

So you want to plan a
Parent Meeting Party?



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Acknowledgements

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References

THE HANEN CENTRE

Manolson, Ayala. It Takes Two to Talk- a Parent's Guide to Helping Children Communicate. Toronto: The Hanen Centre, 1992

Manolson, Ayala and Barbara Ward. You make the Difference- in Helping your Child Learn. Toronto: The Hanen Centre, 1995

PACT – Parents And Communicating Teams
Wisconsin Model

K. Colwell, D. Walters, IDEA Preschool Discretionary Funds Project #2003-9903-79

Original Pictures are from:

<http://www.chanslor.com> - party hat

<http://www.cre8ivitee.com> – bus

<http://www.owc.net> - curved arrow

<http://www.zephyrpress.com> - house

<http://www.friddles.com> - dump truck

<http://www.washoe.k12.nv.us> - parent & child

<http://www.kings.k12.ca.us> - bone

<http://www.ryan-design.com> – car

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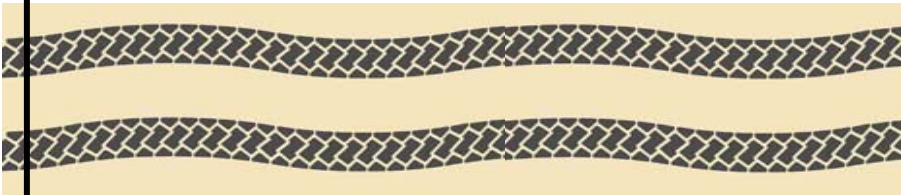


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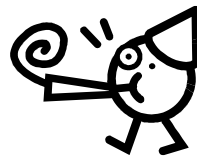
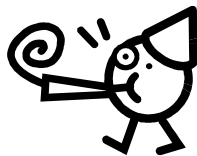
So you want to have a Parent Meeting Party

Our first thought was – “You want us to do what – on top of what we’re already doing? How?”

The why already made sense – if we could reach the parent – build a relationship with them – teach them some of the strategies we were using in the classroom, how much better for that child. After all, we saw the child 3 ½ hours a day – four times a week – nine months a year. The parent was there day in and out and weekends.

Ok how hard can it be? We’ll send out a notice and have a guest speaker on some relevant topic. Then we’ll be done with it for another month. So we did and a few parents actually came and we listened attentively to the nurse talk about First Aid for children. Nobody asked any questions and then we all went home.

As it turned out, we weren’t very engaged and neither were the handful of parents that would faithfully show up regardless of the topic. We knew there could be more. Which led us to where we are today. It’s not enough to just have really good information to share. You need to make your information sharing an event – a celebration. Give your parent meeting the same attention to detail that you would if you were planning a party for friends. It will give your meeting a more welcoming atmosphere.



Planning A Party

1. Invitations

- Visually Appealing
- Agenda
- Expectations
 - Childcare
 - Transportation
 - Meals
 - Materials Provided/Bring with

2. Space

- For adults with adult furniture
- Childcare needs

3. Time –

- Survey parents for days and times. If you are willing give up some Saturday times – we found this to be the optimum time. Parents, children and staff were not tired from putting in an already full day. Parents particularly liked the opportunity to do something fun as a family without costing anything.

4. Refreshments

- Meals
- Snacks
- Who provides (parent sign-p, community donations, provided through program funds)?
- Cleanup

5. Actual Meeting

- Agenda posted with times, try to adhere to it.
- Decorations
 - Table
 - Charts – colorful/visually appealing
 - Visual Aids – represent you population
 - Supplies
 - Office
 - Audio/Visual Equipment

