



AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS

A violence prevention program
for creating welcoming environments
through connection, belonging and inclusion.

FACILITATOR TRAINING MANUAL

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“Belonging means more than just being seen. Belonging entails having a meaningful voice and the opportunity to participate in the design of social and cultural structures. Belonging means having the right to contribute to, and make demands on, society and political institutions.”

john a. powell

Professor at University of
California-Berkeley

INTRODUCTION

The work of Authentic Connections is grounded in health equity, violence prevention, trauma informed practice and community engagement. The purpose of the program is to create connectedness, reduce isolation, and build and strengthen healthy relationships as a step toward violence prevention, suicide prevention, stress reduction and increased mental health and wellbeing in our communities.

The Authentic Connections program is guided by a set of principles. These are the essential elements that help foster and strengthen connections. Using a theory of change approach, Authentic Connections provides strategies and tools that create welcoming environments by increasing opportunities for connection and belonging for individuals, organizations, businesses and communities. When individuals, families, community members or work colleagues feel secure and connected in their lives then they can thrive at home, school, and work and can achieve positive health outcomes.

This is done by inviting individuals to consult, collaborate and be involved in making small changes by looking at the following interactions:

- How do individuals see themselves or their role?
- What does the physical environment do to promote or inhibit positive interactions?
- What are the predictable or repeated stress points?
- How can people be more intentional in creating interactions to promote connection and belonging?

The core principles of Authentic Connections can be applied and are effective in many different settings. The work is an ongoing process that provides individuals the ability to grow and reflect on the environment in which it is implemented.

It is not a one-time training session. It’s important to continue the process, expand and evolve the work to create a culture of respect, genuine care, connection and welcome.

VALUES

Mission Statement: The work of Authentic Connections is to promote social inclusion and belonging, strengthen healthy relationships and prevent violence in the communities in which we live, work and play.

Values of the Authentic Connections Program:

- **Equity:** We believe all people have the right to live safe, healthy and productive lives using the guiding concept of social justice. We are advocates for those who are systematically disadvantaged and work to vigorously address the determinants of health throughout the lifespan.

- **Prevention:** We embrace prevention as a core principle in all our work to promote health and well-being.
- **Respect:** We treat the earth and all people with esteem, dignity and compassion. We inform and educate the public and provide services that are responsive, ethical and inclusive.

HONORING OUR ROOTS

Honoring where the work began: the history of the word ‘Wakanheza’

Wakanheza (wah-kahn-ee-zha) is the Dakota word for child and translates literally to “sacred being.” Gabrielle Strong, a member of the Dakota Nation, formally gifted the word *Wakanheza* to Ramsey County in 2004. At the time, Ms. Strong was Director of the Ain Dah Yung Center which focuses on providing a healthy place within the community for American Indian youth and families to thrive in safety and wholeness. She also worked to revitalize the Dakota language through the Grotto Foundation. Ms. Strong’s formal gifting of the word *Wakanheza* to Ramsey County was to share the world view of children as sacred, to remind us all of the meaning and power of our words, and to both remember and include the indigenous languages of Minnesota in the work that we do.

The word *Wakanheza* specifically refers to children between birth and seven years of age. “The Wakanheza Project” was the founding program for Saint Paul- Ramsey County Public Health in the area of violence prevention models of this type. As the principles of “The Wakanheza Project” expanded to reach broader age groups, populations and environments, the additional programs of “Creating Welcoming Environments” and “Making Authentic Connections” were created. Today, we have assembled all of the experience and program components into “Authentic Connections” which can be implemented in various areas, with all ages, using the *Wakanheza* Principles.

In addition to the rich history of the word *Wakanheza*, the work of Authentic Connections helps to engage people in an understanding of their own unconscious biases and methods of “othering” and helps them to better understand how to create more welcoming environments for all. The Authentic Connections program addresses the issue of “othering” within society, relationships and self.

The power of the program lies in the fact that it simultaneously facilitates lasting internal changes within individuals, while providing tangible, effective strategies which can be implemented within organizations or communities. As a result of using the principles and strategies of the program, participants become the experts doing the deep work of intentionally identifying where and how to create environments and/or connections that reflect equity and inclusion for all.

“There were recurring issues with meltdowns between parents and children in the lobby. The museum staff assessed the physical space and realized the arrangement of the ticket line, the gift shop and the vending machines were creating a “Magnetic Force” pulling over-excited kids and stressed parents in opposite directions. The museum enlisted volunteers who were given the titles of ‘Funstigators’ and ‘Playologists’ to play with/distract kids and reassure parents while waiting in line. This eliminated the daily occurrence of meltdowns created by the “Magnetic Force.” Intentional changes to the physical and social environments greatly reduced the stress for both families and staff.”

- Testimonial from
Minnesota Children’s
Museum

REFLECTION

What words, images or phrases stuck out in your mind when going over the introduction and roots of Authentic Connection?

Did anything surprise you?

GUIDE FOR THE FACILITATOR

This guide is designed to give facilitators the tools they need to engage organizations, businesses and communities in the process of creating transformative change. By increasing their knowledge and using the tools, facilitators will be able to help people create a positive experience for those around them. Understanding the power each person has in creating more positive experiences for others is the key to facilitating such change within organizations and communities. Everyone has a role in creating welcoming environments and increasing connectedness.

The Authentic Connections Facilitator Guide consists of three main sections:

1. **Establishing Readiness** - Using the Authentic Connections Audit (*Appendix B*), learning the principles and understanding the definitions (*Appendix A*) will support participants' understanding of how to create a welcoming environment and will better prepare them for learning the strategies.
2. **Learning the Strategies** – Participants can focus their review of the strategies on those that they deem more applicable to a particular implementation area. For example, the strategies used when working with small children may be different from those working with adults.
3. **Additional Resources and Trainings** – These are for facilitators who are interested in pursuing additional research and/or learning about related trainings to build upon the base of the Authentic Connections program.

Using this guide, Authentic Connections facilitators will:

- Gain familiarity with the Authentic Connections model, history, key principles and strategies and necessary steps for leading a successful learning session and implementation within their organization and/or community.
- Understand the purpose, design and resources of Authentic Connections.
- Enhance skills for conducting group facilitation and planning.

Guidelines for fostering sacred space and deepening shared learning and interconnectedness

The practice of Authentic Connection requires the building of transparency, honesty, and mutual learning and understanding between individuals, groups, organizations and institutions. It requires being vulnerable and open in order to deepen relationships and strengthen mutual accountability.

No matter the level or area in which we are working, there are certain standards that always guide our work:

- Meet people where they are.
- Everyone has a responsibility in creating Authentic Connections with one another.
- Awareness and knowledge lead to skills, which lead to action.

