

Professional Development for ECE's

Session #5 Facilitator Notes

**NEXT-LEVEL SKILLS FOR
EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATORS**

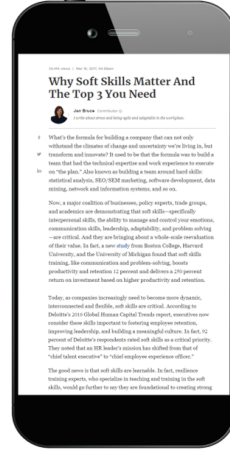
Session 5: Soft Skills

Welcome everyone. Today we are going to talk about soft skills.

What are "Soft Skills"?

- Ways of acting that make it easier to work well with other people
- Sometimes called "people skills"
- Now being recognized as extremely important

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/janbruce/2017/03/10/why-soft-skills-matter-and-the-top-3-you-need/#1cedd9fd76f3>



What exactly are soft skills and how can we learn them? One way to define soft skills is that they are ways of acting that make it easier to work well with other people. Sometimes they are called "people skills".

Many employers are realizing how vitally important soft skills are in their employees.

Either show the article using the link on the slide on the overhead, or direct students to review it themselves. The participant workbook includes 4 questions that can only be answered by reading the article.

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What happens when soft skills are lacking?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtpwgtoisgk>

Sometimes it is easier to understand what soft skills are when you see what happens when they are lacking. Let's take a look at this short video.

Show the video using the link on your screen.

Ask group if they think that the nurse who came late was aware of how she was affecting others. (She justified her actions by saying it was not her fault-she had too much to do.)

Ask the group if they have ever experienced these situations at their job. Also ask the group to consider what happens in a work environment when people do not have soft skills? The participant workbook includes both of these questions, with space to record answers.

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Activity



How do you see yourself?
How do others see you?

Soft skills are different from hard skills. If you don't know how to use a computer, someone can show you how, and with practice, you can learn how to do it very well. Soft skills are more difficult to get outside help with. They often involve developing an awareness of how others are thinking and feeling and realizing how our actions affect others.

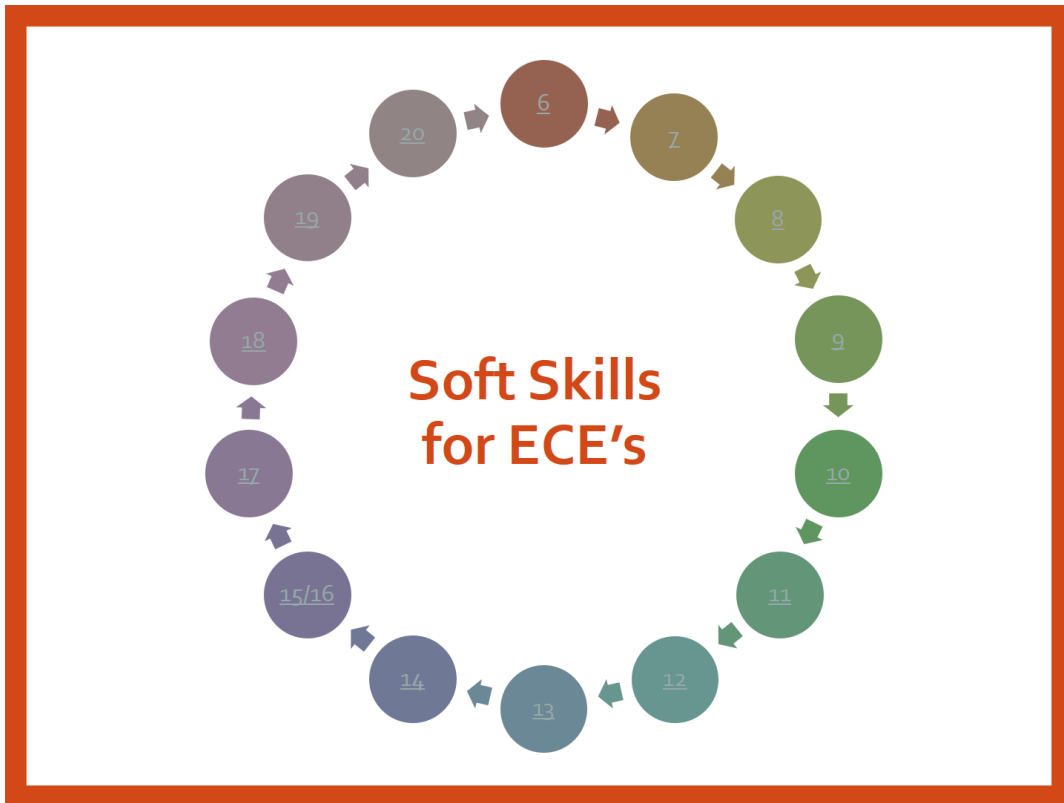
Let's try an activity related to this.