- Room Arrangement
 - Arrange your tables relatively close together so people feel part of the group, but not squished together.
 - Entertainment
 - Present a variety of ways:
 - Videos – commercial or make your own
 - Role Play – Staff or Parents
 - Large group discussion
 - Small group discussion
 - Cartoons
 - Demonstrations
 - Try for a balance of sit down time with some active time.
 - Be sure to give them a reason for learning – it's harder to do at the end of a long work day.
6. Allow for socializing and time for parents to build relationships with each other. It's wonderful to see parents hit it off and develop a friendship that continues after the parent time.
7. Incentives/Party Favors
- Consider some kind of drawing for returned homework
 - Door Prizes
8. Ground Rules
- Confidentiality
 - Respect for each other
 - The right not to talk/participate
 - Respect for time – maintaining the schedule
9. Feedback
- From parents – use it to plan next meeting
 - To parents – thank-you notes – Reminder or Quote

Parent Party
Notes

Parent/Child Task Board

As we've mentioned before, finding the time to put together the materials and plan meaningful parent/child activities for each month proved to be a challenge. We found ourselves going back to the same old activities or throwing things together at the last minute. The Task Board has a variety of activities for families to choose from, enough to last for eight or more meetings. We keep a box of supplies ready to just pull out prior to the family's arrival. The box can then be restocked any time during the month or week between meetings.

As you know from your own party experience not all of your guests arrive at the same time. The task board addressed this issue. Families can arrive and choose their activities. After 10-15 minutes we use a signal (tambourine/chimes) to let them know it's time to finish up. We then encourage them to wash for the dinner and proceed to the dining area, not all at once but in a slower, filtered manner. This helps us to keep the entire evening on track without cutting short our parent time or going late past our departure time.

An added benefit the Task Board provides is getting the parents into the classroom with their child. Parents and children are sharing an activity in the same space where that child spends their day, doing similar activities. One child was particularly pleased with herself the next day when she told her friend her "mama and daddy were at the homework table yesterday." A parent commented that it gave her better context to the comments her child was making about school.

As you are aware when planning a party, it's attention to details that can make it successful and the more details you can prepare for ahead of time the less rushed/harried you are before your event. The Task Board has enabled us to have meaningful activities ready for families.

Here's a list of tasks we have on our Task Board:

<p>*Keep in mind, the tasks are: designed to take 10-15 minutes activities the child is familiar with paired with a communication strategy to encourage generalization</p>
<p>Have your child show you where the art area is. Draw a picture together. Comment on what you see your child doing and what you are doing. "I am using the red crayon"</p>
<p>Go to the house area observe your child's play. Are they playing alone or with someone? Listen to their language.</p>
<p>Choose a book to read together. Let your child turn the pages.</p>
<p>Build something together in the block area. Talk about the size of blocks or the structure. Comment on big-bigger-biggest</p>
<p>Ask your child to show you the bathroom and how to wash your hands. Ask your child to tell you what to do step-by-step. Prompt them with phrases like "What's next?" or "What do I do first?"</p>
<p>Ask your child where the toothbrushes are. Help them choose a new toothbrush and label it. Repeat the words and phrases they say. Ask them what to do with the old toothbrush.</p>
<p>Put a puzzle together. Comment on how the pieces match. "Here's part of her red dress."</p>

Use the name cards and symbols to have your child name his or her classmates.

Take turns reading the cards.

Remember to wait for your child's response.

Paint a picture together at the easel.

Observe what colors your child uses.

Do they talk while they paint or is it serious work?

Find the stencils and make a picture.

Describe what you're doing, emphasize the shape word.

"I'm using the "Round" stencil. It looks like a ball."

Draw a picture/write a letter together in their journal or with other paper.

