

# Module 1

## Understanding the Family Context

### Module Overview

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#### Objective

In this module, participants will practice noticing and reflecting on the social and educational goals of visiting families and the roles family members take on during their visit. They will consider how to tailor facilitation to take into account the needs and goals of families and build on visitors' ideas, strengths, and interests.

#### Materials needed



- Module 1 video 1 (<https://youtu.be/ebEEZKSsMKA>)
- Module 1 video 2 (<https://youtu.be/X3sMPx28zmU>)
- Handouts (one per participant)
  - Introducing Module 1: Understanding the Family Context (a few copies in case participants need them)
  - Module 1 Video Discussion
  - Module 1 Reflection Homework
  - Introducing Module 2: Supporting Intergenerational Communication
- Chart paper or whiteboard and markers

#### Plan for session (80-90 minutes)



- 1) Warm-up activity, 10 minutes (optional)
- 2) Introducing the module, 10 minutes
- 3) Video discussion, 60 minutes
- 4) Homework for Module 2, 10 minutes

## Warm-Up Activity

10 MIN



If you opt to do a warm-up activity, start the session with it. We recommend the Module 1 activity, Red Ball (<http://www.nisenet.org/catalog/improv-exercises>). In general, an effective warm-up activity for this module will focus on group collaboration, particularly highlighting how the combined efforts of the group have a greater result than individuals working alone.

## Introducing the Module

10 MIN



Introduce this module's topic, paraphrasing what is written below. Participants should have already read "Introducing Module 1: Understanding the Family Context" prior to this session.

### Introducing the topic



*Today's session focuses on understanding the family context—in other words, appreciating who our family visitors are and how they learn together, with or without our help. We'll be watching two videos and then reflecting on family social and educational goals, family member roles during exhibit interactions, and how we can tailor facilitation for individual family needs and interests.*

### Connecting to previous experiences

In small groups, participants discuss their responses to the questions at the end of the handout "Introducing the Family Context." After a few minutes, continue the discussion in the larger group.



- 1) What expectations do you have about the ways families should interact with exhibits at your institution? How do you respond when they don't quite meet these expectations?
- 2) Do you find your expectations about a family can fluctuate based on certain characteristics (gender, race, age, group composition, language use)? In what ways?
- 3) How do you think your assumptions or expectations about a family might affect your interactions with them?
- 4) In what ways do you gather information about what a family needs or wants out of a particular interaction? What clues do you look for to gauge family mood, goals for the visit, or relationships among individuals?

In this module, you will be using the following two videos:

- Module 1 Video 1 (<https://youtu.be/ebEEZKSsMKA>)
- Module 1 Video 2 (<https://youtu.be/X3sMPx28zmU>)

### Introducing the videos



Both of the videos in this module take place at the exhibit *Balancing Art*. Participants should have read the exhibit description as part of their preparation for this session. Before beginning, ask them if they have any questions about the exhibit.

Pass out copies of the Video Discussion handout and give participants a minute or two to review it. Paraphrase the following information about the videos to participants.



*In the first video segment you are about to watch (Module 1 Video 1), a facilitator is working with a family of one child and two adults at the Balancing Art exhibit. This video segment starts as the family approaches the exhibit. The second video (Module 1 Video 2) features a different facilitator with a family consisting primarily of one adult and one child at Balancing Art, although another child occasionally joins them.*

*We will watch each video twice. The first time, ignore the handout and just try to take in the whole interaction. In between the first and second viewing, read over the questions. During the second viewing, I encourage you to notice what clues you can pick up about family members' expectations, needs, and prior experiences. You may also notice how the facilitator picks up on and responds to this information and what he or she says or does to help support the family's goals. Notice how the visitors—both adults and children—respond to this facilitation. After the second viewing of each video, you will have time to jot down responses to the handout prompts in preparation for discussing your observations and reactions.*

### Key video moments for the session leader

Below are some moments in the video when something particularly noteworthy happens with the families or the facilitators. This is not an exhaustive list of every interesting moment in the interaction. We point these out to help you, the session leader, have evidence to support observations by participants. We do not recommend giving these lists to participants.