“This program has provided creative new ways for making people and families feel more welcome, and increased staff awareness of potentially negative situations, and how to change/direct them into positive interactions. It has empowered all staff to engage with families and feel more comfortable and creative in responding to family and patron needs and allows us to listen to our changing communities without judgment. Additionally, it adds positive communication tools for all staff and helps to make the library a destination place for all families, youth and student for free safe exploration and growth.”

-Testimonial from Saint Paul Public Libraries

"It changed the way I thought about intervening. Before, I thought that intervening was telling them the 'right' way to parent, which I didn't feel comfortable with. Now I know it's being helpful and caring, and I like that a lot better."

-Testimonial from a Learning Session Participant

"Wakanheza principles are about empathy, not judgment. The learning session helped me to realize that I don't have to 'fix' these situations, only offer support."

-Testimonial from a Learning Session Participant

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

-Viktor E. Frankl, Neurologist, Psychiatrist and Holocaust Survivor

Your role as facilitator is to uphold the guidelines of the group. These guidelines include:

Time to think, process and reflect

- Enhance skills for conducting group facilitation and planning.
- Time to process and think before speaking.
- Time to connect with others to ask questions.
- Recognize when you may be wrong and learn from this.
- Time to think and time to process in small groups.
- Time to independently center yourself and reflect.

Honest and authentic dialogue

- Enhance skills for conducting group facilitation and planning.
- Be honest with people.
- Encourage open dialogue.
- Share ideas and stories from your real-life experiences.
- Listen with curiosity and willingness to learn, grow, and change.
- Have thoughtful and engaging conversations.

Mindfulness

- Enhance skills for conducting group facilitation and planning.
- Pause for mindfulness moments.
- Offer opportunities for mutual care.
- Take time for self-care.
- Reflect on the information shared.

Acknowledge bias and embrace new ideas

- Define and identify implicit bias.
- Assume good intentions.
- "I need to not let shame get in the way of my learning".
- What is shared within the context of the conversation is confidential, honored and respected.
- Embrace discomfort and recognize not all questions will have answers.

THE WAKANHEZA PRINCIPLES

The Authentic Connections Program is guided by a set of principles. These are the essential elements that can help us foster and strengthen connections.



Environment:

Environments have significant impacts on behaviors.



Bias:

Everyone has implicit bias, which impacts their judgment.



Empathy:

All people have the capacity to understand each other's ideas, feelings, and experiences.



Culture:

Culture includes deeply rooted beliefs and values that shape individual and world views that influence our interactions with others. Opening ourselves to the appreciation of all cultures and the opportunity to acknowledge differences and similarities will allow us to better connect with others.



Power:

Power differences exist within systems and are also experienced uniquely by individuals and impact the way that people interact with others and their environment. Acts of violence can arise from feelings of powerlessness.



Connection:

In any given moment we have an opportunity to make remarkable and profound connections with others when we are intentional and choose to do so.



At Women’s Advocates, staff struggled with the established intake procedure with new clients. Women, often with children, typically arrived at the shelter late at night, fleeing an abusive situation. The intake process consisted of filling out a large packet of paperwork upon arrival. Meltdowns often occurred – highly stressed women with tired and hungry children had a difficult time completing the packets. Staff assessed the situation and the agency decided to change the procedures. They started interactions with a new welcome message to women when they arrived, “We’re glad you’re here. You’re safe now. When was the last time you/your children had something to eat?” That was followed with a tour of the facility ending with the client’s sleeping space, and maybe a light snack. The agency reassessed the paperwork packet, deciding what was absolutely vital and had to be completed upon arrival, and what was less important and could wait until the next day. By changing the tone, the expectations, and the procedures, the staff were able to slow down, be present with the client, and alleviate stress. By clarifying the paperwork procedures, daytime staff knew exactly what to expect and were easily able to complete the paperwork the following day.

-Testimonial from Women’s Advocates

THE STRATEGIES (PARC MODEL)

This work is simple to articulate, but not often not easy to do, it must be intentional. In times of stress or challenges, the strategies listed below can help people reconnect with themselves, and with others in order to create a positive outcome. It's important to remember that our actions can make a situation better or worse. Please consider the following ways to help create welcoming environments and make authentic connections.

THE STRATEGIES (PARC MODEL)

PREPARE

- Complete the Authentic Connections Audit
- Learn about and acknowledge implicit biases
- Assess physical spaces
- Acknowledge personal and organizational capacity
- Learn about and understand systemic and organizational power dynamics
- Practice self-awareness
- Assess internal and client-facing organizational culture
- Continually build positive social connections within the organization and the community

ACT IN THE MOMENT

- Pause and assess yourself and the environment
- Show empathy
- Distract or redirect
- Find something positive
- Offer encouragement
- Be yourself
- Breathe
- Listen
- Give space
- Know your limits and use your resources
- Be aware of bystanders in the environment
- Ask questions
- Show appreciation

REFLECTION & RECONCILIATION

- Work to reestablish feelings of safety with those directly and peripherally involved
- Assess any need for privacy, break or space
- Discuss and reflect both individually and as an organization:
 - » Process feelings and actions taken
 - » Discuss potential causes and areas for change or improvement
 - » Provide reassurance and support to staff
- Potentially follow up with clients involved

CONTINUE ON

- Support staff well-being through mutual care and encouragement of self-care
- Seek additional resources or training, for example:
 - » Implicit Bias Training
 - » Trauma Informed Care
 - » Historical Trauma Training
- Make a plan to implement changes discussed in reflection stage:
 - » Organizational policy
 - » Physical Environment
 - » Staffing adjustments
 - » Organizational culture
 - » Staff training
- Ongoing intentional use of Authentic Connections program

IMPLEMENTING THE PARC MODEL

The first step in initiating the process is for the facilitator to really understand the principles and strategies. Personal experiences are an essential part of the foundation that will allow facilitators to lead sessions with authenticity.

