td>
<td>Everyone pays this tax. That's good because we all benefit when we have good early childhood programs.</td>
<td>This tax is the same for everyone. It's a bigger burden for people with low incomes; they pay the same amount in taxes, even though they earn less money.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in property taxes</td>
<td>Most states use property taxes to support education. Early education should also be supported by property taxes.</td>
<td>If property taxes go up, some people won't be able to afford a home of their own.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in tax on business</td>
<td>Businesses benefit when children thrive. They need to pay their fair share.</td>
<td>Companies will leave our state.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in vehicle licensing fees</td>
<td>Many people own a car or truck. This is a fair and quick way to raise money to support children.</td>
<td>Poor people struggle to pay for a car or truck. This makes it even harder on them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sin taxes” on tobacco, alcohol, and gambling</td>
<td>These things have a bad impact on the state (including children). People who use them should pay more.</td>
<td>It's not fair to ask a small number of people to bear so much of the burden. Plus “sin” taxes don't raise as much money as other taxes do.</td>
<td>Raise less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State lottery</td>
<td>You can play the lottery or not. People who don’t want to play don’t have to buy a ticket.</td>
<td>It's not right to promote gambling. The lottery spends a lot of money on overhead and prizes. Very little of the profits go to help children.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other taxes or fees might you support?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**WORKSHEET C: SPENDING CUTS**

What government spending would you be most likely to cut so there will be more money for early childhood programs and services? (Please try to pick at least 1 even if you or your group would prefer not to cut other spending.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOVERNMENT SPENDING THAT COULD BE CUT</th>
<th>Larger share of state spending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-12 education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuts mean less money for teachers and staff, building upkeep, books, supplies, after-school programs, and buses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicaid/health/human services/hospitals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuts mean less money for health care and social services, mental health, assistance to needy families, child protective services, and job training and placement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education (community colleges and 4-year colleges)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuts mean less money for college teachers and staff, building upkeep, and scholarships and aid for students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public safety/criminal justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuts mean less money for police, firefighters, the criminal justice system, and jails and prisons.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuts mean less money to build and maintain roads and bridges, and for public transportation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General government expenses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuts mean less money for state government, assessing and collecting taxes, the arts, agriculture, energy, and natural resources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other cuts in spending might you support?</td>
<td>Smaller share of state spending</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PART 5: Wrapping Up
(10 minutes)

Survey Questions

The work we did today will provide good ideas for the action teams at the Action Forum.

Before you leave, we hope you will complete a short survey. This will help make sure that all our voices will be heard across our community and state.

A report about this meeting and the survey results will be shared with public officials, the news media, and other leaders across our state.

Thank you for doing this important work!
CREATING CHARTS AND WORKSHEETS FOR YOUR STATE

- Chart A: How our state spends its general fund dollars
- Worksheet B: Taxes and Fees
- Worksheet C: Spending Cuts

Look for the following information:

- The amount spent in each of your state’s “top level” funding categories.
- The number of children from ages 0-5 in the state. This allows you to figure out how much is spent, per child. Some states don’t provide specific reports for early childhood. Look for spending on programs and services such as: Pre-K, preschool, child care assistance, home visiting, prenatal and new-mother health care, and parenting classes.
- K-12 enrollment and spending. This allows you to compare early childhood spending with K-12 spending. Please note that this comparison gives the highest estimate of what it might cost to expand early childhood services, per child.
- The amount likely to be raised by specific tax increases. Look for proposals to initiate or raise a tax or fee in your state. These proposals often include estimates of the amount of money the tax will generate. Also look at reports on sources of your state’s revenue. For example, these reports should indicate how much money your state department of education received from taxes on alcohol, vehicle registrations, the state lottery, property taxes, etc.
- Please Note: Unless spending is aimed at children from ages 0-5, it should not be classified as early childhood spending. For many programs (e.g., Medicaid) state budgets do not break down spending by the age of the children; these figures often reflect spending on children of all ages.