Activity:

- Divide the group into pairs. Hand out the sheets "As We See Ourselves" and "As Others See Us"
- Have the group spend about 5 minutes filling out the "As We See Ourselves" side
- Then have them give their sheet to their partners to fill out the other side. Partners should not look at what people have filled out about themselves.
- Have the partners hand the sheets back and let each person look at how their partners saw them. Compare it this to how they saw themselves.
- Allow some time to share their feelings about this experience. The participant workbook provides writing space, and asks students to write down one of their observations from this activity.

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Ask the group what the soft skills are that they use in their job. This question is included in the participant workbook, with space for students to record their thoughts.

After they bring up a soft skill and explain how they use it in their job, click on the circle related to that soft skill (see list below) to see more information about it and suggestions about how to develop it. When finished with that slide, click on the return button at the bottom of the page to return to the “Soft Skills for ECEs” page and let the group bring up another soft skill.

Slide 6 - Accountability

Slide 7 - Adaptability

Slide 8 - Attitude

Slide 9 - Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

Slide 10 - Strategic Thinking

Slide 11 - Influencing Other

Slide 12 – Leadership

Slide 13 - Motivation

Slide 14 - Presentation

Slides 15 & 16 - Stress Management

Slide 17 - Mindfulness moment for stress management

Slide 18 - Teamwork

Slide 19 - Time Management

Slide 20 - Learning soft skills

In the participant workbook, each of these soft skills is listed with a space for the student to fill in what it means. There is a second question provided for each of the soft skills, based on the information or activities included in that specific soft skills slide.

Accountability

- Care about the quality of your work, own your actions both good and bad
- Admit mistakes, take responsibility for them
- Learn from them
- Being accountable helps our relationships, our reputation, our career and our well-being



<https://prezi.com/k7uf4okq1a4q/soft-skills-accountability/>



Accountability means that you care about the quality of your work and you own your actions, both good and bad. Let's face it, we are all human and don't perform to the highest degree every day, but an accountable person owns up to their shortfalls.

A person who is accountable admits their mistakes and takes responsibility for them. Furthermore, they learn from them because they want to do a better job next time.

Sometimes people do not want to admit mistakes because they do not want others to think less of them. However, taking responsibility for actions actually helps to build relationships and reputations, careers and your own well-being. It shows that you are honest, trustworthy, and willing to learn and to improve.

Show the "Soft Skills: Accountability and Responsibility" presentation using the link on your screen. Participants are asked to record some examples of excuses mentioned in the presentation in their workbook.

Adaptability

- Stay flexible when changes or new plans arise
- Keep calm in the face of difficulties
- Deal with changing priorities and workloads
- Situations can change very rapidly when dealing with children, parents and other staff
 - Adaptability allows you to capitalize on the situation to teach new skills
 - Makes children feel heard, that they matter, when you adapt to situations as they occur



Adaptability is a vital skill for an ECE to develop because things can change very quickly when you are dealing with children. It is very important to stay flexible when changes or new plans arise, and they certainly will. What situations have you run into that demanded adaptability of you? Note that this question is also asked, with space to respond, in the participant workbook.

Another aspect of adaptability is the ability to remain calm when difficulties arise. If you become very flustered and upset when you are facing difficulties, you will find that the children will soon feel very insecure and may begin to act out.

Adaptability is required to deal with the changing priorities and workloads. A child may become ill and this may totally change the activities you had planned for the day. Another staff member can fall ill and suddenly other staff must figure out how to cover their position. Parents may run into unusual circumstances so plans have to change. There are many daily circumstances that require adaptability of an ECE.