Comment on what you are doing

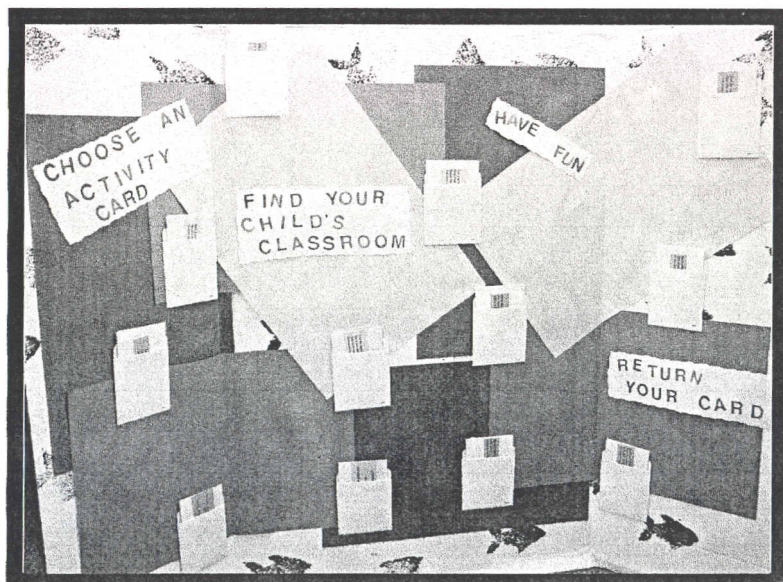
Ask your child to show you where they hang their coat.

Color a paper coat together.

Have your child describe with colors to use.

Interpret what he/she says

"Red Pocket" "Yes, your coat has a red pocket"



Task Board
Notes

An Actual Meeting

A.k.a., the night of the meeting is here. All your pre-planning will pay off. And with the air of a party! Instead of a meeting, you, as staff, will approach it with more enthusiasm, too, and that does have a way of rubbing off on parents...

Our agendas have had a number of incarnations. Our favorite was probably the mid-Saturday meetings. They ran from 10 am to 12:00 or 1:00 depending on the activity or field trip. Yes, field trips were possible when you were working with Saturdays. We went to pumpkin patch and the Zoo. Families really liked it because it gave them a no cost family activity, which included a meal. Staff was more refreshed than at the end of a work day. And that was true for families, too. There was a more relaxed atmosphere with our Saturday meetings; though on the flip side of that was sometimes it was hard drawing parent/child activity to a close in a timely matter; everyone was having such a good time!

Our present situation is back to evening meetings and our agenda looks like this:

- 5:30 – 5:45 Greeting & Parent/Child activity in the class room
(This is from the task home)
- 5:45 – 6:15 Meal
- 6:15 – 6:30 Transition to parent Meeting/children to classroom for child care
- 6:30 – 7:30 Parent Meeting
 - Ice breaker
 - Agenda & Classroom business
 - Parent training
 - Making it/Take activity with “parent interviewing” by staff
- 7:30 – 8:00 Evaluations, Good-byes & Clean up

We had our first meeting using this agenda in October and we were all very happy with it. We had spent more time planning it (that paid off) and we gently moved things along in a more intentional way (using a tambourine and giving five minutes warnings). That way we got everything in and were done on time.

The evaluations indicated that the parents enjoyed the evening both the subject matter and the socializing. We had a nice group size of about 22

parents which broke down into four small groups. A staff member was with each group to help facilitate conversation and answer any questions.

The parent Meeting is really the heart of our evening. We start with an icebreaker activity to warm things up. In October we did the Doughnut. A large piece of paper with a doughnut drawn on it was hung on the wall near each table. This activity is about finding things that parents have in common and things that are unique to them. The common factor is written in the middle, the unique factors around the ring. It does get people talking and moving around. We do look for something physical for the parents to do so they are not always sitting and listening.

The room arrangement can be critical here. We have a large room which we need when everyone is there eating. However, once the meal is done we group tables at one end so the group is sitting closer together. This makes it cozier and encourages parents to talk with each other.

After a few minutes for ice breaker, each small group presented its findings to the large group.

Our Spanish-speaking families were together in one group and our bilingual staff person translated for them and for the rest of us.

After some announcements about upcoming classroom field trips, we began our program. We choose to not use a video, but instead to have staff role-playing different parenting styles with a baby doll. This was one way to model role-playing for the parents and also be entertaining. Having fun is an important element of our meetings. Staff and parents need to be enjoying themselves if this is going to be successful. Being able to make fun of oneself is an important ingredient!

