

Trainer Tip: Training Small Groups

Have you ever walked into a training room anticipating a large audience to discover only a few showed up for the class? Below are some tips and tricks you can use to engage and keep the attention of small training groups:

Introductions and WIIFM

Setting the tone for the day and identifying participants' expectations can be facilitated with more purpose when faced with smaller groups. There is time to not only have each participant state their learning expectations, but to also share any expertise and experience related to the topic that he or she brings to the class.

Strategies in Training

Encourage participants to use examples and experiences from their own cases to build case studies, to use in role plays, and to create problem-solving exercises. This is a widely used strategy regardless of class size, but with smaller groups the trainer can guide or use a prepared worksheet to guide participants to develop detailed case studies by asking them to provide more history, identify challenges, outline what strategies have worked, and which ones fell short of the desired goal.

Trainers can take advantage of having more time and facilitate more application exercises. Write additional case studies for group problem-solving or role play activities and keep them on hand for when class size is smaller than anticipated. When role playing, the process can be redirected numerous times by having participants experiment with re-doing the role play, but this time with a client who is resistant, angry, quiet, or reluctant. For example, a trainer may say "Let's try this section again, but this time the client will be more resistant." Trainers can also create a twist or add complexity to a given case scenario by asking "But what if ..?" For example, "But what if the client arrived to the appointment under the influence of drugs?" or "What if you discovered the client was being battered?"

Trainers can periodically stop the training and ask participants to take a question "from the hat" such as, "What would keep you from implementing this strategy, practice, etc. on the job?"; "What have you been doing already that demonstrates this skill, activity, etc.?"; or "How would your job change if you started this practice?" Discuss the question and encourage trainees to share ideas.

Use a current news story, national event or pending legislation that has some connection to the training content to facilitate further discussion.



For example, if the content involves child sexual abuse, use a recent newspaper or magazine article and ask the group to analyze the story for common myths and misconceptions about sexual abuse. Or identify parts of a story that reinforce what we currently know to be true about sexual abuse.

Trainers can ask participants to join the learning environment by providing participants with written reference information on a specific topic, asking them to study the material and prepare a presentation for the rest of the group. Trainers may find it helpful to give them specific questions to answer regarding the topic.

Strategies for the End of Training

If the training involves content for which there may be different perspectives, create a point/counterpoint discussion that summarizes the concepts. The trainer must make sure the information given is accurate and should summarize the main points of the discussion.

Provide participants with links to online resources such as the *Field Guide to Child Welfare* and discuss how this and other valuable resources have led to the creation of standards for current evidenced-based practice. If access to the internet is available, there are valuable online resources that caseworkers never have time to access. Spend time surfing the net and highlight key resources related to your topic.

Conduct a Jeopardy-type wrap-up exercise that covers the content of the workshop. This may be done with cards or with the game function on the Classroom Performance System.

Allow ample time for participants to complete their action plans. One suggestion is to pair participants to 'critique' action plans before presenting them to the class. Ask each trainee to give feedback and suggestions on the implementation of the activities in the plan.

Are there strategies you've used to train small groups that have been successful? Send your tips to [Laura Hughes](#) and have them featured in the fall issue of *Common Ground*!