If adaptability is one of your strengths, you can capitalize on the new situations to teach new skills. Also, children feel heard, and that they matter when their caregiver adapts to the situations as they occur. Remember that you are modeling behavior for the children. What skills are they learning from you?

Attitude



- You show your thoughts or feelings through your words and actions
- It shows through in your tone and body language
- You can read other people's thoughts and feelings through their body language
- Challenges to attitude
- Strategies for getting back on track-recognize triggers, don't take it out on others, remember role models, recognize small successes, continuous improvement
- Attitude test

https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS_89.htm



Your attitude will be reflected in your work whether you are aware it or not. You show your thoughts or feelings through your word and actions. You show it through your tone and body language. You can read other people's thoughts and feelings through their body language, tone, their words and their actions.

Everybody has bad days or bad moments. When you do have a bad day, what kinds of behavior are you likely to display? Do you try to keep everyone away? Do you try to get them involved in your issues? Do you get involved in arguments, blame others, complain or make sarcastic comments?

How can you get back on track when you are having a bad day?

One way to get back on track is to recognize your triggers. You can then become aware of when your attitude is deteriorating and can work to change it, or at least, not take it out on others. It is helpful to keep in mind your role models or what you would like your attitude to be, and work toward that. Celebrate even small successes and work on continuous improvement.

Having a good attitude attracts positive results. If you expect things to go badly, they probably will.

At the bottom of this slide I have a link to an attitude test. You can try this quiz in your own time. You may find that it helps you identify a few habitual ways of thinking that you were not aware of before.

Note that in the participant handbook, students are asked whether they were surprised by the results of the test included in the article associated with that link "Are You a Positive or Negative Thinker?"

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PASrBGtcrdU>



We can also use the skills we teach children to take the emotion out of the situation:

- Determine what the problem is
- Think of a number of solutions
- Pick one and try it
- Did it work?



Edward de Bono had a very unique technique illustrating ways to develop critical thinking and problem solving. Let's take a look at this short presentation.

White - Look at all the information

Red - What is your gut feeling?

Yellow- What are the good things in a situation?

Black - What are the negative things about a situation?

Green - Thinking outside the box and coming up with creative solutions

Blue - Taking control of the decision-making process.

This technique allows you to approach the situation from a number of different points of view.

In the participant workbook, students are asked to identify which of the Six Thinking Hats they think they wear most naturally?

We can also apply the skills we teach the children to our own situation. We help the children take the emotion out of the problem by first of all determining what the problem is, thinking of a number of solutions, and picking one to try. Ask afterward, "Did it work?" If not, try another solution.

Strategic Thinking

- Thinking creatively. How do you do this?
- Be proactive and do things before you are asked to, prepare for the future
- Develop an understanding of ideas that are opposing or different than yours. This gives you a more holistic view
- Always look for ways to improve
- Keep up to date on the latest news, studies



Strategic thinking requires that you think creatively. One way to do this is to be proactive and do things before you are asked to do them on the job. Think about what you need to do in the future.

If you listen closely and try to understand people who have different or opposing ideas than your, you can develop a wider understanding.

Strategic thinking requires that you always look for ways to improve. Note that in the participant workbook, this is reinforced and the question “what is something you’d like to improve about the work you do?” is asked.

It is also important that you keep up to date on the latest news and latest studies in your field. This allows you to make decisions and choices with all of most recent information at hand.

Influencing Others

- Respect is key. No one likes to be told what to do. Motivational interviewing is a good technique
- Listen to children, parents, other staff, give them some time to express themselves, ask open ended questions
- Affirmation of their desire, of themselves, their solutions or next steps
- Reflect back to them to clarify or check understanding
- Summarize problem and steps to take
- As a professional child-care worker you are being a role model for the children at all times, for parents



Respect is key when working on the skill of influencing others. Nobody likes to be told what to do Using some of the basic concepts of the technique of the Motivational interviewing can be helpful. Has anyone here heard of "Motivational Interviewing"?

- Let the group indicate share what they know if they have heard of this technique.

I will try to give an extremely brief summary: When someone is having difficulties, they know they need to make a change but it's hard, they are ambivalent, are unsure about making a change. In Motivational Interviewing the counselor asks:

Open-ended questions about the situation and listens closely to that person as they express themselves. They Affirm that person's desire for themselves and their solutions or the next steps that person wants to take. They Reflect back to the person what they have said to clarify and to check understanding. Then they Summarize the problem and the steps to take.