Where you can find data about your state:

- American FactFinder of the U.S. Census Bureau: http://www.factfinder.census.gov
- CensusScope, Social Science Data Analysis Network (SSDAN): www.censusscope.org/segregation.html
- Kids Count Data Center: http://datacenter.kidscount.org
- The National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO): http://www.nasbo.org
- National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER): http://nieer.org
- Statehealthfacts.org: http://www.statehealthfacts.org
- U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS): http://www.census.gov/acs/www/

For examples of charts from other states, please see the “Tools” tab of our Early Childhood Development page at www.everyday-democracy.org.
TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

A facilitator does not need to be an expert on the topic being discussed. But you should prepare very carefully for the discussion. This means:

- Understand the goals of the dialogue.
- Be familiar with the subject.
- Before each session, spend time thinking about how it might go.
- Prepare questions to help the group explore the subject.

If you are well prepared, you can give your full attention to how the group is acting and interacting. And you can really listen to what each person is saying.

Here are a few more tips:

**Stay neutral!**

The most important thing to remember is that the facilitator must not share personal views and stories. You must not push your own agenda! Your job is to help the group members have a rich conversation.

- Help people feel welcome and relaxed.
- Invite everyone to join the conversation.
- Well-timed humor is usually appreciated.

**Explain the purpose of the dialogue and help the group set guidelines.**

The purpose of this dialogue is to talk about the well-being of the children in our community.

Start by reviewing the guidelines listed in Session 1. Then, invite participants to add their own ideas.

**Help the group do its work.**

- Remember, your main job is to keep the group focused on the subject.
- Consider splitting up into smaller groups. This will give people more chances to talk.
- Enter the discussion only when necessary.
- Don’t allow the group to turn to you for the answers.
- Resist the urge to speak after each comment or answer every question. Let participants respond directly to each other.
- Once in a while, ask participants to sum up important points.
- People sometimes need time to think before they respond. Don’t be afraid of silence! Try counting silently to ten before you rephrase the question. This will give people time to collect their thoughts.
- Try to involve everyone; don’t let anyone take over the conversation. Keep track of who has spoken, and who hasn’t.
- Remember that a dialogue is not a debate. If participants forget this, ask the group to help enforce the discussion guidelines.
- Keep careful track of time!
Help the group look at different points of view.

- This discussion guide presents a wide range of views. Look at the pros and cons of each viewpoint. Or, ask participants to consider a point of view that hasn’t come up in the discussion.
- Ask participants to think about their own values and how they affect their opinions.
- Don’t allow the group to get stuck on a personal experience or story.
- Help participants see the things they have in common.

Ask open-ended questions.

Open-ended questions can’t be answered with a quick “yes” or “no.” They push people to think about their beliefs. Open-ended questions also encourage people to look for connections between different ideas.

General questions

- What seems to be the key point here?
- Do you agree with that? Why?
- What do other people think of this idea?
- What would be a strong case against what you just said?
- What experiences have you had with this?
- Help us understand the reasons behind your opinion.
- What do you think is really going on here? Why is that important?
- How might others see this issue?
- Do you think others in the group see this the way you do? Why?
- How does this make you feel?

Questions to use when there is disagreement

- What do you think s/he is saying?
- What bothers you most about this?
- What is at the heart of the disagreement?
- How does this make you feel?
- What experiences or beliefs might lead a reasonable person to support that point of view?
- What do you think is really important to people who hold that opinion?
- What is blocking the discussion?
- What don’t you agree with?
- What do you find most convincing about that point of view?
- What is it about that viewpoint that upsets you?
- Please say more about what you think.
- What makes this so hard?
- What have we missed that we need to talk about?
Questions to use when people are feeling discouraged

- How does that make you feel?
- What gives you hope?
- Can the problems that you are talking about be solved in any way? How?

Closing questions

- What are the key points of agreement and disagreement in today’s session?
- What have you heard today that has made you think, or has touched you in some way?

Close with a summary of the discussion. Allow time for evaluation, and set the stage for the next meeting.

- Give participants a chance to talk about the most important thing they got out of the discussion and to share their new ideas.
- If you will be meeting again, remind the group of the readings and subject for the next session.
- At the end of the final session, allow time to fill out evaluation sheets. This gives participants a chance to comment on the process and give feedback to the facilitator.
Working with Cultural Differences

It’s important for the facilitator to be familiar with a range of cultures. Effective facilitators are sensitive to and comfortable with cultural differences. If you have not spent time with people from different backgrounds, get involved in a community activity that helps you understand cross-cultural dynamics.

