



Hot Tips for Leading the Benefits and Barriers Exercise

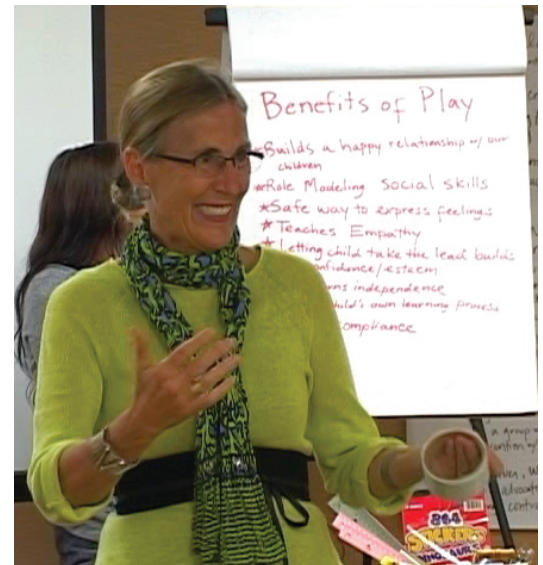
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Overview

The purpose of the Incredible Years Benefits and Barriers exercise is for group leaders to explore with workshop participants the benefits of the skill being taught in the particular workshop session (such as, child directed play, social, emotion, academic or persistent coaching, descriptive commenting, praise, incentives, self-regulation skills, proactive discipline, and problem solving).

Exploring Benefits: After reviewing the previous session home or classroom assignments, the group leader introduces the new topic by asking participants what they think the benefits are of doing the particular parenting or teaching method being discussed in the session. You can start this discussion by dividing the group up into buddy dyads or small groups to discuss the benefits. After that the groups report their reflections back to the larger group and their key points are briefly summarized on a flip chart using the participants' words. As you validate their ideas, you can explore with them the rationale for the approach. Highlight how the benefit helps children achieve their developmental milestones or their particular goals. For example, you might say, *"one benefit you are saying of emotion coaching is that it builds a child's emotion literacy, which in turn will help children learn to self-regulate."*



Exploring Barriers: Once the benefits are discussed the same groups break out again in dyads or small groups to discuss possible barriers to using the particular coaching or relationship building method or behavior management strategy. Afterwards these barriers are summarized with the entire group and the key points are put on the flip chart next to the benefits list. For example, some barriers often discussed are: not enough time to do this because of number of children, not understanding the rationale for its use, difficulty managing the children's behavioral responses when using the particular approach, not believing in the particular approach, and not having the patience or motivation to carry it out due to home or school context stressors.



NOTE: During the barriers exercise discussion be sure you do not evaluate the barriers, or try to solve the problem obstacles but simply write down the obstacle as participants state them. Also remember not to mix up talking about benefits and barriers at the same discussion. Do each discussion separately.

Promote Reflections: Next ask the participants to look at the two lists and think about the short-term advantages and disadvantages of the approach and for whom there are benefits or barriers, such as parent, teacher or child. Frequently group participants will see that the barriers are mostly problems for the parent or teacher, especially in the short term, while the long term benefits are for the child and their future relationship with their teacher and/or parent. Keep these discussions fairly short and succinct because you will have time to unpack them and problem solve ways to overcome some of the obstacles as participants discuss the separate video vignettes.

After the lists have been created and summarized remind the participants that they will have chances to think more about the benefits and barriers as the session progress. A statement such as, “we can see that there are many potential benefits to [topic], and there are also some barriers. As we go through the material today we can work together to build a list of principles that will help make [topic] effective and lead to these benefits and address your goals. Also we will note ways to try and reduce the barriers or avoid them.”

Example:



Benefits/Barriers Discussion

Trainer models leading a benefits/barriers discussion about the value of teaching and supporting young children as they learn social skills

• Benefits	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Important friendship skills• Children with these skills are more successful with peers• Children learn empathy• These are school readiness skills• Prevents conflict and melt-downs• Children feel better about themselves• More enjoyable interactions with adults and peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tantrums• Disagreements• Children too dysregulated to listen to coaching• Children should work problems out on their own• Too hard to coach social skills in a large classroom• Not enough teacher time to work with children in small groups



Rationale for Benefits and Barriers Exercise: The reason for doing this exercise is not just for the participants to think about their own particular teaching or parenting goals and obstacles but for the group leader to understand each individual participant’s viewpoint. During this discussion you will become aware of any possible misunderstandings about some aspect of normal child development, the nature of their goals for themselves or the children, or what family or school factors or philosophy may interfere with a participant’s motivation to use the approach. This information will help you as group leader know what questions to ask when mediating the vignettes and facilitating discussions. For example, when talking about a particular coaching method shown on the video vignette the group leader might address ways to use the method in large classrooms with limited time available or multiple children. Or, if there is a lack of understanding of typical child development, the group leader can talk about normal developmental differences in children’s language development, emotional regulation, ability to share, or wait, and temperament as well as what strategy might be most useful to meet a particular goal for the teacher or parent. Or, help the participants tailor the particular strategy being discussed to a particular child’s social, emotional or language level. For example, when discussing descriptive commenting, tailoring for a child with language delays by engaging in more modeling, prompting, limiting number of words, and using repetition and imitation.

Group leaders will address every new topic with this collaborative Benefits and Barriers exercise. This is an important opportunity for you to understand where your workshop participants are coming from before introducing the content details of the strategy being learned. Participants will benefit greatly from sharing important insights, knowledge, and their experiences with each other. This will build group support and trust which in turn will allow you explore in more depth the discussions of the vignettes and set up of the role play practices.



Key Principles of Benefits/Barriers Discussion



- Benefits/barriers are used to find out what teachers already know/believe about a topic
- Structure the brainstorm with benefits first and barriers second
- Group leader listens, validates, and paraphrases benefits while co-leader records the ideas
- Group leader does not challenge ideas, problem-solve, or try to persuade teacher of different point of view
- Group leader can validate teacher's point of view without endorsing the teacher's opinions: e.g. "So, one barrier to coaching social skills is the belief that children should work out problems on their own, without adult intervention."
- Benefits/barriers list will be used later during vignette discussion. Group will come up with principles to support the benefits and will come back to problem solve the barriers.

