

# Chapter 11:

## Training & Technical Assistance

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***Vision:*** *The focus and commitment of Healthy Families America Training and Technical Assistance is to strengthen and develop a network of state training systems to provide Healthy Families America/home visiting training and technical assistance for staff from all sites.*

### I. Introduction

#### ***What kind of training is available?***

The Critical Elements provide a framework for training, requiring Healthy Families America service providers to receive intensive training specific to their roles, including both primary and wrap-around training. Primary training or “core training” establishes a foundation for the Healthy Families America program and instructs staff in their roles as Family Support Workers, Assessment Workers, Supervisors and Program Managers. Wraparound training complements primary training and covers an orientation to the agency and community, the details of parent education and information on topics relevant to the needs of families in specific communities, such as domestic violence or literacy.

As the program has grown, there has been a focus on building in-state training teams. Initially, training was conducted by trainers from the national office, in partnership with the Hawaii Family Support Center. With the exponential growth of the program, training institutes became necessary to train and certify trainers from states where growth was rapid and the need for training was more frequent. As these state training systems have evolved, they have built the capacity to support, maintain and expand the programs in their states. State training systems can tailor the training for Healthy Families America staff according to need and incorporate state specific components into core and wraparound training.

Training prepares staff to effectively work with overburdened families. In Healthy Families America it is an ongoing process, usually beginning with **orientation**, which is provided to new staff by agency personnel. Orientation consists of information about agency policies and procedures, service provision in the community and state, and community resources or services available to them and the families they will serve.

**Primary** training is mandatory. Primary training may be delivered by certified national or state trainers. Primary training assists program staff in providing services specific to their job responsibilities. Training content is designed around the Critical Elements and is based on best practices of family-centered and strength-based theory and service provision. If a state training system is not in place, PCA America and/or the Midwest and Western Regional Resource Centers\* can provide information about scheduling a primary training.

Primary training is conducted over five consecutive days with one day reserved for training of Supervisors and Program Managers. One day is spent with the full group

covering the basics of the program, including the Critical Elements. The next three days are divided into two role-specific training tracks – for Family Support and Family Assessment Workers. Supervisors should receive training in both roles to ensure that they will be able to provide support and technical assistance to staff. For more information, including costs and applications, go to [http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/network\\_resources/training.shtml](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/network_resources/training.shtml)

**Wraparound** training consists of ongoing or advanced training that includes information about the challenges faced by the community's families and the local resources available to support those families. This training is provided through partnership with local agencies and/or state trainers. Approximately 80 hours of ongoing training should be provided within the first six months of employment. Opportunities for ongoing or advanced training should be built into a program's annual operating plan.

### ***What is Technical Assistance?***

Through technical assistance (TA), support is provided to sites that are implementing or growing their programs. It is important to provide ongoing TA to ensure that programs adhere to the Critical Elements while adjusting their services to meet the needs of the families in their communities. Technical assistance is offered when planning a site, developing policies and procedures, designing evaluation, scheduling training, building training and TA teams, providing quality assurance, data management, and other issues related to delivery of Healthy Families America services.

Technical assistance can be available from a variety of sources including:

- State Leaders
- State Trainers
- Existing Healthy Families America sites
- Healthy Families America peer reviewers
- Local community experts
- PCA America national office
- Local or state partners
- Healthy Families America Regional Resource Centers of Excellence\*

Technical assistance can be provided in a variety of ways, including:

- Telephone conversations
- E-mail
- One-on-one meetings
- Group meetings
- Conference calls

### ***\*What are the Regional Resource Centers?***

As we continue to support and strengthen state systems, reduce duplication of effort and maximize the brokering of strengths and skills in the existing network, a plan for the establishment of Regional Resource Centers was developed. The Centers formalize what has been happening informally, as states have reached out to their neighboring states to help create and improve services to families.

The Western and Midwestern Regional Resource Centers support the administration of Healthy Families America in the areas of training, quality assurance and capacity building. Technical assistance in program development and identifying training needs for new and existing sites are coordinated by these regional centers serving 21 states. By assessing the needs, strengths and future growth of Healthy Families America, the Regional Resource Centers can look at regional trends, build capacity and support existing programs.

For more information on the Regional Resource Centers, click here:

[http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/network\\_resources/reg\\_resource\\_centers.shtml](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/network_resources/reg_resource_centers.shtml)

## II. Guidelines for Training and Technical Assistance

When an organization is considering the establishment of a state training system, the following guidelines will assist in developing a well thought out approach.