Helping multicultural groups function well

- Ask participants to bring something to the circle that helps others learn about their culture.
- Ask people to tell the story of their name.
- Pay attention to cross-cultural dynamics in the group.
- Think about how your own culture and communication style is affecting the conversation. You may need to ask questions in a different way.
- Set a tone of unity. Help people see their similarities as well as their differences.
- Help people understand that there is no one “right way” to communicate.
- Talk together about different communication styles—like body language and personal space, and traditions of listening and speaking out.
- Avoid stereotyping. Cultural norms don’t apply to all the individuals within a culture.
- Try to build empathy and understanding among group members, but remind them that no one can know exactly how it feels to be in someone else’s shoes.
- Encourage group members to talk only about their own experiences and cultures. (No one can represent his or her entire culture.)
- Encourage people to think about times in their own lives when they have been treated unfairly or have experienced being “the other.”
- Show respect for people who tell how they have been mistreated. Be careful not make light of the experiences. (“I can’t believe that happened!”)
- After a couple of sessions, ask participants how culture affects the way they feel about the exercises and ideas that come up in the discussion. After the group decides on action steps they can take, talk about the role of culture and race in developing and carrying out the actions.

Be aware of the ways that cultural differences show up when people from different cultures interact

Communication styles

- Verbal communication

  - There are differences in meaning (even in the same language) from one culture to another. For example: Shouting may mean a person is excited, not angry.

- Non-verbal communication

  Facial expressions and body language vary from culture to culture; so does personal space and touching. (Seating arrangements matter!)

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Expressing opinions and emotion

- Direct vs. indirect communication: In some cultures, people are encouraged to say what they think and “get to the point.”
- In other cultures, it makes people uncomfortable to answer questions directly.
- In some cultures, people are encouraged to be open and “honest” about expressing their emotions.
- In other cultures, people may keep their feelings to themselves. Expressing great joy, sorrow, or anger may be considered inappropriate.

Other cultural differences

Attitudes toward conflict

- In some cultures, people deal with conflict directly and are encouraged to “speak up.”
- In other cultures, face-to-face conflict is embarrassing or inappropriate, and people prefer to work things out quietly or behind the scenes (perhaps in writing or through a third party).

Approaches to completing tasks

- In some cultures, more value is placed on getting to work, first, and building relationships along the way.
- Other cultures start by building relationships; then, people are ready to work together to complete the task.

Decision-making styles

- In some cultures, managers delegate responsibility for decision making to an assistant.
- In some cultures, people value being able to make decisions themselves.
- Sometimes, group decisions are made by majority rule.
- Sometimes, groups make decisions by consensus.

Approaches to “knowing”

- People in some cultures learn by measuring, and counting—quantifying things.
- In other cultures, “knowing” comes from experience and intuitive reasoning.

Approaches to authority

- In some cultures, it is OK to question authority, as long as it’s done respectfully.
- In other cultures, people in authority are not to be questioned or challenged, and it’s important to follow protocol and show proper respect.

Independence and Interdependence

- Some cultures value independence and individuality. People are encouraged to speak and stand up for themselves.
- In other cultures, interdependence and group harmony come first. The needs of the group come before individual needs.
Working with Groups Where Literacy is a Concern

- Begin with a simple explanation of how the dialogue will work, and tell participants the goal of each session. (Each time you meet, restate the goal of the session.)
- Limit your use of the flip chart.
- Assign someone to help participants fill out forms.
- Be prepared to read aloud to the group instead of asking participants to read.
- Make sure everyone understands. Once in a while, ask participants to sum up or review the conversation.
- Avoid using jargon or acronyms. When people look puzzled, ask: “What does that mean?”
- In between sessions, check with participants to make sure they know that what they say is very important to the group.
- Give people extra time to collect their thoughts before they talk. Remember, this may be the first time they have spoken in public, and/or in a different language.
- Consider putting people in small groups, but don’t separate people by language groups. (You may need more than one interpreter per dialogue.)

