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Making the Family Connection: Use of Initiatives with Families



Facilitation is the art of opening doors and windows for others...facilitation helps the group discover its own wisdom and learning. (The Appreciative Facilitator)

*The voice is a wild thing, it cannot be bred in captivity.
--Willa Cather*

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This is a multidimensional approach, in an unfamiliar environment that creates climate of change and hope while allowing the therapist and clients to assess client capabilities, form genuine community, and focus on success.

CHALLENGE OF CHOICE: Simply put, the degree to which participants have choice in their process and content is the degree to which the outcome will be theirs. Choice allows participants to feel emotionally and physically safe. Individuals who feel safe are more likely to take risks: in physical challenges, in being open with others, and in considering other points of view. For some individuals, the profound discovery is that they *have* a choice – for their actions, words, thoughts, and even feelings. Choice can transform the entire tone of an experience. Consider the difference between someone who goes skydiving, and someone who is thrown from a plane. Choice is complex, and requires practice. It is about finding one's voice. It is about being allowed to make mistakes. Individuals who choose an experience are more likely to take ownership of their mistakes, and learn from them. "Challenge of Choice" lets participants choose the level of challenge that works best for them. Even if they choose to observe, there is always a way for them to participate. Giving other people choice builds trust. Of course, as a facilitator, you too have choice... giving your group choice does not mean you have to endure choices that are dangerous, emotionally damaging, unethical, or illegal. The key is to refer back to the ground rules – all choices must occur within that framework. And finally, what if they won't play? This can be the scariest part of encouraging choice. When this happens, don't panic. Treat it as relevant information, and ask yourself: what need is going unmet? It might be time to take a break, adjust the activity to make it more fun or challenging, to shift the focus back onto the participants, or to open the floor to observations about what is happening in the group. (Project Adventure, 1990)

FULL VALUE CONTRACT: The Full Value Contract is the baseline of acceptable behavior by the group, and a freely made commitment by all members to uphold them. They are an essential foundation for building trust within a group. Ideally, members should generate this contract themselves. However, it should include in some form the following: be here, be honest, let go and move on, be safe, care for self and others, and commit to goals. (Schoel & Maizell, 2002)

Everyone must agree, freely and publicly, to the Ground Rules to successfully use them. Using the "thumbs up" signal is an easy way to do this. Implicit in this process is that the rules will be broken. This is okay. The important thing is to address the breakdown, learn whatever can be learned, and re-commit to this baseline of personal integrity. (Adapted from the Five Finger Contract by Laurie Frank, in *The Empty Bag*, p. 14)

ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AGENTS: Safety; Trust; Effective Communication; Freedom; Belonging; Challenge; Enjoyment/Fun (Alvarez & Stauffer, 2002)

FACILITATION TIPS: Focus on fun and enjoyment. Use initiatives initially to break down barriers and create an atmosphere of support and trust. Emphasize physical and psychological safety. Stop an activity if participants become too physically or emotionally exhausted or it is not working. Focus on the process, not the product. Use time outs to elicit information to process about participants' interactions. Intentionally debrief after the initiative is complete. Emphasize solutions, not problems. Identify and disrupt problematic patterns. Identify group strengths. Use the group building initiatives as metaphors for daily living situations and to raise relevant issues for discussion. (Gerstein, 1999)

ADAPTATION

- ❑ Progression: Consider the continuum from awareness, to responsibility, to experimentation, to generalization/transfer.
- ❑ Environmental: Consider participant group size, physical space, ability level of participants, and props.
- ❑ Clinical: Consider individual and family issues, affect/emotional age level, cognitive age level, behavioral age level, personal space/boundaries, and emotional risk level.
- ❑ Developmental: Consider participant buy-in, previous experience, communication skills, problem-solving skills, and group dynamic stage.



SAMPLE ACTIVITIES¹ & PROCESSING IDEAS:

Optimal processing creates a context for dynamic change.

