Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Protecting Children in Wales

Child Practice Reviews:
Guide for Organising and Facilitating Learning Events

Child Practice Reviews: Guide for Organising and Facilitating Learning Events

This guide is intended for the use of LSCB *Review Panels* and reviewers. It sets out the process of the review, detailing roles and tasks at each stage and giving examples of methods and approaches for engaging practitioners and managers in reflection and learning. The guide should be used in conjunction with the statutory guidance, *Protecting Children in Wales: Arrangements for Multi-Agency Child Practice Reviews* (December 2012).

Contents

Introduction

1.1.   The learning and reviewing framework is intended to provide an environment in which practitioners and their agencies can learn from their casework. It is important, therefore, that attention is given to creating the conditions for learning from the very beginning of the process of case review.

1.2.   A key component of the new arrangements for child practice reviews is a facilitated practitioner-focused learning event which is led by the reviewer, appointed by the *Review Panel.* This event brings together the relevant practitioners involved in a case where there has been significant harm to a child or children so that they can share their understanding of what happened and identify key learning points for future practice.

1.3.   Reviewing serious cases can raise much anxiety in individuals and organisations and in turn anxiety can block learning and lead to defensiveness and an inability to reflect. The reviewer as facilitator has an important role in the management of this anxiety and so early identification of who is to undertake the role of reviewer is crucial. This is so the reviewer can engage at an early stage in the process, working alongside the *Review Panel*. This means that when practitioners gather for the learning event they will be better able to review, reflect and participate.

Creating the conditions for learning

1.4.   Learning is about progress, about developing and moving forward. The learning and reviewing framework brings people together in groups to work collaboratively, to share ideas and to enhance understanding. The group, therefore, has to be an effective entity in order that the task can be achieved.

1.5.   Ensuring effectiveness requires several preconditions[1]. Firstly, the individuals who make up the group need to feel safe in order that they can begin to open up and connect with other group members. If safety and openness are features of the group, then a modicum of trust will build between participants that will lead on to achieving the real work of the group, that of appropriate and constructive questioning and challenge which will result in the development of ideas and action plans.

1.6.   The creation of feelings of safety is a key starting point that can begin to happen from the very start of the review process. Clarifying objectives, setting out purpose and being transparent about expectations, all help to minimise defensiveness and manage the inevitable anxiety within organisations, systems and individuals.

1.7.   The building of trust within a group and the move towards challenge and change is not necessarily a linear process. At any point trust within the group can be lost for any number of reasons. Facilitating the process therefore requires constant

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[1] Professional Development Group, University of Nottingham in Charles, M with Stevenson, O (1990) *'Multidisciplinary is Different'* University of Nottingham.

monitoring of the group and sometimes a rebuilding of safety to restore openness and communication (see **Appendix 1**).

The reviewer

1.8.   The guidance specifies that the reviewer must be independent of the case management, may be a member of the LSCB or a member of another Board, or from a neighbouring authority, or a person with relevant expertise as required by the case. In the event of an extended review two reviewers are required; one who is independent of the case management but who has knowledge of the local context and a second reviewer who will bring external professional challenge, is independent of the board, and has relevant expertise. Both will have responsibility for scrutiny of the additional issues arising from the statutory responsibilities of the agencies and will work jointly with the *Review Panel*.

1.9.   The role of the reviewer is a multi-faceted one as it includes managing the task, facilitating the process, managing and facilitating the learning of the group, producing a child practice review report and, with the *Review Panel*, an outline action plan.

1.10.   It follows, therefore, that the role requires a wide range of knowledge, skills and abilities which include:

- The knowledge and skill base of their own profession.

- A thorough knowledge of child protection systems, issues and practice.

- The roles and responsibilities of practitioners, organisations and services within the inter-agency safeguarding network.

- The capacity to share all of the above. In other words, the ability to 'talk practice'.

- An understanding of the nature of multi-disciplinary working.

- An understanding of how adults learn.

- An understanding of group dynamics.

- Skills in facilitating and managing group process.

- The ability to shape an event but also to work in the moment with what participants bring to the group.

1.11.   Extended reviews require two reviewers. In some circumstances, another person may be appointed to work with the reviewer of a concise review. In addition to the knowledge, skills and abilities listed above, they will also have to think about how they can work alongside one another. If they have never worked together before, then this will mean spending some time getting to know one another in terms of knowledge, skills and styles as well as thinking about who will do what in order to ensure effective facilitation.