After our presentation, we broke into those same small ice breaker groups to discuss parenting styles. A staff member was with each group to facilitate when necessary and guide the group through the worksheet. This also lead into a discussion of their children's styles and how their children reacted to their particular parenting style.

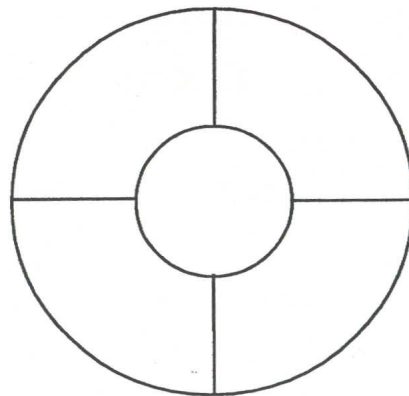
The discussion of parenting styles lead into our next activity, which was to take a silhouette of a child and make it into a representation of their child. Some parents drew in features and clothes the child likes to wear. Others wrote things and activities the child likes to do. The staff member was there in each group to make suggestions or answer any questions.

This is one of the key parts of our meeting: to have staff working closely with parents to answer questions from worksheets and action plans. It is a way that staff and parents build a relationship and makes the action plans. It is a way that staff and parents build a relationship and it makes the action plans (on homework) very specific to each family.

Particularly when a strategy is taught during the meeting, the action plan “interview” process gives the staff a chance to reiterate or teach it again with specifics for each family. Asking questions of each parent about their particular child filling in how the parent thinks this strategy will work with his child gives us another chance to teach the strategy.

This activity took us just about down to the wire, but we did save time for evaluations. These are important avenues for finding out what parents think and if they have any suggestions. Read the evaluations and address any suggestions. We are teaching good communication; we should practice what we preach.

We chose to have four of our parent meetings be based on strategies. A different book will be read each time and will be the center of the strategy discussion. Each family will leave with homework and a book to keep.



Donut

EAST MADISON FAMILY TIME

30 Dempsey Road

Tuesday, October 21st, 2003

5:30 pm to 7:30pm

5:30-Parent/Child Activity

5:45- Meal Time

6:30- Parent Time

- HSPC/Parent Input
- Classroom News
- Overview of Future Parent Times
(Make and Take Its)
- Learning Your Parent Role and Your Child's style of
Communication

7:30- Clean up and Goodbyes

- Free Meal and Childcare
- Transportation is provided
- Great time to meet other parents



Any Questions call 240-4712

Please Return by Friday October 17:

How many will attend? _____ adults _____ children

Will you need a ride YES NO

Name _____

Actual Meeting
Notes

Adult Learning

When we began, we didn't give much thought to how adults learned. We thought if we just told them- they would listen and know why it's important. We did send them home with handouts and some suggestions to try at home.