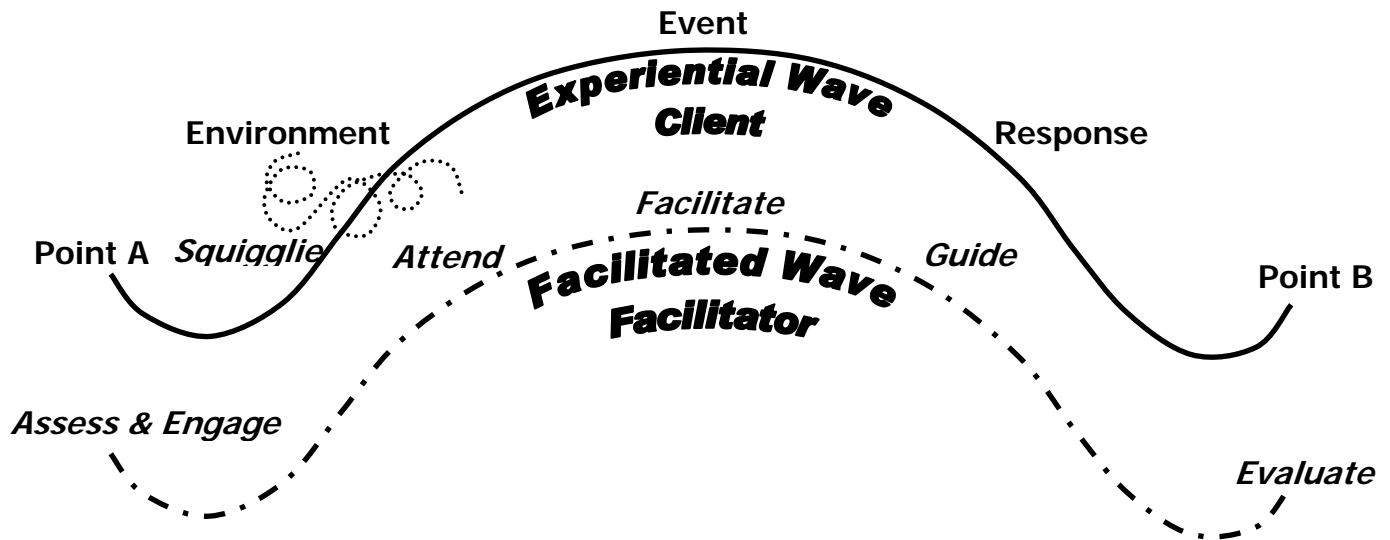
- **ABC Volleyball** (Using a balloon, create a letter goal to keep the balloon in the air –no two-taps, use a beach ball and see how this changes!): goal setting, group support, frustration tolerance, keeping things “in the air”
- **Back Draw** (recreate a picture shown only to one member by communicating only with touch sitting or standing with everyone facing the front of their line. Person at the front of the line will be given a drawing instrument and paper): communication, miscommunication, frustration tolerance, cooperation
- **Banana Bandana** (Stick a bandana in the back pocket of one group member and put at the end of conga line. Front person must capture the bandana): competition, leading, following, running circles
- **Blind Polygon** (form the designated geometric shape using fun noodles with eyes closed): communication, limitations, expectations, problem-solving
- **Candy Challenge** (set up two people in a arm wrestling offering one piece of candy for each “win” during a 30 second time period): “giving in” may get more, competition, assumptions
- **Chaos** (Put hula hoop in middle of circle with lots of throwable objects, place other hula hoops around, one object at a time, get the most resources as possible): cooperation, competition, assumed limits, cheating, fairness, resources, making sense of chaos
- **Circle Drop** (give each person fun noodle standing up. Give successive directions, i.e., let go clap once; let go, clap once, & turn around; etc.): competition, listening, increasing challenges and complexity of life
- **Each one, Teach one** (each person take turns teaching something 1:1 to another person in 60 seconds): leadership, communication, the value of diversity, and/or feelings associated with contributing positively to the group.
- **Human Camera:** (in pairs, one person is the “camera” and the other person is the “photographer.” The camera has their eyes closed and bumpers up and take pictures as directed by their photographer. The photographer stands behind the camera with their hands gently resting on the shoulders of their partner. The photographer will guide the camera to a place to take a picture. To focus the camera the photographer will gently position their partner’s head so that the “camera’s” eyes are directed toward the item to be photographed. When the photographer taps the camera on the shoulder, the camera will quickly blink their eyes): trust, sharing, supporting, communication
- **Starburst:** (Each person has a piece of candy. While holding on to the circle of webbing and with their eyes closed throws the item. The group is then told to get their piece of candy): styles of interaction, communication, and roles in relationships
- **Tennis Ball Pyramid:** (13 tennis balls. Define a quality that is important to your family and using masking tape, tape that quality to the ball. Build a pyramid using all 13 tennis balls. Then the families are to pick up their pyramids, move a given distance without the pyramid falling apart): cooperation, problem-solving, communication, family strengths and group dynamics
- **Warp Speed** (fastest time to have object touch each person – start by tossing pattern): cooperation, competition, assumed limits, pressure, success