This is a way of working in collaboration with someone that you want to influence. You accept their potential, their strength, and use their good ideas, and keep their best interest in mind. Once again, to summarize, you use OARS:

- Open-ended questions
- Affirmations
- Reflect back and
- Summarize

In the participant workbook, space has been provided for students to record what OARS stands for. Again, it is important to remember that as a child-care worker, you are being a role model for the children and also the parents.

Leadership



- Children are watching and learning from you each day. Are you being a good role model?
- Parents may be relying on your professional expertise in dealing with issues concerning their children
- Other staff may be looking to you because of your experience
- Who do you look to for leadership? Where do you look?



As an ECE you are being a leader every day. Children are watching and learning from you. Are you being a good role model?

You are being a leader for parents as well. They may be relying on your professional expertise in dealing with issues concerning their children. Therefore, it is vitally important that you keep up on the latest research and the latest studies.

Other staff may be looking to you for leadership because of your experience. Are you being a good leader?

Who do you look to for leadership? Where do you look? Take a few moments to discuss this with the group. In the participant workbook, this question is reworded to ask “Who do you look to for leadership? What qualities do they possess that make them a leader in your eyes?” with space to respond.

Motivation

- Wanting to do something really well



- Driven to achieve
- Showing commitment
- Demonstrating initiative
- Being optimistic
- Connected to values

When you have setbacks, think about your values and plan and why it is important. Talk to someone in your support network, give yourself a visual reminder, and learn from those setbacks.



Motivation is a very important soft skill to have. If you are motivated, you want to do something really well. You have a quality of work in mind that you want to achieve, and you work very hard to do that. You are very committed to reaching your goal.

When you have that kind of motivation you take the initiative to reach that goal. You don't need to be asked to do certain things each time because you are already working toward the goal.

If you are motivated, you are also optimistic because you believe that you can reach your goal.

Each person's motivation will be dependent on their values, on what is important to them.

When you have setbacks in your work it is helpful to think back on your values and why this is important to you. Do you have someone in your support network that you can talk to remind yourself of why this is important? Can you give yourself a visual reminder of your goals? Can you learn from your setbacks and commit to reaching the goal?

In the participant workbook, students are asked to record an answer to the question "Who can you talk to when have a setback, or feel like you can't achieve your work-related goals?"

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Presentation

The way you look and sound to others, including:

- Dress
- Hygiene
- Language
- Manners

What is appropriate can change depending on who we are talking to, the situation we are in, or cultural differences.



Having a sense of how to present yourself at work is an important soft skill, and this can include physical aspects like dress and appearance, but also manner, language, how you sound to others. Let's first discuss dress and hygiene. What is appropriate dress and hygiene for an ECE?

Open this up for discussion in the group. Some of the issues to bring up can be revealing clothing such as low tops and yoga pants, dirty or torn clothing, tattoos etc.

In the workbook, students are asked to record an example of both appropriate dress and hygiene, and inappropriate dress and hygiene.

What is appropriate language in a daycare? Remember that you are modeling for children. Language must remain polite, no swear words or gutter language, even if you are angry or frustrated. The language you use can change depending on who you are talking to. You may use a lot of professional jargon when you are talking to co-worker for example, but not to parents or children.

It is important to consider the manners and dress expected by different cultures. For example, if you are wearing a sleeveless top, someone from a Muslim tradition may find that much too revealing. What you consider to be a casual use of language may also be considered very disrespectful by someone from a different culture.

Ask for examples of this from the group. What have they experienced?