Planning and Assessment

- Review the Authentic Connections Information Packet to understand the program.
- Make initial connection with Saint Paul- Ramsey County Public Health.
- Determine your objective and goals: What vision do you want to fulfil? What issue are you hoping to address? What barriers exist/do people face?
 - » Complete the Authentic Connections Audit.
 - » Identify repeated or predictable times of stress or conflict.
 - » Assess the physical environment from the perspective of everyone (staff, public, clients, adults and children).
 - » Identify what (if any) factors are creating an unwelcome environment.
- If appropriate/necessary reach out to County staff. This meeting will give you/your organization and the County staff a chance to get to know each other, discuss what challenges your organization wants to address and brainstorm implementation strategies for Authentic Connections.
- Secure support from leadership and determine if this program is the right fit for your organization at this time. Support from organizational leadership is critical to successful implementation of Authentic Connections. Share your personal passion and vision of how implementing Authentic Connections could benefit the agency, business or community with those in leadership. Determine if there is a collective vision and establish whether this program is the right fit and if there is commitment to implement and sustain the program at this time.
- Determine the measures you would like to use for data collection. What do you hope to change? How will you know if implementing the session(s) is successful? Examples can include: Fewer 911 calls, fewer incidents requiring immediate extra support staff, or increases in positive client, customer, patient or staff feedback.
- Establish who will be involved and identify a point person. Work together to plan, implement, evaluate and communicate through the entire process.

“Although this approach may seem obvious, our experience (inside and outside of the shelter) is that generally people do not approach others who are expressing anger, frustration or actually physically hurting their children. With over 1000 women and children utilizing our shelter each year, we often do not see mothers or children at their best. By consistently applying the Wakanheza Principles, approaching each situation in a non-judgmental positive manner, offering a diversion or helping directly with a child, we have made a big difference in our work.”

-Testimonial from
Women’s Advocates

“As a nonprofit organization working to increase access to health care coverage, Portico Healthnet has been fortunate to partner with Authentic Connections for many years. Their framework has helped us make our office space welcoming and inclusive for all Minnesotans and prioritize self-care resources to support our staff. Their ongoing guidance has helped us learn about de-escalation techniques, health equity and implicit bias in order to better serve our clients. Our work together even inspired a staff-led art project design to represent our work, our staff and the communities we serve. We are so grateful to have this resource in our community and we look forward to many more years of partnership.”

-Testimonial from Portico Healthnet, 2019

- Plan for all staff/volunteers/community members to participate in the learning sessions. Everyone in the environment is responsible for the environment. Identify any logistical barriers (work schedules, location, etc.). Some agencies have offered multiple sessions of the same content, in order to assure that everyone has ability to attend. Emphasize that everyone has the responsibility in creating authentic connections with one another.

Identify Internal Resources

- Identify champions within the agency. These are individuals who are passionate about the principles and strategies and will eagerly move the work forward.
- Identify budget needs – e.g. space, time, materials.

The Learning Session

- Host the learning session(s), ensuring that everyone, in every position, is able to attend. A two-hour session is ideal. (*See Authentic Connections Learning Session Lesson Plan in Appendix B*)
- Be intentional about creating a welcoming, safe, respectful, positive, and fun learning environment. Provide food and beverages, if you are able. Set up the room with tables to allow for small group work. Use a microphone if the room is large, to ensure that everyone is able to hear. Provide materials for small group work – paper, markers, post-it notes, etc. Consider accessibility needs including accommodations for those with impaired vision or hearing and those with extra learning needs.
- Ensure that all participants learn how to apply the principles and strategies for themselves, with their colleagues and with the clients they serve.
- Conduct any data collection/measurement your planning team has identified.
- Encourage your staff to practice their new knowledge and skills.
- Collect learning session evaluations from participants to understand their experiences.

Internal Debrief

- Review the summary of learning session participant evaluation responses.
- Conduct a debrief of the session so participants are able to express their thoughts immediately, in the moment. Our experience has shown that people are less likely to provide open-ended responses the further they get from the session.

- Have the planning team evaluate the process. What did you learn? How will leaders and staff use it? What changes do you hope to see? What are the next steps?
- Share and discuss the evaluation conclusions.

Sustainability

- Regularly discuss staff experiences and progress. Encourage staff to practice their new knowledge and skills.
- Put into place sustainability measures such as: a section in a weekly or monthly staff email, setting aside time during meetings to discuss Authentic Connections, or putting up reminders of the principles or key strategies in highly visual spaces. *(See Sustainability Section for more information)*
- Loop back to your original audit. Did you solve the original issue you wanted to? What are you measuring? Where are you now?
- Make needed changes based on the evaluation feedback such as encouraging new strategies, emphasizing certain practices, exploring complimentary trainings/learning or having a refresher learning session.
- Remember that doing Authentic Connections in an ongoing endeavor and your implementation of it may change as the needs of your organization and the population it serves changes. The process is cyclical and you can revisit any step as needed.

SUSTAINING AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS

Authentic Connections is an ongoing process that transforms the culture of organizations over time. The principles and strategies have been described as the ‘spirit we bring’ or ‘face we wear’ by staff. Please consider the following elements when thinking about how to sustain Authentic Connections in your organization:

People

Acknowledge that this work is simple to articulate, but often not easy to do, it must be intentional. People need to take care of themselves in order to share their best self with others.

- Brainstorm with your staff/volunteers/community members about what kinds of mutual care and self-care make sense for them.
- Ensure that your organization’s leadership supports and models this. Some examples may include: building movement and stretch breaks into the work day, providing nutritious and healthy snacks at work meetings (not sugar and caffeine), using humor, getting out into nature, listening to music, actively connecting and reaching out to colleagues on a regular basis, getting enough sleep, debriefing with colleagues and supervisors immediately following a stressful incident and more.

“The YMCA engaged elders in a series of “Making Authentic Connections” dialogues with young people from a community youth program. Through the dialogues and shared meals, the two groups discovered they have many things in common and unlikely friendships were forged. Subsequently, the groups planned community service projects and fun outings together that were not part of the Making Authentic Connections programming. YMCA staff reported seeing elders and youth greeting one another in friendly ways including hugs and high fives. Prior to these sessions, there were no ways in which the two groups had connected or formed relationships.”

-Testimonial from the YMCA



Students from the Twin Cities Academy joined seniors at a local independent living residence to play bingo, Uno and other games. Several of these students were returning to the residence as they had participated in the Making Authentic Connections sessions the previous school year. The students were in general a little nervous about meeting the residents as many did not have regular contact with older adults in their day to day life.

Two of the students who had been part of the MAC program the previous year were delighted to reconnect with one of the residents. Since the beginning of the MAC sessions, these two young women had bonded with one of the residents, and in fact made several visits on their own to see the resident. Neither of these students had grandparents or any older adult in their circle, and they were interested in hearing about her childhood, where she had grown up, and in turn, the resident asked about what kind of music or food they liked. The resident also appreciated the visits and the conversations as she is estranged from her family and has not met her grandchildren although the family lives only a few miles away.

The relationship between these two very different women has had an impact on each of their lives. The senior, who has recently stopped therapy for a very aggressive cancer, often mentions how important the connection to these students is, and how it has made such a positive experience when she was struggling with her health.