Working with Interpreters

- Remind volunteer interpreters not to add their own opinions.
- Give interpreters written materials ahead of time, and go over the process with them.
- Make sure the interpreter feels comfortable letting the facilitator know if s/he needs more time.
- Speak in short sentences and keep ideas simple. (This gives the interpreter time to catch up.)
- Pay attention to the interpreter. Even if you don’t speak the language, you can probably tell if s/he is translating everything, or not.
- At the beginning of each session, ask the interpreters to review the guidelines.
- After every session, ask interpreters to translate notes that were posted on newsprint.
Note-Taking Tips

Every small group dialogue needs someone to take notes. This person's job is to listen carefully, keep track of the big ideas that come up in the dialogue, and list them, in categories, on large sheets of paper so everyone can see them.

- If there are two facilitators for your group, they can take turns recording.
- If a volunteer takes notes, make sure it is not the same person each session. (The recorder is too busy to take part in the discussion.)
- Caution: People should talk to each other, not to the recorder.

Note taking serves many purposes

- It helps group members stay on track and move the discussion along.
- It provides a way to capture the wisdom and common themes that develop in the discussion.
- Notes from all the dialogues in your program can be turned into a report that summarizes what you have done.

How to do it

- Capture big ideas and themes, not every word.
- Try to use the same words as the speaker.
- Check with the group to make sure your notes are correct.
- Some groups organize their records this way:
  - Areas where we agree
  - Areas where we disagree
  - Areas that are mixed
  - Action ideas
  - Things we are already doing

- Write neatly so everyone can read the notes.
- Save the notes so that you can refer to them in later sessions.
- After each session, share the notes with the program organizers so they can follow your progress.
ONLINE RESOURCES

Parents, Families, & Caregivers
Here is a sampling of resources to help you learn more about—and act on—the issues discussed in this guide. All of these resources are available online.

- **Dare to be You**—Offers various curricula and training for parents and teachers working to help young children become strong and resilient. Provides training, evaluation, and technical assistance to help families and teachers bring DARE programs into their communities.
  www.coopext.colostate.edu/DTBY/

- **Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center**—Website developed by Head Start just for parents. Here parents can learn about how children develop, how to help keep them healthy, and how to play with them to help them learn.
  www.eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/For%20Parents

- **Family Voices**—Strives to achieve family-centered care for all children and youth with special health care needs and/or disabilities. Family Voices provides families with tools to make informed decisions, advocate for improved public and private policies, and build partnerships among professionals and families.
  www.familyvoices.org

- **National Fatherhood Initiative®**—Provides community-based programming that helps local, regional, and state organizations provide fathers with resources that foster self-awareness, compassion, and an increased sense of responsibility.
  www.fatherhood.org

- **Nurse-Family Partnership®**—Helps low-income, first-time mothers become confident parents by partnering them with nurses who make home visits. The organization works with communities interested in implementing the Nurse-Family Partnership model.
  www.nursefamilypartnership.org/communities

- **Strengthening Families and Communities: 2010 Resource Guide**—Provides support for the people working with caregivers and parents and their children to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. The guide is based on information, tools, and strategies from the Department of Health and Human Services.

- **Triple P-Positive Parenting Program®**—Aims to prevent behavioral, emotional and developmental problems in children by enhancing the knowledge, skills, and confidence of parents. The program is a multi-level, parenting- and family-support strategy offered through organizations and government agencies.
  www.triplep-america.com/index.html
Early Child Care, Learning, & Education

- The Building Baby’s Brain series by Better Brains for Babies—Easy-to-read, research-based information that teaches parents about how babies develop, and gives them ideas about what they can do to help their babies’ brains develop in the best way.
  www.fcs.uga.edu/ext/bbb/factSheets.php

- National Association for the Education of Young Children—Serves as a professional development resource for early childhood educators. The association also conducts public policy advocacy for investments in high-quality, affordable early childhood education for all children from birth through age 8.
  www.naeyc.org

- National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center—An online library created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Provides information on early care and education. Topics include early learning, family support, health and safety, partnerships and collaboration, and special needs and disabilities, among others.
  www.nccic.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm

- National Institute for Early Education Research—Offers independent research-based advice and technical assistance for policy makers, journalists, researchers, and educators to support early childhood education for all young children.
  www.nieer.org

- Pre-K Now—A public education and advocacy campaign of the Pew Center on the States that promotes high-quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten for all 3- and 4-year-olds.
  www.preknow.org