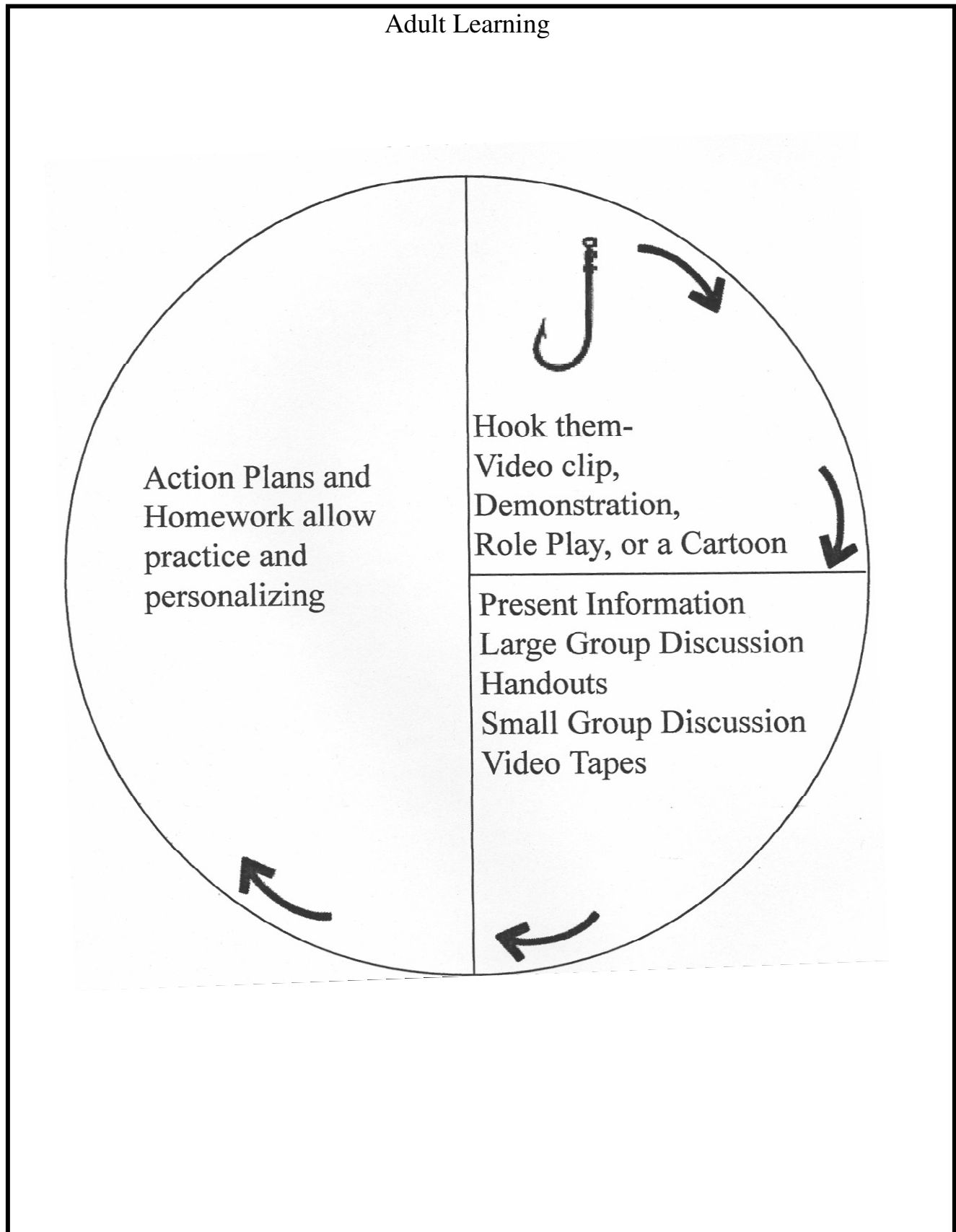
We've since learned we need to be more deliberate in our presentation. Right from the start we need to hook the learner. Once participants have a purpose for their learning they are ready for you to present the material. It's also important to give the adults the time to practice their new knowledge or skills and the opportunity to make it theirs.

We now have a structure to our meetings that had been missing.

Keep In Mind

- Adults have different styles of learning.
- Adults have varied reading/learning abilities.
- They come to your meeting with past experiences with teachers – not all were necessarily good.
- It's the end of a long day.





Adult Learning
Notes

Communication/Relationship Building Strategies

As you can tell from our story, we have gone through many phases of a parent meeting structure to get to where we are now. Today we view it as a more of a “party with a purpose” and have it strongly connected to the concepts from the Hanen Program.

Hanen is a program out of Canada. It teaches communication skills to parents so they can help in their children’s language development. It was originally created to help parents whose children had developmental delays or physical issues which slowed language development.

From the Hanen Program a Wisconsin model was developed. We worked on that project which took two years and which has as a final product a workbook of its own. The model is called PACT, Parents and Communication Teams. Most of what we teach at parent meetings is from PACT. We use the strategies to teach and foster relationship-building which we feel is the foundation of good communication.