-Testimonial from East Side Elders

People (continued)

- Mutual care also refers to an organization’s commitment to providing staff with adequate benefits to allow staff to care for themselves and their families.

Organizational Culture

There are many ways to keep Authentic Connections alive within an organization. Some examples include:

- Review the summary of learning session participant evaluation responses.
- Identifying the champions. These are the people who will dedicate time and energy to organizing, evaluating and sustaining Authentic Connections. Support them as they move the work forward.
- Engaging participants in identifying how the principles and strategies can be applied to specific locations/events within the organization.
- Making it a part of your organizational culture. Add elements of Authentic Connections to employee orientation manuals, employee performance reviews, newsletters and communications and/or staff meetings.

Resources

- Time to plan and coordinate the session(s).
- Time for participants to attend the session(s).
- Space/food/materials for the session.
- Time for the planning team to debrief and follow-up after the session(s).
- Ongoing commitment to possible policy, procedure and/or environment changes.

RESOURCES

The following resources are available in the appendices or digital copies are available by request. We encourage you to adjust these sample resources to meet your organization’s unique needs:

- Sample learning session agenda(s) for facilitators and participants
- Sample learning session evaluation
- Authentic Connections Audit

There are many people who have influenced the creation and success of this work. Additionally, there are numerous organizations and trainings that are complementary to the Authentic Connections work. We would like to acknowledge the influence of the following organizations, programs and experts on the Authentic Connections program.

“Some of the vocabulary of the project was left behind because of staff turnover, but it’s clear from the way we do our intakes and other processes that the key messages have been internalized.”

-Testimonial from
Women’s Advocates

“The program has had a profound impact on our organization in many ways. It has improved our framework of customer service training for staff and volunteers in a critical area: how to deal with difficult parenting situations in public. Our staff and volunteers working with our visitors have noted an amazing improvement in their comfort level with and ability to defuse these challenging situations. Due to the ideas inspired through this work, we have implemented new practices and procedures that have reduced such incidents and our visitors have noted that we are an even more welcoming and friendly place for families to explore.”

-Testimonial from
Minnesota Children’s
Museum

ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS

| Name | Description/Topic Area | Website |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ACES Connection | Adverse Childhood Experiences Prevention and Healing | http://www.acesconnection.com/ |
| AMAZE | Provides developmentally appropriate curricula on anti-bias education, diversity/inclusion and social emotional learning for early childhood and elementary age children. | http://www.amazeworks.org/ |
| Anti-Defamation League | Provides anti-bias training and resources | https://www.adl.org/ |
| EdChange | Workshops on anti-racism, cultural competence and white privilege. | http://www.edchange.org/ |
| Minnesota Collaborative Anti-Racism Initiative (MCARI) | Introductory and comprehensive workshops on the systemic institutionalized dynamics of racism and dismantling strategies | http://www.crossroadsantiracism.org/ |
| Trauma Transformed | Trauma informed systems work in the San Francisco Bay Area | http://traumatransformed.org/ |
| Youth Friendly Services Assessment Tool | Creating Youth Friendly spaces | shorturl.at/uxEJ1 |

EXPERTS

| Name | Description/Topic Area | Website |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Jillian Peterson and James Densley | Founders of The Violence Project | https://www.theviolenceproject.org/home |
| John Gottman | Provides a research-based approach to relationships. | https://www.gottman.com/ |
| Mario Martinez | Clinical neuropsychologist who lectures worldwide on how cultural beliefs affect health and longevity. | https://www.biocognitive.com/ |
| john a. powell | Internationally recognized expert in the areas of civil rights, civil liberties, structural racism, housing, poverty, and democracy. | https://haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/john-powell |

ADDITIONAL READING SUGGESTIONS

| Author Name | Book/Article Title | Description/Topic Area |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lisa Feldman Barrett | <i>How Emotions Are Made (2018)</i> | Written by a psychologist and neuroscientist, this book explores how emotions are created through the interplay of the brain, body and culture. |
| Tara Brach | <i>Radical Acceptance (2003)</i> | Written by a clinical psychologist with a background in Buddhist mindfulness meditation. |
| Brene Brown | <i>Rising Strong (2017)</i> | The author tells us how to get back up after falling through sharing stories from various people. |
| Malcolm Gladwell | <i>The Tipping Point (2002)</i> | Explores the “tipping point” phenomenon. |
| Joy DeGruy Leary | <i>Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (2005)</i> | The author “lays the groundwork for understanding how the past has influenced the present, and opens up the discussion of how we can use the strengths we have gained to heal.” |
| Gabor Mate, MD | <i>When the Body Says No (2011)</i> | -Through the stories of people, the author shows the role that stress plays on chronic illness. |
| | <i>In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts (2010)</i> | -The author explores addiction and explains why it is one of the most “misunderstood phenomena in our society.” |
| Rollo May | <i>Love and Will (1969)</i> | Written by an existentialist psychologist, the author articulates how an awareness of death is essential to life. |
| Emily and Amelia Nagoski | <i>Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle (2019)</i> | Science-based explanations on how women experience burnout with simple plans (informed by neuroscience) on how to reduce stress. |
| Bessel van der Kolk, MD | <i>The Body Keeps the Score (2015)</i> | The author, an expert on trauma, explores how trauma effects the body and brain and explores innovative treatments for trauma. |

APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS

Belonging

It is a basic human need. Belonging can be used in a social context, such as attachment to a particular social group. Additionally, it can be used in a spatial context, such as attachment to a particular place. Individuals may experience belonging in different ways.

Bias

The attitudes, opinions and judgment we hold about a person or group of people before the presence of evidence that either confirms or contradicts. Bias can include attitudes, opinions or judgements that paint a person or group of people in either a positive or negative light. We all have biases.

Equity Lens

A tool used by an individual or organization to identify and remove barriers and reinforce best practices. Using an equity lens helps people understand how race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, culture, class, age, religion/spirituality, wealth, abilities and inequities affect and shape day to day work and interactions. An equity lens allows one to improve the quality of interactions and remove barriers created by policies and practices.

Health Equity

The attainment of the highest level of health possible for people of all ages and backgrounds, with focused attention to the needs of those at greatest risk of poor health, based on social condition. (Braveman, 2014)

Implicit Bias

An unconsciously held set of associations about a particular group. Implicit biases are pervasive and malleable. The implicit associations we hold do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs or even reflect stances we would explicitly endorse. We generally tend to hold implicit biases that favor our own ingroup, though research has shown we can still hold implicit biases against our ingroup.

Inequity

Obstacles that exclude groups or communities of people from full participation and benefits in social, economic and political life which results from systemic barriers.