- 1. Establish a system to identify and meet a variety of training (core and wraparound) and technical assistance needs (including quality assurance, fiscal management, data management) for all sites in a timely manner.** A review of current sites and projected growth and how training is currently being delivered will begin the process of determining the current and future training needs in a state. A process should be developed to identify the training and the needs for sites in the state. They may entail conducting a survey or holding meetings to learn what support and information are needed. Sites should know who to contact to access training and technical assistance. A look at both state and local level training resources (for wraparound training) will help to determine how best to provide these through a state training system.
- 2. Ensure that there are enough trained staff to coordinate and/or provide training and technical assistance to all sites.** While building a state training system it is often necessary for out-of-state trainers to provide primary training. The process of certifying in-state trainers may take up to a year. It is recommended that a state certify two teams of Healthy Families America certified trainers. This would ensure the availability of trainers for the two primary functions and supervision (Family Support Worker, Assessment Worker and Supervisor). In some states where substantial growth in sites is expected, more than two training teams may be necessary to meet the training and technical assistance needs for all sites.

It is not uncommon for state training systems to directly employ certified trainers who provide primary, advanced and some wraparound training as well as technical assistance. State systems may also contract with other certified trainers whose main function is something other than training and who may be employed outside of the state training system.

Some states will schedule monthly or quarterly primary and wraparound training while states with a smaller number of sites may only schedule training as needed. In some state training systems, such as Healthy Families Georgia, programs also provide less intense home visiting services such as First Steps. Training for such a service may be built into a state training system, which includes training and technical assistance on a continuum of services.

It is not unusual for state training systems to call on out-of-state trainers who have expertise in specialized areas to provide more advanced training on a consultant basis. Often through informal and formal networking, states can identify resources in training both within and outside the Healthy Families America network. PCA America as well as the Regional Resource Centers can serve as a resource for identifying and linking training services as well.

- 3. Establish a process to evaluate the quality of the state's training and technical assistance system and to measure projected outcomes.** Evaluation of each training takes place to determine how effective the training experience has been for participants. Within a state an aggregate of scores for a particular training can provide a good overview of how all training is delivered and if material/information shared in training was understood. Assessing these scores can help identify areas that may need more clarity, further training and/or adjustments in delivery. Some states may develop pre-and post-tests for various trainings to ensure that participants are learning the information provided. A process called transference of knowledge looks at longer term outcomes in learning, measuring how participants were able to effectively implement what they were taught in training.

Evaluating technical assistance can be accomplished with a survey provided to sites to assess how technical assistance was provided, how it was implemented and if it was useful.

- 4. Ensure that funding is secured to enable all sites to have access to necessary training and technical assistance.** There are various ways in which state training systems may provide services. Money may be allocated directly to an in-state training entity that provides primary, advanced or wraparound training. In turn, sites may send participants to training free of charge. In other systems, limited budgets may only provide training and/or technical assistance for a fee. In this case, sites must budget for training and technical assistance. States may also want to consider bartering training, particularly for wrap-around training. If funding is an issue, try to find creative alternatives. A trainer with expertise in domestic violence or substance abuse may provide training to Healthy Families America sites for free in exchange for receiving training on child abuse prevention or providing strength-based services to families.

### **III. Examples from the states**

#### ***Michigan***

In Michigan, funding for training and technical assistance flows from the Children's Charter of the Courts of Michigan, United Way Foundation, the Skillman Foundation and the Children's Trust Fund. Training is coordinated at the Children's Charter of the Courts. Training is scheduled when a program site is developed or has to train new staff members. Word is put out to all the program sites in the state when a training is scheduled to ensure the group being trained is of optimal size. The training is advertised through their advocacy network at meetings and through e-mail.

State trainers are rotated to ensure that they conduct at least two primary trainings a year. Sites pay a per-person fee for training and this money in turn pays for trainers and materials. All trainings are evaluated at the end of each training day. At this time

Michigan is using a pre/post test design and is developing a method to evaluate the information gathered.

When operating on a small budget, it is important to schedule more participants for training than needed to cover costs. Also, holding trainings at different locations better meets the training needs of the sites across the state.

### **Florida**

Healthy Families Florida (HFF) is developing web-based training for 42 of the 64 subtopics required by Healthy Families America. Staff in local HFF projects will access the online system using a secure password and user name. Each training module is based on a subtopic and staff will take the different modules at their leisure. To complete the requirement for that subtopic, staff must pass the online competency-based test for that module. The online system will score the results and maintain a transcript for each employee. The employee, their supervisor, or central administration staff can view the transcripts to see what trainings staff have completed and their test results. In addition, program managers and central administration staff will be able to produce reports indicating what training requirements staff have met.

### **Georgia**

Funding for Healthy Families Georgia is through state appropriations. The state chapter of PCA America, Prevent Child Abuse Georgia, coordinates the training, technical assistance and quality assurance for sites, including the First Steps program. First Steps provides services on a more limited basis for families of newborns. Core training is scheduled three times a year, with Advanced Training also offered through their annual training symposium. Quarterly and biannual network meetings incorporate training into their agendas. When additional training needs are identified, they are conducted on an as-needed basis.

A survey of site training and technical assistance needs is conducted on occasion, but most training needs are identified through on-going site visits and contact with sites. State trainers are on staff at the Chapter and they provide all core training. First Steps Coordinators are trained to provide training to their site volunteers. Advanced training may be by state trainers or may be contracted out, depending on the topic. Sites do not pay for training. All trainings are evaluated and the information gathered helps to modify or enhance training content as needed.