### Video 1:

- 0:40 Adult in gray sweatshirt explains that child has his own ideas.
- 1:24 Facilitator stays back as adult in gray communicates with child.
- 3:04 Facilitator provides some orientation about balancing.
- 3:14 Family starts to celebrate; facilitator asks question about reasoning.
- 3:20 Child has an “extra” piece; adult in black sweatshirt encourages child to respond to facilitator.
- 4:40 Facilitator focuses on the mathematical relationship in the exhibit.
- 5:20 Adult in black asks questions.
- 6:17 Adult in black tests exhibit and discusses with facilitator.

### Video 2:

- 0:27 Adult and children speak to each other in Spanish.
- 0:40 Facilitator approaches but stands behind family and watches them.
- 1:00 Facilitator discourages younger children from hanging pieces by telling them that the adult male and older child are “working on something.”
- 1:26 Facilitator orients group to the zone of balance; older child celebrates success.
- 1:35 Facilitator gives a piece to adult to hang on bar for child to solve, then steps back.
- 2:14 Facilitator gives mystery weight to adult to hang on bar, then steps back again to observe.
- 3:00 Adult male gives instructions to older child.
- 3:52 Facilitator gives mystery weight piece to older child for adult to solve.
- 4:05 Adult male starts talking primarily in English.
- 5:18 Facilitator steps back to describe exhibit to another visitor.

## Video discussion: Module 1 Video 1



Watch the video segment twice. Then take 3-5 minutes for participants to quietly jot down their answers to questions on the first page of the discussion handout.



Next break into small groups of 2-4 participants (if possible, try to mix up groups from previous discussions) and share answers. Ask one member from each group to share a summary of their discussion with the larger group.

In your discussion, keep track of the strategies participants mention on the whiteboard or chart paper. You may want to write down other group responses as well, but keep those ideas separate from the list of strategies. Some strategies participants might mention include: observing quietly to assess the family’s approach, simplifying the challenges for the child, talking separately with one of the adults, and providing orientation or additional challenges to support the facilitation already going on within the family.

- 1) What did you notice about the attitudes of each adult toward the boy? In what ways are they the same? In what ways are they different?
- 2) What do you think the child is trying to do in the first several minutes of the video?
- 3) What do you notice about each of the adults in terms of their physical comfort and “state of mind”?
- 4) How do the adults react when the facilitator is having an extended interaction with the boy?
- 5) What do you make of the last interaction between the male adult and the facilitator?
- 6) What are some strategies the facilitator used to keep the family engaged or to respond to particular aspects of this family context?

Note: If a participant makes assumptions about a person’s behavior in the video, try asking, “What did you see that leads you to that conclusion? What did the person do or say that suggests that behavior or attitude?” The goal of these questions is to help the group become aware of underlying assumptions and expectations about families that shape our perceptions and approaches as educators.

### Video discussion: Module 1 Video 2



Watch the video segment twice. Then take 3-5 minutes for participants to quietly jot down their answers to questions on the second page of the video discussion handout. (Note that this video includes a family speaking in Spanish. We have chosen not to subtitle the video to simulate the experience of an educator who does not speak the first language of the visitors, which was true of the facilitator in this interaction.)



Break into small groups of 2-4 participants and share answers. Ask one member from each group to share a summary of their discussion with the larger group. Continue to record possible strategies on the chart paper or whiteboard.

- 1) What did you notice about the way the adult male interacted with the two children at the beginning of the video? What can you tell even if you don’t understand Spanish?
- 2) What do you notice about the relationship among the children?
- 3) What assumption(s) did the facilitator make in addressing the children in English? In addressing the adult?

- 4) Why do you think the facilitator decided to bring out the question mark when she did? Why did she decide to bring out the second question mark? Why did she switch tactics on the third question mark?
- 5) Think of a time when you've interacted with a family who is not speaking English to one another. How have you handled the situation?