- CDF Freedom Schools® Program—A summer and after-school enrichment program that helps children fall in love with reading, increases their self-esteem, and generates more positive attitudes toward learning.
  www.childrensdefense.org/programs-campaigns/freedom-schools/

- Tribal Child Care Technical Assistance Center—Helps tribes and tribal organizations work to improve the quality, affordability, and availability of child care. Operated by the Native American Management Services for the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, the center offers training, technical assistance, and information to help efforts to coordinate early childhood services.
  www.nccic.acf.hhs.gov/tribal/

- Zero to Three®—Website that provides easy-to-read, research-based information for parents, policymakers, and family service providers on a wide range of topics related to early childhood, including child development, health and mental health, safety, nutrition, sleep, child care, and much more.
  www.zerotothree.org
Health & Safety

- **Action Strategies Toolkit**: A guide for local and state leaders working to create healthy communities and prevent childhood obesity—Provides local and state policymakers with strategies and ideas for creating healthy, active communities, and for providing access to affordable healthy foods. Published by the Leadership for Healthy Communities program at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. 

- **Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs**—A national association that serves as a resource, partner, and advocate for state public health leaders and others working to improve the health of women, children, youth and families, including those with special health care needs. 
  [www.amchp.org](http://www.amchp.org)

- **Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention: A Sourcebook for Community Action**—A publication from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that reviews the effectiveness of specific violence prevention practices in four key areas: parents and families, home visiting, social and conflict resolution skills, and mentoring. 
  [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/IV_bestpractices.html](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/IV_bestpractices.html)

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**—A federal agency responsible for health promotion, prevention of disease, injury and disability, and preparedness for new health threats. The CDC website contains detailed information on many issues related to the health and well-being of young children. 
  [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

- **Community Food Security Coalition**—A nonprofit organization that dedicates itself to building strong, sustainable, local and regional food systems that ensure access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food for all people at all times. Its report, **Delivering More: Scaling Up Farm to School Programs**, offers insights into how farm-to-school programs could reach more students and schools. 
  [www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org)

- **Healthy Child Healthy World**—A nonprofit organization that brings together experts to provide parents, educators and health professionals with practical information to help reduce children’s exposure to harmful chemicals and to help parents and caregivers switch to non-toxic choices. The organization also advocates for and creates standards and policies for safer products. 
  [www.healthychild.org/main/](http://www.healthychild.org/main/)

- **The Incredible Years**—Provides parents, teachers, and children with training to help reduce children’s aggression and behavior problems and increase social competence at home and at school. Children who participate learn how to control their emotions and interact in healthy ways with other children and adults. 
  [www.incredibleyears.com/Library/show_dissemination.asp](http://www.incredibleyears.com/Library/show_dissemination.asp)
- Institute for Children's Environmental Health—A nonprofit educational organization that works to foster collaborative initiatives to reduce and, ultimately, eliminate environmental exposures that can threaten the health of current and future generations.  
  www.iceh.org

- KaBOOM!—Provides a model and tools for communities that want to find, improve, and/or build kid-inspired playgrounds on their own.  
  www.kaboom.org

- Prevention Institute—Creates tools and frameworks to prevent violence, traffic injuries, and chronic disease. Provides training and strategic consultation with government, foundations, and community-based organizations.  
  www.preventioninstitute.org/index.php

- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity—Works to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic by changing public policies and creating healthier environments in schools and communities.  
  www.reversechildhoodobesity.org

- Developing Your Asthma Intervention Strategies—Missouri Department of Health and Human Services maintains a website that provides examples of asthma prevention strategies and programs for children, including asthma day camps, community asthma prevention programs, asthma care training, and more.  
  www.dhss.mo.gov/InterventionMICA/Asthma/index_4.html

- mychildsafety.net—Website, created and operated by a parent, provides a child-safety guide for parents that offers tips on everything from bed rails to water safety to bullying.  
  www.mychildsafety.net

- National Healthy Start Association—A federally-funded program that promotes the development of community-based maternal and child health programs, particularly those addressing the issues of infant mortality, low birth weight and racial disparities in outcomes for newborns. The association provides a nationwide communications and technical assistance network for the exchange and dissemination of “models that work.”  
  www.healthystartassoc.org