The beauty of these strategies is that they are straight forward and are things that many parents are already doing. No fancy or extra equipment is needed and they can be practiced anywhere at anytime.

The concepts, however, demand a certain attitude which puts the child at the center of things. The results are improved adult-child relationships with both children and adults enjoying each other’s company more. And isn’t *that* what it’s all about?

So what are these strategies we’ve been talking so much about, which are at the core of our parent meetings? Well, they can be summed up in three A’s: Allow, Adapt and Add. They are three concentric circles with “Allow” at the center.

Allow stands for allowing your child to lead. It all begins with observing the child. So that the parent gets a feel for what the child likes to do and how the child likes to do things. The parent takes the time to find out what the child’s focus of attention is. Waiting is the next step; waiting and giving the child time to express his/herself. Then listening carefully and giving the child the parent’s undivided attention is the next crucial step.

Observe. Wait. Listen. This is really the center or core of the strategies – to let the child know that you, the parent, are interested in her and what she has to say. This reflects a respect and a yearning for relationship which are key concepts to this approach.

From this center comes the next circle or the next A, Adapt. Adapt explains how the parent can respond to the child. After the parent has observed, waited, and listened to the child. Adapting includes behaviors like

being face to face with your child, imitating the sounds, words or gestures your child makes. Adapting is all about how the parent responds and works to engage the child. Mainly it is ways that the parent lets the child know that the parent wants to communicate and is interested in what the child is doing and saying. It is the start of the dance of communication, that flow of back and forth, give and take, that promotes good feelings and good talking.

The next A is Add. It is the next step in responding and engaging with the child to enrich the language experience. It expands on the adapting behaviors. You might imitate what the child said and then add a word or action. You may add facial expressions or gestures as you repeat what the child just said. In some way you take what the child has said or done and make it fuller, richer, more expansive.

So there are the three A's: Allow, Adapt, and Add. Allowing the child to lead is at the center and is what we teach the parent to go back to often in this communication dance. The other two A's- Adapt and Add – are ways we spell out how to show interest, engage the child in talking and build a two-way relationship.

These strategies teach and encourage relationship-building behaviors, and what parent doesn't want to have a good relationship with their child?