### Video Discussion for Both Videos



After watching and discussing both videos, continue the group conversation, focusing on the kinds of strategies the facilitators in the videos used and participants' reactions to them.

- 1) What similarities and differences do you see between the two families in these videos?
- 2) What challenges might you encounter using facilitation strategies like those highlighted in these videos?

At the conclusion of this module, record the list of strategies generated during the conversations (e.g., take a photo or type the list) and share the ideas with participants to help them incorporate interpretation of family context into their facilitation practice. Other strategies related to understanding the family context that participants might mention include: asking families what they have worked on so far at the exhibit, providing options or choice for family decision-making, and helping to engage some family members to allow others to explore the exhibit more deeply.

### Homework

10 MIN



In the time between this session and the next, participants will practice noticing characteristics of the family context both with and without facilitators present. They will also try out some facilitation strategies for clarifying and supporting family goals and needs.

Pass out copies of the Module 1 reflection homework handout to each participant, as well as the background reading for the next module: "Introducing Module 2: Supporting Intergenerational Communication." Allow participants a few minutes to read over the homework handout. Ask for any questions, clarifications, or comments.

## For Further Exploration

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### More Videos

Full-length, unedited versions of the videos from this module (without subtitles) are also available:

- Module 1 Video 1 ([https://youtu.be/7Wn\\_cqOgk8](https://youtu.be/7Wn_cqOgk8))
- Module 1 Video 2 (<https://youtu.be/VCeoaqTbew0>)

You can also watch videos that were assigned to other modules and the bonus videos, paying particular attention to what the interactions reveal about the family context, including visitor needs, interests, and roles.

### Readings

The following books and articles can be useful for continuing to explore the topic of family learning in museums:

Ellenbogen, K., Luke, J. J., & Dierking, L. D. (2007). **Family learning in museums: Perspectives on a decade of research.** In J. H. Falk, L. D. Dierking, & S. Foutz (Eds.), *In principle, in practice: Museums as learning institutions* (pp. 17–30). Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

National Research Council. (2009). **Learning science in informal environments: People, places, and pursuits.** Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/12190/learning-science-in-informal-environments-people-places-and-pursuits> (See especially chapter 4, “Everyday Settings and Family Activities”)

Pattison, S. A., & Dierking, L. D. (2012). **Exploring staff facilitation that supports family learning.** *Journal of Museum Education*, 37(3), 69–80.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284569006\\_Exploring\\_Staff\\_Facilitation\\_that\\_Supports\\_Family\\_Learning](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284569006_Exploring_Staff_Facilitation_that_Supports_Family_Learning)





## Video 1

- 1) What did you notice about the attitudes of each adult toward the boy? In what ways are they the same? In what ways are they different?
  
- 2) What do you think the child is trying to do in the first several minutes of the video?
  
- 3) What do you notice about each of the adults in terms of their physical comfort and “state of mind”?
  
- 4) How do the adults react when the facilitator is having an extended interaction with the boy?
  
- 5) What do you make of the last interaction between the male adult and the facilitator?
  
- 6) What are some strategies the facilitator used to keep the family engaged or to respond to particular aspects of this family context?

## Video 2

- 1) What did you notice about the way the adult male interacted with the two children at the beginning of the video? What can you tell even if you don't understand Spanish?
- 2) What do you notice about the relationship among the children?
- 3) What assumption(s) did the facilitator make in addressing the children in English? In addressing the adult?
- 4) Why do you think the facilitator decided to bring out the question mark when she did? Why did she decide to bring out the second question mark? Why did she switch tactics on the third question mark?
- 5) Think of a time when you've interacted with a family who is not speaking English to one another. How have you handled the situation?

## Both Videos

- 1) What similarities and differences do you see between the two families in these videos?
- 2) What challenges might you encounter using facilitation strategies like those highlighted in these videos?