Intercultural Competence

A range of cognitive, affective and behavioral skills that lead to effective and appropriate communication with people of similar and different cultures. It is the ability to function effectively across cultures, to think and act appropriately, and to communicate and work with people from different cultural backgrounds – at home or abroad.

Micro-aggressions

Little things we hear or see that remind us that we are the “other” or outside the norm of the dominant culture. Micro-aggressions exist in all aspects of our lives such as: race, body size, age, ability, sexual orientation, gender and more.

Mutual Care

The act of an organization or community providing the means for individuals to meet their basic, social and emotional needs. This includes providing fair wages and benefits, time-off and safe and supportive work environments. Mutual care acknowledges that self-care alone puts the onus on the individuals to sustain themselves with potentially unsustainable conditions.

Negativity Bias

A psychological principle that “the bad is stronger than the good.” This can be seen through examples of negative experiences having seemingly greater importance and affect us disproportionately to positive experiences.

Othering

A set of dynamics, processes and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities. Othering creates processes that marginalize people on the basis of perceived group differences. It shapes our personal and social realities. Dimensions of othering include, but are not limited to: religion, sex, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (class), disability, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, and skin tone. Othering and marginality can occur on a group basis or at the individual level. (http://www.otheringandbelonging.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/OtheringAndBelonging_Issue1.pdf)

Racism

Prejudice against individuals from a certain racial group and can be either explicit or implicit. It includes prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one’s own race is superior. In the United States of America, power rests within the white community. This is societal power and why the white community can be racist. This is not to say that bias and prejudice do not exist within communities of color. Certainly, they do both internally and externally.

Racial Equity

The creation and proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes, and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, and outcomes for all people regardless of race.

Structural Racism

The normalization of an array of dynamics — historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal — that routinely advantage white people while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color and American Indians. Structural Inequities are systems of society — such as finance, housing, transportation, education, social opportunities, etc. — that are structured in such a way that they benefit one population unfairly (whether intended or not). (MDH, 2014)

The Golden Rule

Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. This is assuming that all people are the same with the same desires, needs and wants. Try the Platinum Rules: Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.

Theory of Change for Authentic Connections

This theory of change reflects the importance of small changes in individuals’ behaviors in concert with each other, that reduces the incidence of negative behaviors within the organization. New norms develop and people forget they’re implementing Authentic Connections.

White Fragility

A state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable triggering a range of defensive moves. (DiAngelo, 2011)

White Privilege

The system of advantages and benefits that white people receive as a result of whiteness. “White skin privilege is not something that white people necessarily do, create or enjoy on purpose. White skin privilege is a transparent preference for whiteness that saturates our society. White skin privilege serves several functions.” (Teaching Tolerance, project of Southern Poverty Law Center, 2015)

APPENDIX B: PROGRAM MATERIALS

AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS AUDIT TOOL

Every organization has the capacity to do Authentic Connections. This audit is meant to be used as a guide in preparation for Authentic Connections implementation for building a more connected community. Understanding your organization's strengths and areas for growth is key to beginning, evaluating and sustaining this work. We encourage you to use this assessment tool without judgment of yourself or others within your organization. This audit is not a requirement but is offered to facilitate reflection in preparation for planning and discussion regarding your organization's new or ongoing implementation.

The audit is divided into four main areas. Under each heading, you will find specific behaviors or practices that support the overall area of focus. Some of these may not apply to your organization. Focus on the aspects that do apply to your organization. Remember that this is a guide, not a rulebook, for building a more connected community.

Audit Instructions:

Put a check mark in the box you believe best reflects where you or your organization is currently at. If you are having trouble deciding which applies, consider how others might describe the particular practice. It is useful to have multiple people in multiple roles, complete the audit.

Below is a key to help decipher which column to select in each question.

- **No Current Practice**
Select this if this practice is not happening or is a problem in your organization. This behavior may be not be on your organization's radar yet.
- **Discussion of Practice**
Select this if this practice is being discussed by some or all staff, but no action has been taken to ensure the item is addressed.
- **Practice Needs Improvement**
Select this column if there has been action to address this practice, but there is more work to be done. This could mean that some staff engage with a behavior positively, but not all staff. Or that action has been taken, but more action is needed to fully address the item.
- **Effective Current Practice**
Select this column if the practice is addressed in a continuous and sustainable manner. This could mean that a physical change has been made and is maintained, or that the entire staff is engaged in positive behaviors.

Does your physical space offer a welcoming environment for all individuals?

| Questions | No current practice | Discussion of practice | Practice needs improvement | Effective current practice |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Does security balance welcoming, hospitality and safety? | | | | |
| Is security developed with staff and client input? | | | | |
| Is the building accessible for people with hearing, visual or mobility challenges? | | | | |
| Is the space well-lit (bright, but not jarring)? | | | | |
| Are spaces are clean and well-maintained? | | | | |
| Do you have bathrooms that meet the needs of all genders (e.g. single stall bathrooms with locks) and are there changing stations accessible to parents of all genders? | | | | |
| Does the physical space create a calm atmosphere (music, lighting, color scheme, furniture, etc.)? | | | | |
| Are there materials available that support trauma and stress reduction, as well as recovery and wellness? | | | | |
| Does the environment reflect the cultures of those served? | | | | |
| Are materials and signs available in the language(s) of those served? | | | | |
| Is there a quiet room or space available? | | | | |
| Are there materials or activities for children (e.g. toys, books, coloring, etc.)? | | | | |
| Are materials (including print, music, video, etc.) screened for negative stereotypes and assumptions? | | | | |
| Do meeting spaces ensure confidentiality? | | | | |
| Is there access to water, coffee, tea or snacks? | | | | |
| Are one-on-one meeting spaces set up in a welcoming and warm formation that allows for the provider and client to face each other and connect? | | | | |
| Are one-on-one meeting spaces configured to protect the safety of both client/patients and providers? | | | | |
| Are chairs comfortable? | | | | |
| Are exits easily accessible from all spaces in the building/facility? | | | | |
| Is peer support available? | | | | |
| Is there an avenue for clients to make suggestions? | | | | |

Do you work to understand the impact of the social environment, focus on addressing the behavior of individuals to reduce racial, ethnic and cultural inequities and increase social inclusion?

