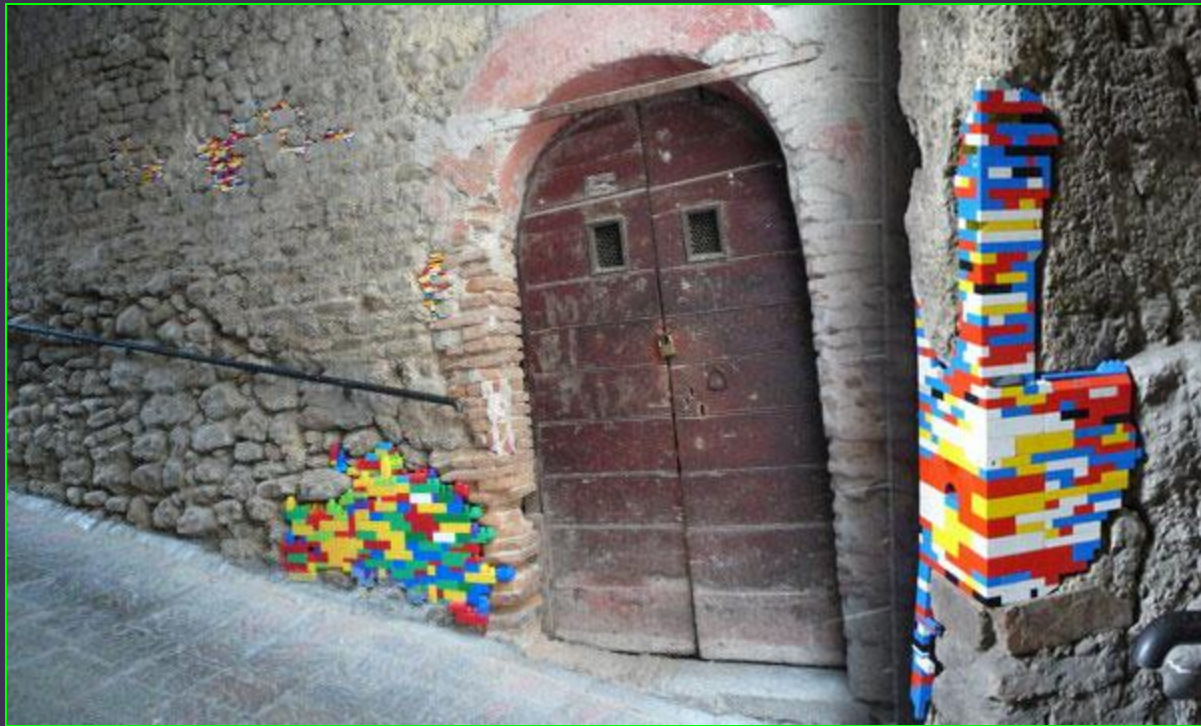


“This is Not a 7th Grade Math Class”:
**Facilitator Training of the Child Witness
Program**



Project Outline

- 7 interviews were conducted with program facilitators from across the Central West Region of Ontario.
- Interviewees had between 2 and 10 years of experience facilitating the program and over 50 years combined.
- Between all of the interviewees, they had experience facilitating each age group as well as the mothers group.
- We asked them:

What should new facilitators know?

- Their answers have been compiled into this training tool:



Program Strength

- Every interviewee agreed that the program was unique because it brings together the mother as well as the children. They liked that it addresses violence in many situations and includes peer learning.

“I like that it is a support group for children and that they come with a parent, so in a way, the whole family can be involved in it. I like for the children that there is a safe place for them to express what they have experienced. They learn from their peers that violence is not ok, and how to deal with their anger and emotions that are very scary for them.”



Curriculum

Interviewees were asked about their experience with the programs' curriculum and areas that they found particularly difficult to teach.

- The purpose of, and using the manual.
- Violence in the Family (at the preschool age).
- Session 1- talking about abuse and awkwardness of a new group.
- Sexual abuse.
- Addressing mixed messages.



Addressing Mixed Messages

“The confusing part for some kids is that it is ok to watch a hockey game and see violence but then they are told that they cannot hit. So it is acceptable in sports but not in real life? We address this and it is in the manual as well. We talk about where you see violence. It is one thing to address it in words but it is something else for them to experience it in the school, in a violent movie at home or when playing video games. You need to be aware and prepared for the messages around the kids, not just what you are saying.”



Facilitating

- Keeping kids engaged can sometimes be hard-especially when they may not want to talk about the topic.
- You need to use a variety of approaches.
- Wearing multiple hats- facilitator and crisis support worker.
- Understanding your group:

“ Sometimes you have to reach out more than a facilitator would regularly do, you are pulling and pulling for answers...”



Activities

Interviewees shared ideas around the use of activities to teach curriculum content.

“What we find effective with kids is we cover the tables with markers and paper and they can doodle while we are meeting around the dinner table. It is easier to talk when they can avert their gaze.”

“For the preschool age it is about getting down on the floor and doing activities at their level.”

“Concrete things”

“Having squeeze balls and when you talk about something or watch a movie they suggest. They can hold onto something they can squeeze and relax.”



Activities

We asked interviewees to share some of their more successful activities:

Body Map

Trace the kids' bodies on a big piece of paper. Then have the children point to the area where they feel pain or where they might hurt.