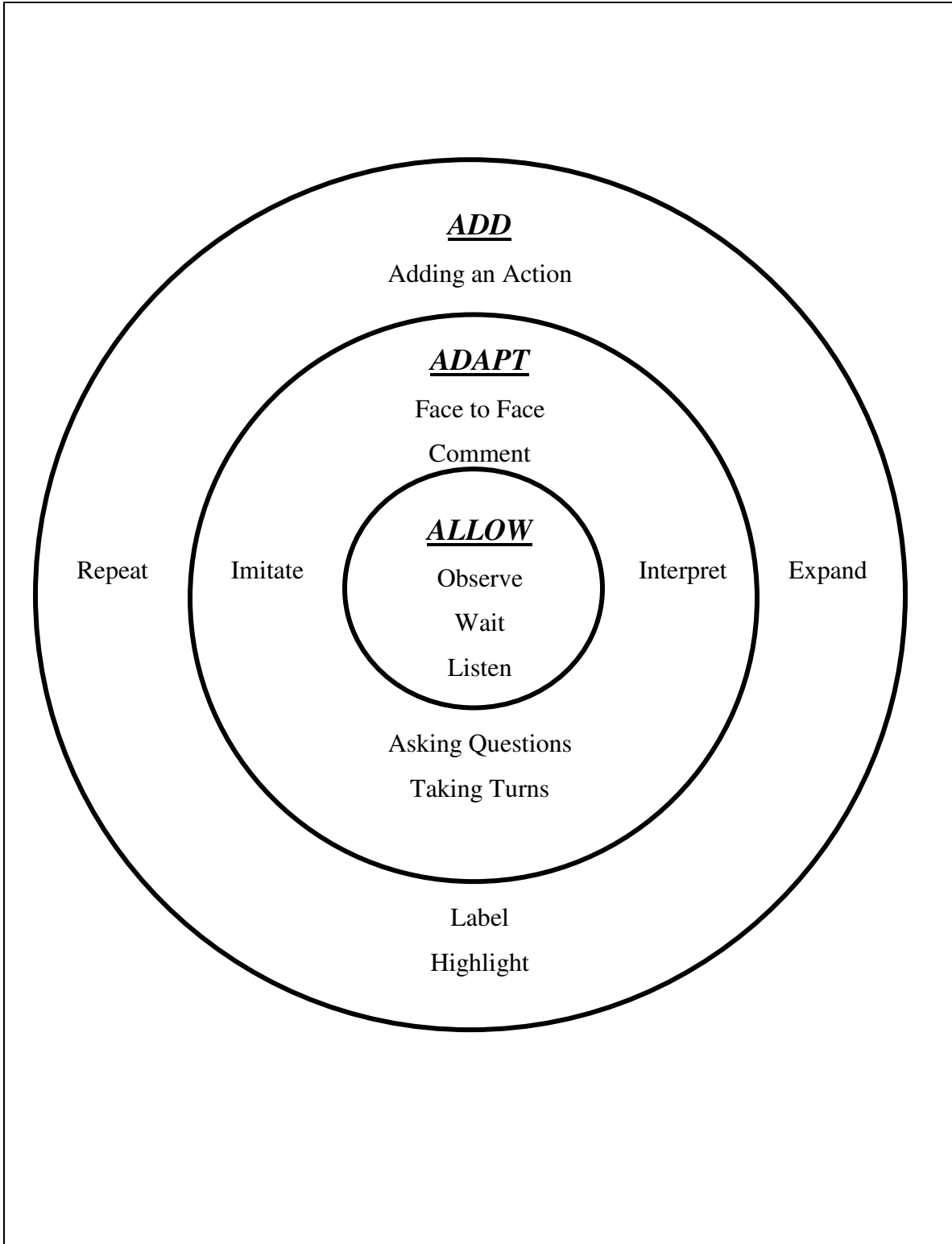
On the next page you will find the three concentric circles of Allow, Adapt and Add and a list of behaviors we teach with each A.

Allow

Adapt

Add

The Three A's of
Communication and Relationship-building



Communication/Relationship
Building Strategies
Notes

Action Plans

Action plans are our way of solidifying the teaching of a strategy. Each sheet has a short description of the strategy, an example of it, and then some questions for the staff member to go through with the parent.

The action plans are designed to help the staff go through a strategy with a parent. There are questions to the parent about their child such as “What do you think will catch your child’s interest in this book?” Using what the parent predicts, the staff and parent together go through how this particular strategy can be used with the child’s interest.

This “interview” is a good time for relationship building between the staff and parent. The strategies are good tool for the adult-to –adult communication, too!

The bottom half of the sheet contains the homework. Homework gives the parent a chance to try the strategy with their child and record what happens. This way the sheet acts as an information guide to the strategy and a place to record what actually happened at home with the book.

There are no wrong answers to this. The parent may be able to guess what the child is drawn to – or may be completely off. No matter. The goal is for the parent to allow the child to lead and go from there. With each homework sheet we want to take the parent back to the center of our circle – observe, wait, and listen.

Now the incentive to do this homework and bring it back is this: each meeting a drawing will be made from all those who did their homework and brought it back. The prize is a \$10 gift certificate for food at a local restaurant. (This has been a good incentive when we’ve used it in the past.)

These parent interviews will be done during the Make It/Take It portion of the meeting.

Allow

Adapt

Add

Allow

I. Parent Roles

- View each video segment
- In your small group talk about the following:
 - How do you think the child is feeling?

- What is the parent's purpose and when do you find yourself doing this?

- What is one thing the parent could change?