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<h3>Stress Management</h3> <p>Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory: https://www.talent.wisc.edu/Home/Portals/0/OPC/2009/Letting%20Go%20of%20Stress.pdf</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We all experience at times. How can it be dealt with in a constructive way?• Recognize the signs of stress within ourselves and deal with them, rather than taking it out on children, parents other staff, etc.	<h3>Stress Management</h3> <table border="0"><tr><td data-bbox="857 369 1055 596"><p>Signs of stress: headaches, aches and pains, frequent sickness, fatigue and insomnia, digestive issues, changes in appetite, depression, rapid heartbeat, sweating, loss of libido. Be aware of your signs.</p></td><td data-bbox="1125 369 1339 651"><p>Self-care methods to reduce stress: Exercise, yoga, essential oils, mindfulness practice, supplements, reduce caffeine, keep a gratitude journal, chew gum, spend time with friends and family, laugh, learn to say no, avoid procrastination, cuddle, listen to relaxing music, deep breathing, spend time with pet.</p></td></tr></table>	<p>Signs of stress: headaches, aches and pains, frequent sickness, fatigue and insomnia, digestive issues, changes in appetite, depression, rapid heartbeat, sweating, loss of libido. Be aware of your signs.</p> 	<p>Self-care methods to reduce stress: Exercise, yoga, essential oils, mindfulness practice, supplements, reduce caffeine, keep a gratitude journal, chew gum, spend time with friends and family, laugh, learn to say no, avoid procrastination, cuddle, listen to relaxing music, deep breathing, spend time with pet.</p>
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Stress Management is a very important soft skill. Many of us will have very stressful experiences at some time in our lives from home, from work, or other sources and we may be underestimating how that is having an effect on us.

Hand out the Holmes-Rahe Stress inventory and have each person fill it out and add up his or her score.

Ask if any of the participants scored over 150. Ask if they were aware that the item mentioned on the inventory caused increased stress levels. Notice that even some very positive events increased stress levels.

Discuss some of the recommendations on the handout. Encourage all participants to develop a stress-reduction practice.

Students are asked to record the range into which their score on the Holmes-Rahe Stress Inventory fell. They are then asked whether they think they have the tools they need to cope with the amount of stress in their lives, or not.

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Activity



Mindfulness Exercises:

- <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/mindfulness-exercises-techniques-activities/>
- <https://positivepsychology.com/mindful-self-compassion/>



This slide has some links to some mindfulness exercises and meditations which can be used as resources. A PDF copy of the Mindful Self Compassion exercises can also be found on the Literacy Link South Central website here: <https://www.llsc.on.ca/skills-for-work---ece>

These meditations can be used by you to decrease stress. If you have trouble falling asleep, put on a mindfulness exercise before bed and let your body and mind calm down. Take a moment during the day to do an exercise and you will feel refreshed.

These exercises can be easily adapted for children. You may be surprised at how well children respond to them.

There are many wonderful mindfulness exercises and meditations on the internet.

- Ask if any of the participants have favourite sites for this.

Take a couple of moments to do a simple mindfulness exercise that can easily be done with children. For example:

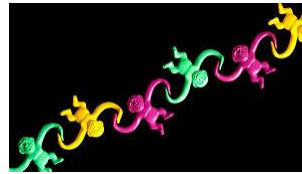
- Turn off lights in classroom. Say 'Take a few deep, slow, clearing breaths. Let your body relax; let any parts of you that need to wiggle or stretch do so. Feel the gravity gently pulling down on you, and let the chair (or floor) support you without any effort on your part. Just let go and allow yourself to be silent and not do anything for a few minutes. Think about your breathing, and let it flow in and out, in and out.'

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Teamwork

- Take responsibility for finishing your work
- Cooperate with others, help them get their job done
- Think about the whole team's job, not just your own part
- Treat others with respect
- Try to solve the problems rather than placing blame
- Involves trust
- Resolving conflicts
- Requires all kinds of people



Working in a daycare takes a lot of teamwork so this is a valuable soft skill to develop. People who are good team players:

- Take responsibility for finishing your work. You don't know what the other staff are going to have to deal with that day so do not leave extra things for them to do.
- Cooperate with others to get the job done.
- Think about the whole team's job, not just your own. Another staff member may have a situation that is very challenging for whatever reason, and there may be things you can do to help out.
- Treat others with respect. It will be difficult for others to help you if you need it when you have not been respectful to them.
- Instead of placing blame in a difficult situation, try to solve the problem
- This means developing a sense of trust with your co-workers
- It also means that if you are in conflict with a co-worker that you try to resolve it.

Every workplace requires a variety of personality types. Others may be very different from you but they have a unique contribution to make to the workplace and should be appreciated for it.

In their workbooks, students are asked to think about someone they have worked with who was a great team player. A space is provided for them to describe what made them such a good teammate.