| Questions | | No current practice | Discussion of practice | Practice needs improvement | Effective current practice |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Is communication conducted in client's preferred language and method? | | | | |
| | Does staff refrain from making assumptions based on non-verbal language that may differ across cultures? | | | | |
| | Does staff ask open-ended questions about relevant cultural traditions or customs? | | | | |
| | Does your organization discuss and encourage examination and recognition of implicit biases? | | | | |
| | Does your organization address incidents of inequity or social exclusion in a reflective manner and make plans for improvement? | | | | |
| | Are assessment tools used and interpreted with consideration of their cultural bias? | | | | |
| | Does staff receive ongoing education about cultural traditions and customs of those they serve? | | | | |
| | Do you have clearly communicated confidentiality policies? | | | | |
| | Does staff follow your confidentiality policy? | | | | |
| | Does your staff discuss with clients the best means of communicating confidential information for them? | | | | |

Are your services and information easily accessible?

| Questions | | No current practice | Discussion of practice | Practice needs improvement | Effective current practice |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Are your hours convenient for those you serve (including parents, youth, and those working varying shifts)? | | | | |
| | Are walk-in appointments available? | | | | |
| | Is your location accessible to those you serve? Are you nearby public transportation? Do you have affordable and accessible parking? | | | | |
| | Do you have a website that clearly lists information regarding hours, services, fees, and procedures? | | | | |
| | Do you utilize modes of communication and marketing that work best for those you serve (phone, texts, website, etc.)? | | | | |
| | Are consent forms written in easy to understand language? | | | | |

Do you prevent or de-escalate stressful situations, better connect and engage with individuals?

| Questions | | No current practice | Discussion of practice | Practice needs improvement | Effective current practice |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Is there someone to welcome and connect with clients when they arrive? | | | | |
| | Are all staff expected to connect with those you serve through simple gestures such as eye contact, saying hello, or smiling? | | | | |
| | Are staff confident in their ability to recognize a person or situation that is escalating? | | | | |
| | Are staff confident in their ability to connect with clients experiencing stress? | | | | |
| | Do staff connect with individuals with respect and positive regard? | | | | |
| | Do you acknowledge and validate clients' feelings? | | | | |
| | Do staff feel they have backup in situations that are beyond their capacity to de-escalate? | | | | |
| | Do staff feel they have the capacity to stay calm in escalated or stressful situations? | | | | |

This list was adapted, in part, from the following sources:

- https://www.aucd.org/docs/councils/mcc/cultural_competency_assmt2004.pdf
- http://traumatransformed.org/wp-content/uploads/TI_ENVIRONMENTALSCAN.pdf
- <https://www.qualityinteractions.com/blog/cultural-awareness-in-healthcare-checklist>
- <https://www.healthyteennetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/YF-Assessment-Guide-and-Tool.pdf>

TEMPLATE – LEARNING SESSION LESSON PLAN

Authentic Connections

Partner's Name | Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health

Location

Date

Time

Name of Presenters

Session Plan

Goals

The Authentic Connections Program aims to:

- Build individual and organization capacity to develop authentic connections.
- Increase individual and organization capacity to anticipate and reduce stressful situations.
- Decrease incidents of escalation and violence in the community.
- Increase the sense of connectedness within the community, including amongst and between individuals, organizations, businesses, and public agencies.

*Add goals specific to the organization/setting.

Objectives

As a result of this session, participants will be able to:

- Explain the six Wakaheza Principles.
- Identify strategies for use in their personal and professional lives.
- Strengthen connections with organization staff, clients, and the community.

*Add objectives specific to the organization/setting.

Materials and Space

- Comfortable seating and tables that allow for small group work
- Authentic Connections overview and strategies (1 copy per participant)
- Flip chart paper on the tables (1-2 sheets per group)
- Flip chart paper and easel for presenters
- Markers
- Pens (1 per participant)
- Evaluations (1 copy per participant)
- Optional: fidgets for increased focus and engagement

Timeline

00:00-00:04 **Welcome | Vision** (ORG Leadership)

Welcome everyone to the learning session and thank them for engaging with this important work today. Share the organization's goals and vision in implementing Authentic Connections.

00:05-00:09 **Brief session overview | Context of our work** (Facilitator Name)

Explain Authentic Connections (Refer to overview): This is a violence prevention program designed to help individuals and organizations build capacity for creating authentic connections with clients, colleagues and the community. This program focuses on identifying stressful situations and preventing escalation through genuine interactions.

Explain the following:

- This work is for everyone. It is not easy, but it is simple.
- The principles and strategies provide a way to help those you serve and each other.
- This work enhances connections.
- Every person has the power to have impact in any given moment.
- Building authentic connections amongst people and communities reduces feelings of social isolation and powerlessness, which are often at the root of acts of violence.
- By using positive approaches in potentially stressful situations, we can intervene in cycles of violence before escalation.

Today's session:

- Ask the participants to identify regularly occurring, stressful situations in the work place.
- Ground staff in Authentic Connections Principles and Strategies to reduce barriers to authentic connections with clients and colleagues and enhance effectiveness.
- Apply principles and strategies to previously identified situations.
- Committing to this work moving forward.

00:10-00:14 **Authentic Connection — Reflection** (Optional)

- Ask participants to think of a time when they felt an authentic connection with a client and/or colleague.
 - » How did the authentic connection make a difference in the interaction?
- Ask participants to share a word to describe the feeling or impact of this authentic connection. Facilitator should write the words on a white board or flipchart.
- Note any themes and emphasize that these moments move us closer toward our vision of a safer, more connected community.

00:15-00:44 **Brainstorm Challenging Situations**

Small Group Brainstorm

Ask participants to gather in small groups to brainstorm situations that are challenging/stressful for them, their colleagues/those they serve. Often these are recurring and predictable. Each group should pick a scribe. Make a list on flip chart paper of these situations for:

- Self
- Colleagues
- Those they serve

Large Group Debrief

Each group should pick a spokesperson to share a few top examples from their brainstorm. Ask participants to share select examples that provide a variety of situations rather than repeating examples already shared. Facilitator will collect the flip chart pages from all the groups and post them on the walls.

00:45-01:09 **Authentic Connections Principles and Strategies Overview**

(See appendix A for detailed explanations of principles and strategies)

- Principles; understanding barriers for self/others & tools for connection
- PARC Strategies; assessing self/situation & doable action in the moment that can make the situation better rather than worse.
- Provide examples/real life situations to help visualize the Principles and Strategies

01:10-01:40 **Application: Authentic Connections Principles and Strategies**

Small Group Work:

- Review list of situations created in the first small group exercise through the lens of Authentic Connections Principles and Strategies to identify doable actions to improve the situation in the moment.
- Role play scenarios (Optional)

Large Group Debrief:

Each table select 1-3 scenarios (depending on time) and briefly share situation and doable action in the moment to help improve the situation for:

- Self
- Colleagues
- Those you serve

01:40-01:49 **Call to Action: What is one thing you will commit to do from this session for (Optional)**

- Yourself?
- Colleagues?
- Students?