2.   Preparation

2.1.   At this stage of preparation leading up to the learning event, there are four main areas that the reviewer has to concentrate on and they are:

- Engaging with and working alongside the *Review Panel.*

- Gaining an in-depth understanding of the situation under review.

- Beginning to connect with those who are to participate in the learning event.

- Planning the event itself with regard to structure and methods of facilitation.

2.2.   Careful preparation is crucial in terms of promoting a learning environment, managing anxiety and paving the way for 'success'.

2.3.   Once the reviewer has been identified and commissioned then a meeting with the *Review Panel* should be set up to think about how the reviewer works alongside the group and to discuss and plan the next steps. The agenda will include:

- Revisiting the terms of reference and making any adjustments if necessary.

- Making decisions about timelines and summaries in terms of which agencies and services, who will be approached to complete them and the deadline for submission.

- Thinking about how family members will be contacted to see if they wish to contribute to the review and speak to the reviewer, and deciding who is best placed to make this initial approach.

- Consideration of the learning event itself in terms of possible participants; date; venue and duration. Most events will probably take a day on average. However, some might be successfully completed in half a day and occasionally very complex situations may need to be extended over two days. If the latter is the case then thought should be given as to whether these should be sequential or not. Two consecutive days, whilst intense, would ensure a continuous thread of themes and learning. A gap between the days gives an opportunity for further thought and preparation by the participants.

The stage of clarification

2.4.   Timelines and summaries should be sent to the reviewer by the *Review Panel* as soon as possible after the deadline for submission. This will allow the reviewer time for a first reading to identify main points, note what 'strikes' them about the situation and to see whether or not there are any gaps in information or any lack of clarity. It is also an opportunity to think about who should be part of the learning event.

2.5.   The next step is a second meeting of the reviewer with the *Review Panel*, also involving the authors of the timelines and summaries if they are not already *Review Panel* members. The agenda for this meeting should encompass:

- Clarifying and filling gaps in the information presented in the timelines and summaries as far as is possible. This could include seeking further information from time-line authors, Panel members or access to source material. It should also be recognised that it might not be possible to know some things until the learning event itself.

- Identifying issues and hypotheses to be tested out at the learning event.

- Confirming who should attend the learning event and encouraging *Review Panel* members to approach these people informally before they receive a letter of invitation.

- Confirming date, venue and duration of the event and who will be present in the role of note-taker.

- Confirming if and how family members are to be approached to contribute to the review.

2.6.   The first contact that the reviewer has with the participants in the learning event is via the letter of invitation. It is recommended that this is kept short and simple but makes clear that there is an expectation of attendance and offers the opportunity for direct contact with the reviewer if someone has additional questions and queries about the event. It is also helpful if people are given a structure around which to prepare as they will need to revisit their contact with the child who is the subject of the review. A sample letter of invitation at **Appendix 2** suggests they think about their involvement in terms of:

- Assessments.

- Decision making.

- Actions.

- Interaction with other professionals and services.

- Areas of effective practice.

- Areas where there could be some improvements.

2.7.   Panel members have an important role to play in helping participants prepare for the learning event. Such preparation can be facilitated by face to face meetings between the appropriate panel member and the practitioner.

2.8.   At this stage of becoming acquainted with the specifics of the situation, the reviewer will need to give thought to how to structure the learning event and this is considered in more detail in the next section.

2.9.   If family members who are relevant to the situation wish to contribute to the review by meeting with the reviewer, then it is best done before the learning event so

that family members' thoughts and opinions can be woven into the programme for the day and inform any conclusions and action plans. Family members can include parents, carers, grandparents, the child, the child's siblings and any other significant people. It is recommended that the *Review Panel* Chair or other appropriate professional is also present at that meeting. The venue for such a meeting will differ depending on circumstances. It is best if it is a neutral and comfortable space but it should be accessible to and acceptable for family members.

2.10.   The learning event will need to capture discussions and contributions and so it is important to identify a note taker for the event. Ideally this would be someone who is skilled in taking accurate minutes, who has an understanding of the territory but who will not actively participate in the process. There needs to be good rapport between note taker and reviewer and so thought should be given at the preparation stage as to how they are to work together.

3.   The event

Purpose

3.1.   The purpose of the learning event is to bring together key staff to reflect and learn from what has happened in order to improve practice in the future. Using a systems approach the emphasis will be on understanding what happened, considering why some assessments and decisions were made and how and what can be learned for the future. A systems approach does not stop at the point when faults in professional practice have been identified, it moves on to explore the interaction of the individual with the wider context to understand why things developed in the way they did[2].