Time Management

Making decisions about how you spend your time:

- At home and at work
- Prioritizing: what is the most important?
- Being productive
- Avoid procrastinating: make a start, ask for advice, break it into smaller steps, create deadlines for each step, get rid of distractions, and reward yourself for success



Planning your time = accomplishing your goals!



Time management involves making decisions about how to spend your time. As we saw in the video at the beginning of this session, managing your time to make it to work on time and ready to contribute can be extremely important and set the tone for the whole day. Managing your personal time outside of work so that you can be fully present and available for work is so important when it is your job to be responsible for children.

Working with children and dealing with the constantly changing situations that come up also requires that you are able to prioritize your tasks. What is the most important thing to take care of at this moment?

Being productive is an important aspect of time management. There may be times when all the children are relatively quiet and do not need immediate attention. These may be the times that you can fit in the other duties that you have.

You may have a newsletter to write, or a report and have found yourself procrastinating. If you tend to do this, just start the job. Perhaps you do not feel you have the knowledge or skills to do the job. If this is the case, ask for advice from someone who knows. Break the job into smaller steps and work at one step at a time. Give yourself deadlines for each step. Get rid of distractions so that you can concentrate on the job. Reward yourself when you have finished.

Time management involves planning your time so that you can accomplish your goals.

Students are asked to record some tips they plan to use to help them with time management in their participant workbook.

Learning Soft Skills

- Do people either have them... or not?
- Can they be developed?
- What is the best way to develop them?
- Think of a person who has good soft skills. Describe the situation in which they demonstrated their skills.
- How can soft skills be taught to children?



Now that we have discussed various soft skills, do you think that they can be learned? Do people either have them or not have them? Can they be developed?

What is the best way to develop them?

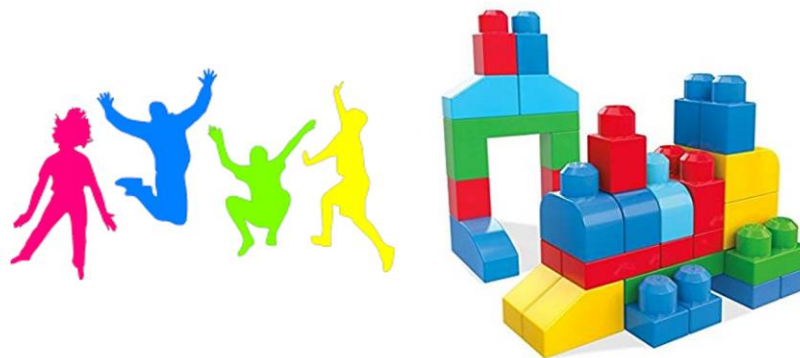
Think of a person who has good soft skills. Can you describe a situation in which they were displayed?

Since soft skills are so important for a person to be successful, how can they be taught to children?

Each of these questions is included in the participant workbook along with instructions to discuss them with others in the class.

- These questions can be discussed by the group as a whole
- A point to consider is that soft skills are dependent of the person having an awareness of themselves and others around them. Soft skills cannot be taught if there is no awareness or sensitivity to others around them.

Activity: Mega Bloks in Pairs



We are now going to try an activity in which we get to practice some of our soft skills.

- This activity is based on the Empathy Toy developed by Ilana Ben-Ari as demonstrated at <https://twentyonetoys.ca/pages/empathy-toy>
- For this activity you need sets of 6 mega bloks of the same size and shape but in different colours, and blindfolds for each pair of participants.
- Divide the group into pairs. Each pair will receive a set of blocks-12 blocks, with six in one colour and six in another. The 2 colours will have blocks of identical size and shape and each person in the pair will get one colour. They will also receive a blindfold. One of the pair will be blindfolded. The person without the blindfold will build something with their 6 blocks. The blindfolded person will attempt to build the same thing with their blocks as they are directed by their partner.
- After a few minutes, let the people reverse roles.
- Let each pair share their experiences with the group.

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Question for Reflection

Who are your role models?
What have you learned from them?
What do you hope to learn?



These questions are outlined in the participant workbook. Remind the participants to complete this reflection in their journals, and bring it with them to the next session.

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This Facilitator Guide was designed in 2019 as part of the series “**Next Level Skills for Early Childhood Educators.**” This curriculum is intended to support Ontario’s Early Childhood Educators in further developing the unique communication skills required in their role.

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