

Section III: Framework for Training and Technical Assistance

How to use this section:

This section outlines the process by which facilitators progress from their initial introduction to the method, through increasing levels of competence. It describes the training, supervision and other supports to be provided to facilitators as they acquire skills and experience.

This section can be used by:

- administrators, as a tool in long-term planning for staff development and resource allocation;
- program coordinators, as a framework for setting short-term goals for staff;
- parents and advocates, as a means of identifying to agencies and school districts what resources will be needed to provide effective training for facilitators;
- facilitated communication trainers, as a way of describing the progression and scope of training to be offered.

The goal of all programs designed to train facilitators is the same: to produce qualified, competent facilitators. How the training is done will vary given differences in environment, and availability of resources, but all models will share essential common elements:

- an introductory information session;
- resource and information exchange,
- a continuum of beginner, intermediate and advanced training,
- direct supervision leading to indirect supervision,
- continuing education, and
- ongoing technical assistance.

Facilitator training is part of a broad training on disability, disability rights, inclusion, AAC, positive supports, and movement differences and accommodations.

Introductory Information:

Most training begins with the delivery of introductory information by an experienced facilitated communication trainer. This can occur on a one to one basis, in small groups, or in a workshop format. It typically takes from two to eight hours, with the longer workshops taking two to three days. This is intended as an introduction to facilitated communication and is attended by people interested in becoming facilitators as well as those school or social service administrators who

want to learn more about the method. This level of training may be useful in helping individual teams decide whether to explore the use of facilitated communication with a specific person.

People participating at this level have gained only an overview of facilitated communication and do not have the skills necessary to be a facilitator nor to do an assessment.

Teaching Beginner Skills:

This stage of training is designed to teach new facilitators basic skills in facilitation. Basic skill training is necessary as a part of exploring the use of the method with a candidate. It is also indicated when expanding the number of facilitators for an experienced facilitated communication user, or introducing new facilitators to accommodate a change in their circle of support. An essential part of this early training is simulating facilitated communication with a non-disabled communication partner so he/she can give feedback. The facilitator trainee should play the parts of both the facilitator and the facilitated communication user, so he/she can better understand the process.

Supervision:

The acquisition of these skills is an ongoing process that occurs over time with initial intensive support/supervision given from an experienced facilitator. Supervision is decreased as skills/competencies are gained and the facilitator is able to demonstrate reliable, consistent skills. (See beginner level competencies.) New facilitators need time to work directly with and consult with a supervisor. The new facilitator must also have time to practice his or her skills with the facilitated communication user. The amount and length of supervision needed is dependent on

1. the prior experience of the candidate/fc user,
2. the trust and confidence that builds between the new facilitator and the candidate/fc user, and
3. allotted time to build both their relationship and skills in working together.

The new facilitator should be familiar with Best Practices (see that section) in Facilitated Communication and should develop a plan for getting started which will be carried out under supervision; this plan should include specific objectives, such as working toward open communication. Facilitators should keep two portfolios- one assessing his or her own skill development and the other recording the progress of the facilitated communication user.

A facilitator at this level is considered a beginner and should work to master those competencies as delineated in the Beginner Category on the "Facilitator Competencies" list (see Section IV).

Intermediate level:

This level of training is for those facilitators who have mastered the basic level of facilitator skills. This typically refers to those facilitators who have had at least 6 months of direct work with a facilitated communication user. Intermediate level training focuses on increasing facilitator skills in the areas of independence and validation. It also may involve facilitators

receiving in-depth information on selected topics related to facilitated communication.

A facilitator at this level should work to master the competencies as delineated in the Intermediate Level on the Competency list (see that section.) Supervision at this level of training can be less frequent and indirect. Support may be accomplished more through phone conferencing and email correspondence.

Advanced Level:

This level of training is for experienced facilitators who have mastered the skills at the intermediate level. This typically means that they have had at least one year's experience with facilitated communication and have worked successfully with several different facilitated communication users. Facilitators at this level may be designated by their agencies/schools to serve as supervisors of others who are new facilitators. This would help to build within agencies and schools the organizational capacity to provide ongoing training and supervision for facilitated communication. These individuals are eligible to enter the trainers' program. Facilitators at this level should work to master the competencies as delineated in the Advanced Level on the Competency list (see that section).

Resource and Information Exchange: In addition to participation in various levels of facilitator skill training, facilitators should have access to up to date information on facilitated communication. This is critical to assist facilitators to build and maintain their skills. Agencies and schools, etc., should develop a library of resources and information on facilitated communication, such as

- web based information
- resource libraries
- newsletters
- bibliographies

Continuing Education:

In addition to participation in training on facilitated communication and resource and information exchange, facilitators should have access to ongoing support and opportunity to network with people who have extensive experience and knowledge about facilitated communication. This networking can occur in several different ways:

- access to groups and/or informal meetings where there is regular discussion of the various aspects and issues of facilitated communication
- access to conferences which discuss facilitated communication as well as ancillary approaches that enhance the use of the method (e.g., sensory integration;
- consistent connection to those organizations which articulate the current research and practice of the method
- access to facilitated communication users other than those whom the facilitator primarily supports.

Ongoing Technical Assistance:

New facilitators and educational teams often need support for problem solving issues of implementation and program development for people who use the method. This can be provided through onsite technical assistance, either single visit or ongoing, focused on working with the issues for a specific individual or situation (e.g., IEP planning and problem solving, classroom modifications, positive supports, peer relationships/friendship development). Technical assistance should be provided by a person who has expertise with the method and understands the broader issues of disability, communication, accommodations and programming needs. This person is often a trainer or a facilitator at the advanced skill level. People who use facilitated communication as their primary means of communication have often been employed to provide their unique skills and knowledge in this capacity.

General issues:

In considering the training process, the following points are helpful:

- Train more than one person as a facilitator. The two, three or more people should have consistent roles in that person's program/life and spend regular time with the individual.
- For a new candidate for facilitated communication, consider an assessment prior to introductory training so that from the outset of training attention can be given to the specific needs of the individual and the recommendations developed from the assessment.
- At the time that training begins, attention should be given to setting up a schedule for supervision, allotting time for practice, and developing strategies for networking. This overall effort establishes a system of support for the new facilitator which leads to a greater chance for a successful experience.
- Plan for the long term goal of independence right from the beginning. Provide for those involved with support to address this goal through continuous opportunities beyond the initial training.
- Experienced facilitated communication users should be involved in the planning of the training as much as possible. As training begins, they should take an active role in teaching their new facilitators how to provide support.