3.2.   It follows, therefore, that in order to meet these objectives attention to the setting is important. The venue as well as the structure of the day must facilitate the process and so it needs to be arranged in such a way that participants can see one another and develop a conversation together. Rooms laid out in boardroom style or horseshoes or circles should assist this, together with space to move in and out of small groups and sub-sets, and walls or display boards where time lines and flips can be pinned up.

3.3.   If the event is to be held over a day, then it is preferable to provide lunch. This will help participants to continue thinking together in a less formal way and avoid disrupting the process.

Structure

3.4.   A learning event is different from a traditional training event in that it requires the facilitator to work in the moment with the material generated by the group rather than follow a set programme of inputs and structured exercise. However, in order for the event to have some coherency, for participants to engage with and work on the task in hand and arrive at some conclusions, it does need shape and structure without being over-structured.

3.5.   Thinking about the stages in the group dynamic provides a guide to the overall structure of the day. Heron's model[3] (**see Appendix 3**) highlights the need to break through the initial defensiveness of the group, to 'warm' them up in order that they can connect and communicate with one another and begin to be productive and work on the task in hand. Endings are equally important, so that learning and actions can be identified for participants to take away and use in their ongoing work and plans formulated to develop practice and services more generally.

3.6.   This guide has already talked about the need to address possible defensiveness and begin to generate safety early in the process but careful attention

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[2] Fish, S., Munro, E., & Bairstow, S. (2008) *Learning together to safeguard children: developing an inter-agency systems approach for case reviews.* London: SCIE.
[3] Heron, J.(1989) *The Facilitators Handbook.* London: Kogan Page.

to the beginnings of the learning event continues this. So an introduction to the event should cover the following areas:

- Introductions to the reviewer(s) and the note taker.

- A round of introductions to the participants specifying their role and a brief initial explanation of why and when they were involved in the situation under review.

- Clarification of purpose and process of the event.

- Setting some working principles or ground rules for the event and checking that everyone agrees with them. An example of Working Principles can be found at **Appendix 4**.

- Agreeing to call the child/children by their name(s) throughout the event.

- Setting out an overview of the situation under review and the questions to be addressed by the learning event encapsulated in the terms of reference.

- Drawing attention to the timelines.

3.7.   Once the scene has been set and the purpose clarified, then the learning event moves into the main task which is one of identifying key points, looking at who did what, when and why and highlighting assessment and decision making.

3.8.   To begin this process and building on the initial introductory round, participants can be invited to 'tell the story' of their involvement with the situation, specifying what they did and when this happened. This is best done sequentially with reference to the merged timeline so that the reviewer can facilitate each contribution in order of events.

3.9.   As the story unfolds, it will be important to ask participants to differentiate between their thoughts and actions at the time and the wisdom of hindsight afforded by a retrospective reflection. In other words it is about exploring the question 'why did we do that then?' and following it up with 'could we have done it differently and what would have helped us to do so?'

3.10.   As the discussion and thinking develops within the group, the reviewer should ensure the following areas are covered:

- Were the risks in the situation identified and understood?

- How were family members engaged with?

- What were the family's views at the time and what are they now?

- How did the professionals work together?

- What went well? This is about identifying effective practice and what facilitated that good practice.

- What could have been done better and why did it not happen at the time?

3.11.   To help people make sense of their learning and to keep moving through the process, it is important that at appropriate points in the event the reviewer pauses and summarises the discussion. This will also assist in the identification of emerging learning points.

3.12.   Attention has already been drawn to the importance of well structured endings to a learning event. At this final stage there are several aspects that need to be covered which include both individual and group learning, learning about the situation under discussion and learning about the process, together with strategies to ensure all of this can be put into practice. The tasks to be completed at this final stage are, therefore:

- To summarise the key learning points about the situation under review.

- To broadly agree the content of the learning output.

- To outline the next steps.

- To give participants an opportunity to think about their personal learning from the day and how to take it forward.

- To engage in some evaluation of the learning event as a whole including checking out how participants feel about the process. A sample evaluation form can be found at **Appendix 5**.

3.13.   To work through all the stages of the learning event and arrive at an outcome requires the reviewer to give some thought to styles and modes of facilitation. Heron's model[4] (**see Appendix 6**) suggests three approaches, all of which are valid depending on the task in hand and how the group is managing that task.