- Safe Kids USA ® —A nationwide network of 600 coalitions and chapters in all 50 states that works to prevent unintentional childhood injury. By bringing together health and safety experts, educators, corporations, foundations, governments and volunteers, Safe Kids USA ® educates families, provides safety devices to families in need, and advocates for better laws to help keep children safe, healthy, and out of the emergency room.  
  www.saferkids.org

- School-Based Violence Prevention Programs: A Resource Manual—Online resource manual that offers a number of violence prevention programs, by school grade. A key helps readers see which programs have been researched and proven to be effective. Published by the Research and Education for Solutions to Violence and Abuse, a network that coordinates and supports research aimed at ending violence, especially violence involving girls and women.  
  www.ucalgary.ca/resolve/violenceprevention/English/table.htm
Family Economic Security & Jobs

- **The Benefit Bank®**—A web-based, counselor-assisted program that simplifies and centralizes the process of applying for many state and federal benefits for low- and moderate-income individuals and families. Its ‘one-stop-shop’ concept reduces the amount of time needed to apply for benefits.
  
  www.thebenefitbank.com

- **Centers for Working Families® (CWF)** started by the Annie E. Casey Foundation—A neighborhood delivery model that community organizations can implement, CWFs provide coaching, job training, financial services, housing assistance and other supports to help low-income families.
  
  www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/FamilyEconomicSuccess/CentersforWorkingFamilies.aspx

- **First Nations Development Institute**—Works within the tribal nonprofit, government and for-profit sectors to educate grass-roots practitioners, advocate systemic change, and capitalize reservation communities. First Nations offers a number of programs and services to help Native communities protect their assets and establish new ones for the long-term vitality of their communities.
  
  www.4884.ssldomain.com/firstnations/store/

- **MDRC**—A nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research organization that designs and studies new approaches to the problems confronting public education, low-income children, families and communities, and low-wage workers and people with serious barriers to employment.
  
  www.mdrc.org

- **National Center for Children in Poverty**—A public interest research organization dedicated to promoting the economic security, health, and well-being of low-income families and children.
  
  www.nccp.org

- **Simplified Earned Income Tax Credit Community Campaign Kit**—This manual from the Northwest Area Foundation provides information and tools to start up and sustain a local campaign to enable communities to maximize access to Earned Income Tax Credits and Additional Child Tax Credits.
  

- **National Transitional Jobs Network**—A diverse, national coalition dedicated to advancing employment solutions for people who have difficulty getting jobs and succeeding in work. Offers advice and technical assistance for programs to help people move into short-term employment, combining real work, skill development, and supportive services.
  
  www.heartlandalliance.org/ntjn/

- **Thriving Communities: Working together to move from poverty to prosperity for all**—A five-session discussion guide created by Everyday Democracy and the Northwest Area Foundation to help people talk about poverty in their community and take action to create a place where everyone can thrive. Includes a list of organizations, publications, and other resources that tell you more about poverty and help you take action.
  
Racial Equity & Equal Opportunity

- **Children’s Defense Fund**—A nonprofit child advocacy organization that pays particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before children get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble, or suffer family breakdown. [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)

- **Coalition for Asian American Children & Families (CACF)**—As the nation’s only pan-Asian children’s advocacy organization, CACF works to improve the health and well-being of Asian Pacific American children and families. While most of its work focuses on New York City, its online resources can be adapted for communities throughout the United States. [www.cacf.org](http://www.cacf.org)

- **The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc.**—Provides educational and health programs, trainings, and services, to give families, and educators the skills and information they need to raise healthy children, and to make sure those children are well cared for and have what they need to succeed in life. Also advocates legislative policy to improve the lives and well-being of Latino families. [www.chcfinc.org](http://www.chcfinc.org)

- **Facing Racism in a Diverse Nation**—A six-session discussion guide created by Everyday Democracy to help all kinds of people take part in meaningful dialogue to examine gaps among racial and ethnic groups and create institutional and policy change. Also includes a list of resources that address racism, ethnic relations, and inequities. [www.everyday-democracy.org/en/Resource.91.aspx](http://www.everyday-democracy.org/en/Resource.91.aspx)