01:50-01:57 **Session Evaluation**

Hand out session evaluations and give participants a few minutes to complete them. Collect them before people leave. Share that these evaluations help improve future sessions and also help guide the organization's next steps in its Authentic Connections work.

01:58-02:00 **Closing Remarks (Optional—Leadership)**

Thank everyone for attending and engaging with this important work. Share any current next steps (e.g. debrief meetings, policy changes). Share the contact information for the Authentic Connections champions if anyone has questions, suggestions or other follow up items.

TEMPLATE – DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE WAKANHEZA PRINCIPLES



ENVIRONMENT

Environments have significant impacts on behaviors.
“Little changes make a big difference.” Malcolm Gladwell

Key points

- Environments are never neutral.
- Environments have the potential to increase positive behaviors and decrease negative behaviors
- All people can sense immediately whether an environment is welcoming to us, and puts us at ease, or not.
- Physical environment: how furniture is arranged, the colors and textures in the room, the temperature, signage and information, lighting and sound.
- Social environment: feeling safe, loved, relaxed, nervous, threatened, challenged, welcomed, confused

Helpful strategies

- If you have kids in the lobby, make a place that has toys or books or child-sized furniture.
- If you have long wait times for your clients, add signs or spaces for them to know what to expect
- Utilize trauma informed design.
- The connection between people starts with a genuine welcome from the front desk staff. People may come in with a high level of stress, let them know they are safe, welcomed, warmly received.
- Ensure people know where they are and where they need to go.

Example

“I was riding a bus in southern Chile, feeling super proud of myself for asking for directions to the bus stop in a language I wasn’t very comfortable in – the stops weren’t really marked, there weren’t maps at the time, and so on. I’m riding along, see where I want to get off, and go to push the button – there isn’t one. I go to pull the cord – there isn’t one. As I’m watching my stop go by, I’m looking around to ask someone with my eyes “how does this work?” – no eye contact. So, I don’t know how to get off this bus. Turns out, when you want to get off, you stand up and the bus driver just knows. Simple – but there was nothing around me to signal how this works – and it didn’t look the way I expected it to. Now, this is an easy example on purpose, and the consequences were painless – I eventually got off, and just backtracked about three blocks – not a big deal in the long term. But I can still remember that sinking feeling that wants to kind of burst that comes confusion, of feeling like I had an immediate need, and not knowing what to do, of looking for help and not getting it, not able to speak the language of those around me.”

- Erin Dahl, Hennepin County Libraries



BIAS

Everyone has implicit bias, which impacts their judgment.

Key Points

- This is based on lived experiences, environment and experiences of those around.
- Everyone has bias that impacts their judgment.
- We make decisions and judgments about people and situations hundreds of times a day, without even knowing it.
- It helps us organize all the information that comes at us. We all have biases.
- Bias is formed by our upbringing, family, community, culture and personal experiences.
- Our job is to be aware of our biases and how they may or may not influence our behaviors.
- Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious manner. These may relate to: race, gender, body size, ethnicity, age, disability, religion, language, etc.

Helpful strategies

- Work on recognizing and acknowledging your biases. This work will be ongoing and it cannot simply happen in moments of stress when we may go into fight, flight or freeze mode.
- Learn about privilege and understand how your identities and circumstances may give you privilege. This can include white privilege, male privilege and Christian privilege for example. Privilege can lead to blindspots that influence our bias.

Example

I believe that meetings should start on time. It is a sign of respect for others, it is efficient, and it is part of the workplace culture. My implicit bias therefore is that if people are late to a meeting, I assume they are disrespectful, they don't value my time or others, they are unorganized, and/or they are not committed to the work at hand.

My behavior might be callous, rude, and/or discounting of their comments/contributions. I may choose not to invite them to future meetings.

This can damage a professional relationship, team cohesiveness and work accomplishments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE WAKANHEZA PRINCIPLES (CONTINUED)



EMPATHY

All people have the capacity to understand each other's ideas, feelings and experiences. "Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Be kind." -Unknown

Key Points

- Empathy is important to help understand how others are feeling so we know how to respond appropriately to the situation.
- High empathy is shown to lead to more helping behavior.
- This is a tool for connection.
- This requires being genuine and authentic.
- Empathy breaks the isolation people feel in stressful situation where they are feeling impacts of judgments/bias.
- Empathy is relating to the feelings people have in the situations, not the circumstances of the situation. Therefore, you do not have to have the same experience, but can still relate out of your common experience of the feelings; fear, anger, grief, joy, happiness, excitement, etc. Empathy shows up in the pain center of the brain. One actually experiences empathy fatigue rather than compassion fatigue.
- Empathy is a precursor to compassion. Compassion moves us to action that can be of help. Compassion shows up in the nurturing center of the brain. Compassion has a multitude of benefits to all in situations.

Helpful Strategies

- Start with being compassionate to yourself, so you can extend that compassion to others.
- Slow down, and be fully present when you interact with others.
- Acknowledge where you are in the moment, and what you are or are not able to offer.
- Create space to identify creative steps you can take to improve the situation.

Example

The front desk staff at a mental health clinic were experiencing fear based on the behaviors of the patients. In reaction, they put in place barriers and greater space between them and the patients in the waiting room. To address this fear, the clinic had the staff take a Mental Health 101 training.

After the training, the staff reported that they now understand that these behaviors are symptoms of an illness and they are not simply who the patients are. They explained that they were better able to see the patients as people and they were no longer afraid of their behaviors.



CULTURE

Culture includes deeply rooted beliefs and values that shape individual and world views that influence our interactions with others.

Key Points

- Culture is the way of life of a group of people- the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.
- Culture is symbolic communication.
- Culture includes ways of being and unspoken rules of conduct.
- No one can know or understand the culture of another without a relationship.
- Organizations have culture. Authentic Connections can impact the culture of how people relate to and regard those they work with and serve within organizations.
- This is about individual and systemic effort to understand what is below the surface, the deep culture.

Helpful Strategies

- Reach beyond perceived barriers of difference.
- Authentically connecting with another happens on the level of our universal humanity. It happens through a genuine desire to respectfully offer kindness and compassion to be of help in the moment.
- Acts of kindness, smiles, holding a door, giving a look of appreciation and understanding across perceived barriers of language, age, gender, sexual orientation, dress, ethnicity, etc.
- Meet cultural differences with curiosity to create opportunities for understanding and connection.
- With coworkers, be aware of concepts of time, tempo of work and notions of leadership.
- With clients, be aware of concepts of cleanliness, ideals for childrearing, reactions to tone of voice, facial expressions and roles in relation to age, sex, class occupation, etc.