3.14.   Beginning the learning event requires strong leadership from the facilitator in terms of setting the scene and clarifying the process. This is the facilitator in hierarchical mode or leading from the front. As the event gets underway and discussion develops then the facilitator may move into co-operative mode, very much working alongside the group. Participants themselves may suggest a way of working and so for a time the group is leading with the facilitator in a supportive role. It is important that the facilitator is able to move through each of these modes, as appropriate, to suit the needs of both the programme and the group. So, for instance, if the group becomes stuck or discussions go off at a tangent then the facilitator will need to move back into hierarchical mode in order ensure things get back on track.

3.15.   If a learning event is to take place over more than one day, or one continuous session then there will need to be some flexibility in terms of where to break. Reconvening for the second part of the event will also require some careful recapping and reminding of what has emerged so far in order to help participants back into the learning and the reflection.

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[4] Heron, J. (1989) *The Facilitators Handbook.* London: Kogan Page.

Methods

3.16. To help the group think about and make sense of a situation together necessitates the learning event having shape and structure, but it also calls for a variety of materials and methods to assist discussion and sense-making. Both the terms of reference and the merged timeline should be visible and available to participants. The timeline could be pinned up around the walls. If the situation under review contained particular issues such as neglect then it might be helpful to take along some useful references to aid thinking.

3.17. There are a variety of methods which can be employed including:

- Focused questions to guide discussion and trigger thinking.

- Dividing into small groups with specific areas to consider. To capture discussion the subsets can be asked to record the main points on flips.

- Large group discussion to identify the significant events in a situation from the merged timelines, then smaller subsets looking at each of these events to think about:

  o What actions were taken.
  o Why were they taken.
  o What else could have been done at the time.
  o Why did it not happen?

- Reviewers' feeding in their thoughts of what 'struck' them when reading timelines and summaries as a means of generating discussion.

- Asking the group to identify a piece of effective practice and analyse its component parts.

- Having blank sheets of flip paper on the wall to note down significant learning points as they arise or any ideas for subsequent actions.

- Using 'post its' to add any additional significant events to the merged timeline as they are uncovered.

3.18. The above is not an exhaustive list and flexibility is essential in their use as some methods might not suit some groups. It is suggested that facilitators go prepared with a 'tool-kit' of methods so that if something is not working they have other things to fall back on.

Some practice examples

To move from introductions into reflection: *telling the story*

- Using the merged time line as a guide, the facilitator asks each participant to describe their involvement in the situation. This might be best done in chronological order and will include both the what and the why.

- As this is happening the group and facilitator(s) actively listen and ask questions to seek clarification.

- At the end of each contribution or period of time covered the facilitator summarises the main points.

- Any significant issues emerging or early learning points are noted on a flip.

- At the end of this session participants are given some time, in pairs or trios to process what they have heard and to flag up what has 'struck them'.

To move from telling the story to analysis

- In pairs participants move around the time line and identify what they perceive to be significant events in the situation. Mixed pairings (i.e. from different professional backgrounds) will help to deepen understanding of differing perspectives, roles and knowledge.

- These are charted on flips with some discussion about why they are perceived as significant. It is at this point that the facilitator(s) can also add in what has struck them, as well as feed in the impressions of any family members who may have been seen in advance of the event.

- Discussion about these significant points can then address the following questions:

1. What actions were taken and why?
2. What, if anything, could have been done differently? Why was it not done?
3. What would have helped at the time?
4. What did we do well?

To move into summarising and clarifying learning points

- The facilitator summarises what has been covered and what has emerged.

- Participants then give some individual thought to what they have learnt.

- Large group discussion about how this learning might be translated into action points and this is captured on flips.

- An end round of personal action plans where each participants says one thing they are going to do as a result of everything that has been discussed and covered in the event.

4.   After the event

Preparation of the Child Practice Review Report

4.1   After the learning event the task of the reviewer is to collate and synthesise all the material from the learning event. This will include the record taken by the note taker and any flips produced by the group, as well as their own impressions and understanding of what emerged through the event. The learning points resulting from the learning event then have to be transformed into a draft child practice review report using the agreed template outlined in Annex 2 of the statutory guidance.

4.2   The learning issues and conclusions from the learning event will inform discussion with the *Review Panel*. At this meeting there will be a revisiting of the original hypotheses formulated by the Panel and consideration of if and how they were covered within the learning event. A draft child practice review report will be agreed by the reviewer and the Panel, which together with a summary timeline, will go to the LSCB.