¹ We acknowledge and give much thanks to previous AEE conferences and the fabulous resource books by Karl Rohnke, Chris Cavert, Jackie Gerstein, Faith Evans, and many others for these activities that have been adapted for family therapy.

EXPERIENTIAL WAVE!²



The process involved in experiencing life is familiar to all of us. We engage in it multiple times daily when assessing and understanding personal issues, planning home activities, managing our work lives, our friendships, and negotiating issues within our neighborhoods. We are also regularly involved in the facilitation of experiences, either as participants or leaders, for other people including our children, co-workers, students and friends. The experiential wave provides us a model so that we may better understand how to facilitate play with more purpose.



	Point A	Environment	Event	Response	Point B
Student	The whole of one's past experiences, values, beliefs, goals, etc.	External circumstances, e.g., space, weather, location, time of day, norms/values/ beliefs of the setting, etc. Squiggles are anything that takes energy, focus, & attention from the event.	The activities one engages in throughout life.	Generally guided by one's idealized view of life, life direction & goals (Point B) as well as one's identity & life experience (Point A).	One's idealized view of life, life direction, or life goals.
Facilitator	<i>Assess: Prepare by understanding the past history. Facilitate by finding out who showed up, what accompanied them, immediately issues to address, & the current experiential functioning.</i>	<i>Assess & Attend: Prepare by considering previously existing environmental conditions & determining what needs attention. Facilitate creating the desired environment by assessing current operational conditions (safety, trust, connection, enjoyment, challenge, freedom, & communication), what needs attention (the squiggles), & matching activities to address these needs.</i>	<i>Facilitate: Prepare by knowing Point B & planning how you might get there. Facilitate the process that will get you there (matching intervention, sequencing, etc.).</i>	<i>Guide Learning: Facilitate every opportunity to point the participants toward the experiential learning cycle as the experience unfolds, create opportunities for participants to think about their interactions/ thoughts/behavior in the here-& -now, & importance of self-understanding.</i>	<i>Evaluate: Prepare by observing what happened and noticing progress toward point B. Facilitate by engaging participant(s) in the experiential learning cycle, observing what happened, reflecting on the experience, generalizing beyond the here-&-now, & applying learning to life.</i>

² The Experiential Wave theory is excerpted from a work in progress excerpted by Alvarez & Stauffer. They acknowledge & appreciate the work of Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe in *Islands of Healing*, the first to use the wave analogy.

FAVORITE RESOURCES

- Sticking Together: experiential activities for family counseling by Jackie Gerstein © 1999, Accelerated Publishing, Philadelphia, PA 19106
- Quicksilver by Karl Rohnke and Steve Butler © 1995, Project Adventure, Inc., Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, Dubuque, Iowa 52002
- Tribes: A New Way of Learning and Being Together by Jeanne Gibbs © 1995, Center Source Systems, LLC, Sausalito, CA 94965
- Cooperative Learning by Dr. Spencer Kagan © 1994, Kagan Cooperative Learning, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675
- Cowstails and Cobras II by Karl Rohnke © 1989, Project Adventure, Inc., Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, Dubuque, Iowa 52002
- Islands of Healing (adventure based counseling) by Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe © 1988, Project Adventure, Inc., Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, Dubuque, Iowa 52002
- Association of Experiential Education (www.aee.org)