Lessons Learned: Supervisors and program managers should attend all the training that staff attend so that they can assure reinforcement and implementation of new ideas and skills. The more training done at the front end, the less technical assistance is needed in the future as programs develop. It is important to listen to the voices in the field.

Balancing quality assurance and technical assistance is a challenge. Since the TA team members are also trainers, attention must be given to roles and boundaries as they interact with site staff. A 2-3 day primary supervisors training is required. This better prepares them to assume their responsibilities and they usually fare better on QA visits. Regionally based TA staff are helpful as they are seen as more a part of the community and it is logistically more efficient.

## ***New York***

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) has a contract with the state chapter, Prevent Child Abuse New York (PCANY). The chapter provides basic training (core), Supervisor training, training on some advanced topics, and quality assurance. Those programs funded by OCFS do not pay for training. Staff from other programs are charged a fee.

Core training is scheduled ahead of time, based on estimated need. Sometimes the chapter will schedule an additional training based on specific need due to a program expansion, for example. In the early years of Healthy Families in New York surveys were conducted to determine training needs. Information from the surveys, along with contact with program staff and through quality assurance visits, all help to determine content and topics for advanced training.

Trainers who are on staff at PCANY do not receive fees. However, a few trainers are based at programs with full-time responsibilities to these programs such as Supervisors, Managers or Assessment worker. These trainers provide two trainings per year free of charge to PCANY through a cooperative agreement with the employing agencies. Occasionally, there is a need for these trainers to do more training and they are contracted with on an as-needed basis for a fee.

PCANY has developed a separate three-day Supervisor/Manager training, which reduced the core training to four days and provides management with more comprehensive training. The training staff, along with a small number of outside consultants based in various programs, provide Quality Assurance visits to each site annually. Visits are followed by detailed written reports that include descriptions of strengths observed and recommendations for improvement.

PCANY publishes a quarterly newsletter for HFNY staff. This is a vehicle for disseminating program experiences and successes, a way to provide recognition for work well done to programs and staff, and a way to supplement information provided in trainings. A new project, which is designed to improve the transfer of learning from training to on-the-job performance, will involve long-term commitments from the managers and supervisors of participating programs.

Lessons Learned: There is no substitute for on-site observation of staff. These observations are the single richest source of information about how staff are able to incorporate learning from trainings; what are the most common learning needs; what are the barriers to staff performance; and what program environment best supports staff development.

## ***Illinois***

The Ounce of Prevention Fund (OPF) delivers training through a contract with the Illinois Department of Human Services. Technical Assistance to the DHS funded sites is carried out by their existing auditors who also provide TA to other DHS funded programs. The OPF sub-contracts with 11 Healthy Families sites as intermediary funder, and provides TA directly to those 11.

Core training is always scheduled for two years at a time. It is held downstate three times a year, and in Chicago three times a year. Sites do not pay for training. Along with core training the OPF provides many other trainings, including advanced training. Sites are encouraged to fulfill their wrap around training needs through community-based organizations where they are located.

Trainers are on staff at the OPF. Evaluations are done at the end of each training. A yearly training needs assessment survey is sent to each site and currently the OPF is working on a formal research training evaluation project, which includes pre and post-tests and post/post tests six weeks after training.

An Optional Training Certification program is offered to staff as a way to get credit for all the training they attend. The program has a recommended time span of 18 months, and includes a portfolio with a reflective paper and various writing samples, recommendations from Supervisor and participant, and 15 days of required and elective trainings. A one-day follow up training (to core) in Spanish is offered to those serving the Hispanic community. A similar training in English for Supervisors covers issues that arise in Supervision when the program serves a large Hispanic population.

Lessons Learned: Learning how to more accurately assess the training needs across sites is important in order to accommodate turn-over rates; keep training groups small enough to ensure interaction; assist sites in finding community resources for wrap around training; and keeping the range of experience in the Advanced trainings similar amongst the trainees. By keeping in touch with Supervisors we can better determine how staff is implementing training. This is now done through Supervisor trainings held three times a year where topics on supervision issues are discussed and a round-table discussion is held. Planning trainings two years in advance helps sites plan better. At the same time we need to remain flexible to add or subtract events as needed.

#### **IV. Training Resources**

For more information on Healthy Families America Training, please view:

[http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/network\\_resources/training.shtml](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/network_resources/training.shtml)

For more information on the Regional Resource Centers, click here:

[http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/network\\_resources/reg\\_resource\\_centers.shtml](http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/network_resources/reg_resource_centers.shtml)

## Conclusion

This guide has attempted to describe the breadth and depth of state systems development for home visitation across the country. The innovations are tremendous and new ideas and efficiencies are created every day that benefit the development of state systems for home visitation and ultimately the families the programs serve.

## Credits

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