Presentation to Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

4.3   The draft child practice review report has to be presented to the Local Safeguarding Children Board for agreement and action, together with an outline action plan. It is important to describe the situation under review and take Board members through the timeline so that they understand the story and therefore the learning that has emerged. The presentation should also include brief description of the learning event itself in terms of participants, process and impact.

Debrief

4.5   Thought should be given to a process of debriefing for the participants in the learning event, for family members who may have contributed to the review and for the reviewer(s) and the *Review Panel*.

4.6   With regard to the participants in the learning event, it might be too complex to reconvene, but it might be helpful if *Review Panel* members took responsibility for feeding back to people within their agency or service area.
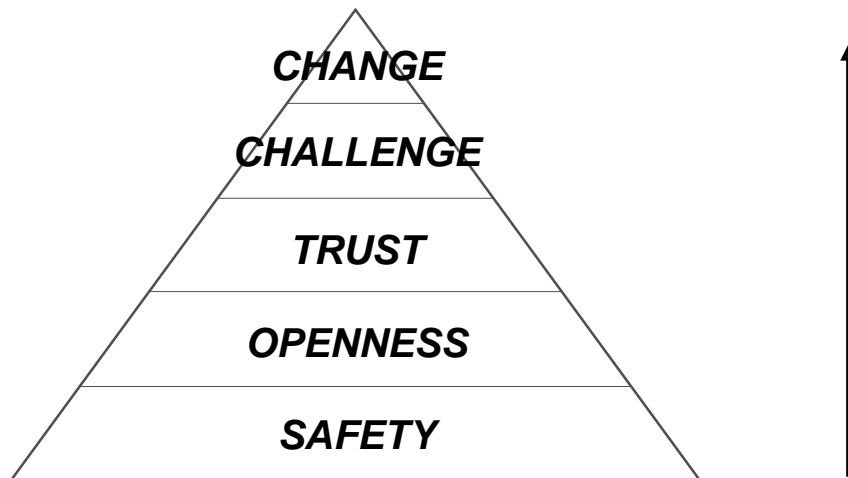
4.7   At the point that family members were first approached, before the learning event, the issue of feedback should have been raised. Some might prefer another meeting to explain what has happened and what recommendations have been made and what actions are to be taken, others might think a phone call or a letter sufficient.

4.8   As this is a new framework for reviews and LSCBs are learning through doing, it would be very helpful if the reviewer could meet with the *Review Panel* to reflect on the overall process of the review.

Appendix 1

Preconditions for Building Effective Group Relationships

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                    CHANGE
                  CHALLENGE                    ↑
                    TRUST                      |
                   OPENNESS                    |
                    SAFETY                     |
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SAFETY   In any situation where personal, professional or organisational change is at stake, the issue of safety is fundamental to the effective working of a group. Without this, group members will be withdrawn and defensive and the main personal agenda for each participant will be personal survival. Conversation will be at the trivial, social level while people explore the motivation of others and the potential threat to themselves.

OPENNESS   Only when people feel safe will they to begin to move from projecting a purely impersonal public persona to revealing a more human image of themselves. Once this process begins, group members become able to be open and honest, both with each other and themselves. They are able to share feelings and emotions and become open about their own personal/professional agendas and issues they care about.

TRUST   With this sharing emerges a feeling of trust in other members of the group. Once people can be relied on not to laugh, disparage or take advantage, then people will be very much more willing to take risks, both in what they attempt themselves and in how they interact with others, knowing that what they say will not be taken in the wrong spirit.

CHALLENGE   In this trusting environment, group members can become truly challenging, in the sense of "constructive confrontation". Procedures, behaviour, perceptions can all be examined and reviewed. Correlation (or the lack of it) between motivation and the effect of behaviour can be checked out and fed back.

CHANGE   As a direct result of such trusting and constructive encounters, genuine and permanent change or co-operation can then be expected.

Appendix 2

Sample Letter of Invitation to the Learning Event

Dear

Learning Event in respect of Child ….. (initials)
Date:
Venue:

One of the features of child practice reviews is that they involves agencies, staff and families in a collective endeavour to reflect and learn from what has happened in order to improve practice in the future.

In line with this a concise/extended review is being undertaken with regard to Child ……. (initials). The review process uses a systems approach whereby the focus is on multi-agency professional practice with the aim of identifying underlying issues that are influencing practice more generally.