Wheel of Power and Control

Split a wheel into pie pieces and hand the pieces out. On the wheel there are categories (such as physical, sexual, emotional) and they have to work as a team to match the scenario in their hand with the category on the wheel. For example- yelling would be emotional abuse.



Skills and Traits

Interviewees were asked what skills/traits characterize a good facilitator of the program:

Sense of Humour
Down to Earth
Professional
Mature
Emotional Availability
Dedication
Assessment Skills
Patient
Humility
Role Model
Organized
Likes Kids
Flexible
Adaptable
Team Player
Creative
Experienced in Group Work



Skills and Traits

Rapport:

- *“I use humour to get them to laugh and feel comfortable. I have never really had the first two groups where it is just discussion based. We need to make sure they know it is safe but to do art and collages and stuff instead of sitting in the room and feeling pressure to talk. It is interesting how they start talking, so by week two or three they are chatting and chatting all the time.”*

Creativity:

- *“There is some autonomy with the book, so you want to cover the topics but how you do it can be creative. We sometimes use movies or do plays.”*
- *“Use creativity for sure, get the basic message but build on it. For example, if anger management is the topic, how might you address this with the group?”*



Skills and Traits

Knowledge Base:

- Understand how DV affects children.
- Knowledge of developmental levels.
- Know about the outside issues impacting certain ages.
- How relationships are understood.
- Grief and loss.
- Emotional expression.



Struggles

We asked the interviewees about the struggles they have encountered while facilitating the program:

Disclosures:

•“If there are any disclosures, in the sense that F&CS may need to be notified. Disclosures of self-harm or serious physical abuse may come out that were not exposed on the intake. You talk about confidentiality but then have to balance this with the duty to report. When looking at family violence this does come up quickly.”

Attendance:

•“I think the biggest struggle is that this is a volunteer program for the most part. Attendance fluctuates and it makes it difficult to get groups to norm together and mesh and work together.”



Challenges

We asked the interviewees about the challenges they have encountered while facilitating the program:

Negative Behaviors:

• “There are always behaviours that come out, the middle group and most recently the 4-6 group have had a lot of the behaviours due to the impact of violence. It can be quite the struggle. Your focus then is having to ensure that the other children and youth are learning but also having a good handle on this child who is having the behavior issues. The reality is that they are just having a different reaction.”

Fit:

• “The screening process is important. Some children thrive well in a group and some children absolutely not because the emotions are too involved. We have had several kids over the years who were not well suited for group.”



Self-Care



Triggers:

- “We all have triggers, maybe it is a kid telling you about sexual abuse, maybe it is physical aggression. Go through the manual and highlight things that might be triggers and decide what you are going to do if it comes up.”

Responding to Triggers:

- “You can easily carry the pain of a child with you. You need to find a place for it. The pain that a child or a family is experiencing needs to be placed somewhere.”
- “You need a safety plan for your emotions,. What are you going to do to take care of yourself and manage the trigger? You need to find out what relaxes you.”

Debriefing:

- “Debriefing is huge that night or the very next day. We do have opportunities to discuss with our colleagues what happened. You do self care without knowing it through debriefing. I usually do my own self-care on the side. Sometimes I just need to know that it does not end with me and that someone else will take things over that I cannot.”

Co-Facilitator

We asked interviewees to tell us their thoughts about working with a co-facilitator:

Debriefing:

- *“ We can talk about the group, how it went, what our reactions were, the kids’ reactions as well as the parents. That cohesiveness among the facilitators and the support you can give each other is valuable.”*

Generate Ideas:

- *“ When you are two people you bring your own enthusiasm and another perspective. You compliment each other and you model for the children. Each of us come with different experiences to share with the kids because of our own life.”*

Flexibility of the Group:

- *“ If I am facilitating and a kid is acting up, the other facilitator can go and work one- on- one with them .”*



Group Diversity

Repeated throughout the interviews was the message that you really need to understand your group:

“When doing the group, especially teens, you have to change methods. I do not do the same thing with every single group. Group one may be better with hands- on activities whereas group two might just like talking to each other.”

“What the group brings sets the tone.”

“ You really see a shift from male to female from the middle to teen. If it is a mix of males and females there is a different mix than all females, like I have right now.”



Own Limitations

Several interviewees mentioned that they struggle with their own limitations as a facilitator of the program and what they can and cannot help with:

“You are limited in the way you are interacting with the children. They come up with violence in the home but also the school. I feel helpless not being able to be a support for this child outside of the group. Inside the group we are talking about it but knowing that you cannot help outside the group, like at their school if they are being bullied, is sometimes very hard. Also, not being able to talk to a class teacher or to be an advocate on the behalf of the child, you can talk to the parent but you have to let go of it and just hope someone else takes over.”



Profound Words

“I sometimes have kids that finally feel they are being acknowledged for who they are or kids making friends for the first time.”

“Regulating emotions and negative behaviours- it is not deliberate but their way of communicating”

“I do not think that after 10 weeks everything is better now. No, we have just helped them take a few steps towards recovery. There are too many aspects we have no control over.”

“The kids need to know you are there to listen, and care about them and that every single thing they have to say is important”



*“You guide them on a journey,
and the majority of the work is
done in the families. We are
just facilitating them though
the topics.”*

We are just, one very important piece of
Lego. Our piece fits with all the others to
help build a system of support that helps
families heal and strengthen.