Example

“My parents were visiting me at Central a few months ago, and I was introducing them to some of my co-workers. My dad, who’s in his early 70s, is a real hand-shaker, right, because that’s what you do when you meet people. Well, when we got to my co-worker Ruqia, who is Muslim, he put out his hand but she didn’t take it. Muslim women do not typically shake the hands or touch men who are not in their families. My co-worker instead put her hand over her heart to welcome my dad. My dad was a bit startled and apologized (and should have asked for more information), but Ruqia took the lead in this instance, graciously explaining the rule of etiquette. My dad respectfully listened, thanked her for telling him more about it and left with an important piece of deep cultural information, a perfect thing for him to take away from a library visit.”

- Erin Dahl, Hennepin County Libraries

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE WAKANHEZA PRINCIPLES (CONTINUED)



POWER

Power differences exist within systems and are also experienced uniquely by individuals and impact the way that people interact with others and their environment. Acts of violence can arise from feelings of powerlessness.

“Deeds of violence in our society are performed largely by those trying to establish their self-esteem, to defend their self-image, and to demonstrate that they, too, are significant . . . Violence arises not out of power, but out of powerlessness.” - Rollo May

Key Points

- Reasons for frustration: Running late, no clear signage, getting lost, voicemail – no live person
- Understanding that violence may arise from powerlessness does not excuse violent and hurtful behavior, it rather helps us move aside our bias and judgment of the behavior to genuinely connect with empathy.
- Power differences are systemic and are upheld by those in power who benefit from them
- That moment of connection can help to restore our own and the power of others to see and act in more positive ways.
- None of us are the worst things we've ever said or done. None of us can be defined by the worst thing we've said or done.

Helpful Strategies

- Keep in mind what people are bringing into the space with them each day.
- Pause to assess the situation and what power dynamics are at play
- Distract or interrupt with kindness.
- Recognize feelings of powerlessness in your co-workers as well as your clients, how can you support those you work with? How can you be a team?

Example

“At the grocery store recently, I was bagging my groceries when a woman with a toddler came into the lane behind me. The child was fussy and squirming to get out of the cart, wailing at the top of her lungs. The mother looked harried, like most of her day had been spent in one level of distress or another. Suddenly, without warning, she reached out and slapped the little girl, yelling at her to “shut the blank up!” I, along with everyone else in the near vicinity, was startled by this, especially since I do not believe in corporal punishment. However, I was pretty proud, actually, that I pulled myself together and pulled out my Wakanheza knowledge to at least help the mom and daughter get out of the store without any more violence. I offered to bag her groceries while she tended to the little girl and left my things with the cashier while I helped her to her car. I obviously don’t know what happened between them after they left, but it felt good to have made at least a small portion of their day a little better for both of them.”

- Erin Dahl, Hennepin County Libraries



CONNECTION

In any given moment we have an opportunity to make remarkable and profound connection with others when we are intentional and choose to do so.

Key Points

- Connection weaves the above principles together. Having positive connections leads to good things, having poor, little or negative connections can lead to poor outcomes.
- Connection is the relationship between people, environment, community.
- You never know what another person is carrying. You don't know what came before your interaction with them, and you don't know what will happen after they leave. But you do have a moment to share.
- This can have a ripple effect – what happens in the shared moment can influence the rest of a person's day/week/month.
- This principle is all about suspending our judgment, understanding the impacts of powerlessness and environment, appreciating culture and practicing empathy and respect.
- There is a fundamental human need for connection.
- Moments of connection over time can shift the culture of organizations and communities.

Helpful strategies

- A look of compassion.
- A smile.
- Eye contact.
- Offer an encouraging remark.
- Be sincere.
- Identify the source of stress and your capacity to relieve it.

Example

A city neighborhood coffee shop owner was frustrated and irritated by a group of sullen 12-year old boys who traipsed through the cafe daily after school, often with skateboards underarm. They wouldn't respond to baristas' greetings, didn't make purchases and would often use the bathrooms and help themselves to water. Staff and patrons agreed their negative energy was palpable and annoying. After reflecting about the situation through the lens of the Wakanheza Principles, the owner decided to conduct an experiment. He began to intentionally and consistently greet the boys warmly, telling them they were welcome to be there, inviting them to help themselves to water and to use the bathroom. Soon, the boys began to respond in a hesitant, but somewhat friendly manner. With time, the owner and the boys became pals and the boys hung out at the coffee shop in ensuing years. The boys and owner came to refer jokingly and fondly to the group as the cafe's skateboard team.

TEMPLATE – LEARNING SESSION EVALUATION

This document is intended to be used as a template for an evaluation to give participants after a Learning Session. There are several Likert scale questions which may be useful for compiling quantitative data, or recording responses from a large group. Additionally, there are open-ended questions which can be used for groups of all sizes but may be easier to analyze for smaller groups. In our experience, having a shorter evaluation has resulted in a higher response rate.

1. How useful did you find the information presented in this Authentic Connections learning session?

(not useful) 1 2 3 4 5 (extremely useful)

2. How effective were the learning session activities in supporting self-reflection and identification of your responses to stressful/challenging situations?

(not useful) 1 2 3 4 5 (extremely useful)

3. How effective was the day in promoting connections with your colleagues?

(not useful) 1 2 3 4 5 (extremely useful)

4. How likely do you think it is that this organization's culture will change in a positive direction due to the information gained from this learning session?

(not useful) 1 2 3 4 5 (extremely useful)

5. Do you feel better prepared to handle a potentially stressful/challenging situation after completing the learning session?

Yes No Unsure

5a. Please provide a brief explanation of your answer:

6. What was the most important thing you learned today?

(We suggest that this be one of the first questions that you ask, as the answers are very enlightening.)

7. What are the next steps for using the principles and strategies to strengthen authentic connections for...

Yourself _____

Your Team _____

Your Organization _____

8. What kind of support would you like to help sustain these efforts?

9. Additional comments about the Authentic Connections learning session?

Thank you for your responses!

Additional Evaluation Questions:

*How likely are you to use the principles and strategies learned today in your daily work and life?

(not useful) 1 2 3 4 5 (extremely useful)

*Is there something that was not covered today that you wish had been discussed?

Yes No Unsure

Please provide a brief explanation of your answer: _____

*Are there additional trainings that you would like to see your organization provide to accompany this learning session?

Yes No Unsure

Please provide a brief explanation of your answer: _____

*Do you have some ideas of how to implement the principles and strategies in your everyday life and work? If so, please give an example:

*Do you feel the organization values and supports self-care and mutual care?

(not useful) 1 2 3 4 5 (extremely useful)

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MORE INFORMATION

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