- **Harlem Children’s Zone® (HCZ)**—HCZ’s mission is to break the cycle of generational poverty for the children and families it serves. Its programs include Baby College® parenting workshops; the Harlem Gems® preschool program, the HCZ Asthma Initiative, which teaches families to better manage the disease; the Promise Academy, a high-quality public charter school; and the Obesity Initiative. [www.hcz.org](http://www.hcz.org)

- **National Indian Child Welfare Association**—Helps tribes provide community-based, culturally appropriate services that help American Indian children grow up safe, healthy, and spiritually strong—free from abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, and the damaging effects of substance abuse. [www.nicwa.org](http://www.nicwa.org)

- **Project Clean Environment for Healthy Kids Training Modules**—Training curricula for health educators who work with farm worker communities. The modules cover health issues such as asthma, lead, pesticides, drinking water and waste disposal. Created by Farmworker Justice, a nonprofit organization that works with migrant and seasonal farm workers. [www.farmworkerjustice.org/resources-publications/training-modules](http://www.farmworkerjustice.org/resources-publications/training-modules)

- **Unnatural Causes**—A four-hour documentary series that crisscrosses the nation, exploring the root causes of socio-economic and racial inequities in health. The documentary’s website offers a discussion guide, tips for organizing dialogues, resources to learn more about health equity, and more. [www.unnaturalcauses.org](http://www.unnaturalcauses.org)
Research, Data, & Reviews of Best Practices

- **Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University**—The center translates and applies knowledge to improve life outcomes for children in the United States and throughout the world. 
  www.developingchild.harvard.edu

- **Child & Family WebGuide**—Provides reviews of trustworthy websites for parents and professionals who seek information on child development. All the sites listed on the WebGuide have been evaluated by graduate students and faculty in child development. The site is a project of the Tufts University Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development and Tisch Library. 
  www.cfw.tufts.edu

- **ChildStats.gov**—This website from the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics offers access to statistics on children and families, including: family and social environment, economic circumstances, health care, physical environment and safety, behavior, education, and health. Contributors to the site publish an annual report, America’s Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being. 
  www.childstats.gov

- **Child Trends®**—A nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that provides research, data, and analysis to the people and institutions whose decisions and actions affect children, including program providers, the policy community, researchers and educators, and the media. Also includes LINKS, a database summarizing evaluations of programs designed to enhance children’s development. 
  www.childtrends.org

- **The Future of Children**—Translates the best social science research about children and youth into information that is useful to policymakers, practitioners, grant-makers, advocates, the media, and students of public policy. The Future of Children is a collaboration of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and the Brookings Institution. 
  www.futureofchildren.org

- **Kids Count Data Center**—This website from the Annie E. Casey Foundation includes data on more than 100 indicators of child well-being. The Data Center has community-level data in addition to city, state, and national data. Data can be used to create maps and charts on the site, and can also be embedded on users’ websites or blogs. 
  http://datacenter.kidscount.org

- **Promising Practices Network**—Provides information on best practices and model programs that aim to improve the lives of children and families. In addition to summaries of programs and practices that are proven to improve outcomes for children, PPN also links to additional research information in all areas related to child well-being. PPN is operated by the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit research organization. 
  www.promisingpractices.net
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ABOUT EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY AND STRONG STARTS FOR CHILDREN

Everyday Democracy
Created in 1989 by The Paul J. Aicher Foundation, Everyday Democracy has worked with more than 600 communities across the United States on many different public issues. We provide advice and training, and then use what we learn to benefit other communities. Our innovative tools and processes have proved to be effective in furthering the efforts of people who are organizing dialogue that leads to change where they live.

Strong Starts for Children
Everyday Democracy’s Strong Starts for Children is a project of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s New Mexico-based initiative, Our Voices, Our Children.

Strong Starts for Children helps communities involve people from all walks of life in large-scale dialogue and action on early childhood development issues. Coalitions selected to participate in the project are in greater Albuquerque and several pueblos.

Our Voices, Our Children includes Strong Starts for Children as well as Common Ground, an initiative of Viewpoint Learning. The two initiatives are helping residents and policymakers combine efforts to advocate for new policy on early childhood development in New Mexico. The community and state-level dialogues will encourage stronger relationships, better ideas, and more strategic action to create a brighter future for the children of New Mexico.