- 1) Take some time, even just 20-30 minutes, to watch both facilitated and unfacilitated family groups engaging with exhibits at your institution. When you are watching another staff member, first ask him or her for permission to observe. When watching unstaffed interactions, respect the privacy of families by being unobtrusive and ending your observation if families appear to be uncomfortable.
  - For unfacilitated groups: What does each family member do or say at the exhibit? What are the apparent social or educational goals for each family member and how can you tell? If you were to interact with this group, what is something that you could do or say to better understand their context?
  - For facilitated groups: What do the facilitators do or say to get insight into a family's social and educational goals? How do they tailor their facilitation to individual families?
  
- 2) Now that you've watched examples of facilitators interacting with families and considered how to incorporate new ideas into your own practice, you can try these strategies out yourself (if needed, refer to the list generated during the video discussion). Before you meet for the next session, try to incorporate a few new strategies into your facilitation with families at exhibits. Observe how visitors react and reflect on ways you can continue to improve the new approaches. Choose one interaction to share with the group during the next module session.
  
- 3) To prepare for module 2, please read the handout, "Introducing Intergenerational Communication". Consider how this perspective relates to your facilitation experience by answering the questions on the handout, in preparation for discussing them at the next module meeting.



Supporting intergenerational communication was a primary goal of the REVEAL facilitation approach. The team believed that by encouraging adults and children to participate together in the facilitated exhibit activities, families would not only have deeper and more satisfying experiences in the moment but would also be more likely to continue to think and talk about the experience long after the museum educator was gone and even after they left the museum. In other words, supporting intergenerational communication was a primary strategy for extending the impact of the often brief experiences at the REVEAL exhibits.

Intergenerational communication—time that family members of different ages spend interacting and talking with each other at exhibits, rather than talking with an educator or acting independently, as well as the quality of the interactions—is a defining characteristic of family learning in museums. As families move through exhibits and galleries, adults point out details, ask questions, provide encouragement and guidance, and express their own interest and curiosity. Children respond to adults and initiate their own conversations, exploring exhibits and participating in programs in collaboration with other family members and sometimes even taking a leading role during the interactions. Innumerable studies over the last several decades have documented the ongoing adult and child dialogues that characterize family learning (Leinhardt et al., 2015; NRC, 2009b; Rigney & Callanan, 2011). Often these conversations are about the exhibits and programs, but families also use the museum setting to explore other topics. And sometimes intergenerational communication is just about the daily necessities of life, like finding the restroom or deciding on a plan for lunch.

As noted in the “Understanding Family Context” module, family learning begins well before the museum visit and continues long after. Intergenerational communication and family conversations are a primary vehicle for this ongoing learning, as children and adults recall memories from the visit, ask curiosity questions that lead to further discussion, and support each other in exploring new or growing areas of interest (Callanan & Oakes, 1992; Falk & Dierking, 2013; NASEM, 2016; Renninger, 2007).

Given the importance of intergenerational communication, a central challenge for museum educators is supporting family learning without inhibiting the natural interactions that occur between adults and children. This is particularly important when facilitating informal, conversational interactions at exhibits, since families may or may not expect a facilitator or staff member to be present and may already be engaged in rich learning conversations of their own. In the REVEAL research study, even educators who were trained in the REVEAL facilitation approach and focused on supporting

intergenerational communication had a slight negative impact on levels of adult-child engagement compared to families who were not supported by a museum educator (Pattison et al., 2017). These results highlight the need for educators to continue to explore strategies and approaches for supporting family learning that might include empowering adult or child family members to take the lead, finding challenges and activities that involve multiple family members, or simply knowing when to step back and give families their own space in which to interact.

Consider the following questions. You will discuss them in small groups when your team meets to explore Module 2: Supporting Intergenerational Communication.

- 1)** In families and multigenerational groups, how do people of different ages usually interact with exhibits at your institution? Are there roles that particular family members tend to take on?
- 2)** How might a family's culture and prior experiences influence how visitors of different ages interact with each other, the facilitator, and an exhibit?
- 3)** Which group members (e.g., adults or kids) do you usually focus on when facilitating with families? Why?
- 4)** What is a time when you have seen facilitators (including yourself) supporting intergenerational communication at exhibits? What specific things were done or said to encourage visitors to interact with one another?