As part of this concise/extended review, terms of reference have been constructed and time-lines prepared, but at the heart of the review is a learning event. It is this event to which you are invited as you were involved in work with the child/young person and his/her family and consequently you have something to contribute to the overall learning. It is expected that you will attend this event.

The Learning Event

The event is to be held at ………………. on …………. starting at ……… and finishing at ……….. Lunch will be provided.

The event will identify key single and inter-agency issues, learning points and issues for consideration by the LSCB. The event will be facilitated by the reviewer for the child practice review, ……………… who will adopt a systems approach and structure the day to help participants reflect, think and learn together in a safe environment.

The family are to be approached to see if they would like to meet with the reviewer before the event, in which case any comments and observations they might wish to make can be woven into the discussions and reflections on the day.

Preparation for the event

It would be helpful if you could give some thought to your involvement with Child ….. (initials) and his/her family thinking specifically about:

- Assessments.

- Decision making.

- Actions.

- Interaction with other professionals and services.

- Areas of good practice.

- Areas where there could be some improvements.

To help you with your preparation you will also receive the following documents:

- The terms of reference of this concise/extended review.

- A copy of the Welsh Government's guidance, *Arrangements for Multi-Agency Child Practice Reviews.*

We very much look forward to working with you at the learning event and hope you find this approach constructive and helpful. In the meantime if you have any queries or need further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Please return the completed reply slip.

Kind regards

Chair of the *Review Panel*

Appendix 3

Stages in the Group Dynamic

WINTERTIME:

The ground may be frozen and the weather stormy.

This is the stage of defensiveness, usually at the outset of a group.

Trust is low and anxiety is high.

SPRINGTIME:

New life starts to break through the surface crust.

This is the stage of working through defensiveness. The group is underway, trust is building and anxiety is reducing.

SUMMERTIME:

There is an abundance of growth and the sun is high.

This is the stage of authentic behaviour where the group is working hard and meeting its aims and objectives. Trust is high and anxiety is a spur to growth and change.

AUTUMN:

The fruit is harvested and stored; the harvesters give thanks and go their way.

This is the stage of closure. As the group draws to a close the members gather in and review the fruit of their learning and prepare to transfer it to life in the wider world outside.

Heron, J. (1989) *The Facilitators Handbook.* London: Kogan Page.

Appendix 4

Working Principles for the Learning Event: an example

1. Each member of the group has a valid contribution to make which will be valued and listened to.

2. Where there are differences in views, these will be heard sensitively or questioned in a way which is constructive and enabling to the process of the group and its objectives.

3. We are all striving to challenge and address oppressive practices in our work and the whole group will share responsibility for addressing oppressive behaviour or language in a way which is sensitive and constructive.

4. Participants will support the principle of confidentiality about personal feelings or issues which are shared during our work together.

5. Naïve questions will be considered the norm.

AND ……………… ????? What else do *you* need to agree in order to participate fully and effectively?

Appendix 5

Sample Evaluation Form

Name:

Job Title/Role:

Date of Learning Event:

1.   **Did this learning event meet its objectives?**

2.   **How do you rate this event?**

3.   **What did you find most helpful?**

4.   **What did you find least helpful?**

5.   **Is there any learning from this event that you intend to take back into your work?**

6.   **Any other relevant comments or suggestions for improvement?**

Thank you for your participation and your assistance

Appendix 6

Modes of Facilitation

❖ The hierarchical mode

Here the facilitator directs the learning process and does things for the group. This is leading from the front by thinking and acting on behalf of the group. Thus the facilitator decides on the objectives and the programme, interprets and gives meaning, challenges resistance, manages group feelings and provides structures for learning.

❖ The co-operative mode

Here the facilitator shares power over the learning process and manages the different dimension **with** the group. The facilitator enables and guides the group to become more self-directing and their view, though influential, is not final but one amongst many. Outcomes are always negotiated and learning processes are devised through collaboration.

❖ The autonomous mode

Here the facilitator respects the total autonomy of the group and does not do things for them or with them, but gives them freedom to find their own way, exercising their own judgement without any intervention on the facilitator's part. The bedrock of learning is unprompted, self-directed practice. It is not about the abdication of responsibility but rather the subtle art of creating conditions within which people can exercise full self-determination in their learning.

Heron, J. (1989) *The Facilitators Handbook.* London: Kogan Page.