II. Child's Style

- Describe your child's style (Remember, it's how your child communicates with familiar adults)

Adapt

- Ask what questions of your child that gets more than a yes or no response

Examples – What if nobody came?
What do you think will happen?

What do you think will catch your child's attention in this book?

What questions could you ask?

Practice These



At Home

What caught your child's attention?

What questions did you ask?

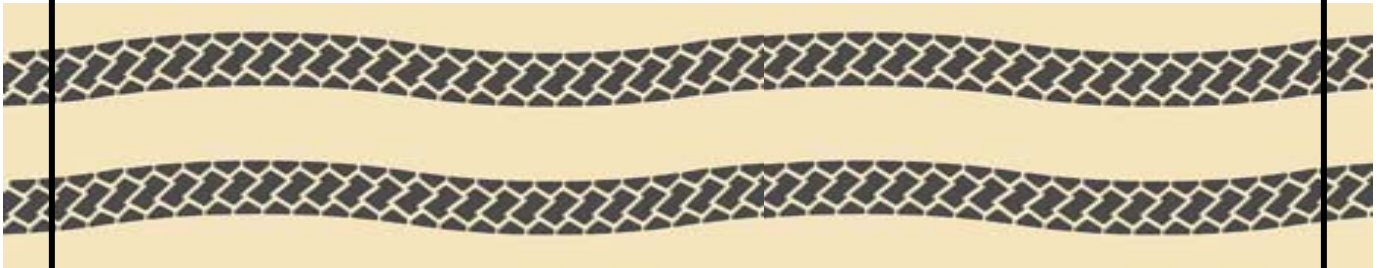
Adapt

Imitate - Copy your child's actions and sounds
- Do what your child does

Examples - *VROOM VROOM* goes the truck
- Roll the truck across the floor just like your child does

What do you think will catch your child's attention?

How can you imitate what your child does?



At Home

What caught your child's attention?

What did you imitate and how?

Adapt

Commenting: Responding to your child verbally

Examples - When your child points to something you respond by naming it

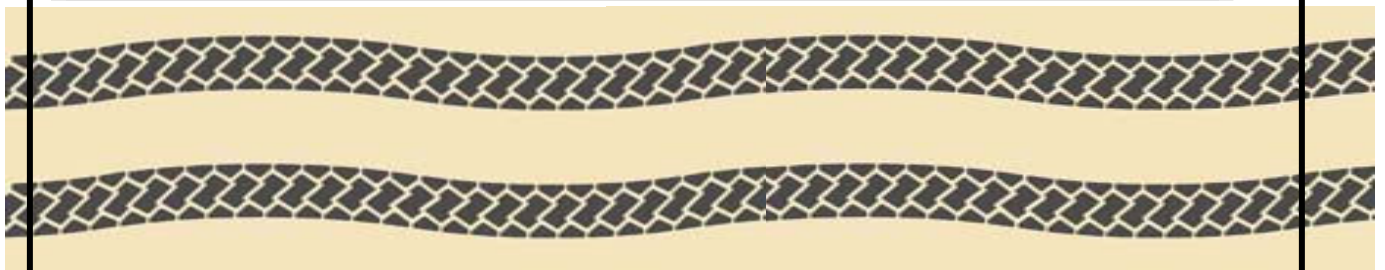
i.e. That is a bone



What do you think will interest your child in this book?

What will be your comments?

Say them Aloud



At Home

What did interest your child in this book?

How did you comment on it/what did you say?

Adapt

Interpret - restating what your child says, or giving words to a gesture.

Example - 1. I saw a twuck. (child)

You saw a truck. (adult)

2. Who are you sitting on now? (child)

Who am I sitting by now? (adult)

3. I count four truck. (child)

You count four trucks. (adult)



What do you think will catch your child's attention?

How might you interpret what your child says or points to?



At Home

What caught your child's attention?

What did you interpret for your child and how did you do it?

Add

EMPHASIZE NEW OR IMPORTANT WORDS. It helps your child pay attention to these words.

Example: The truck is ENORMOUS



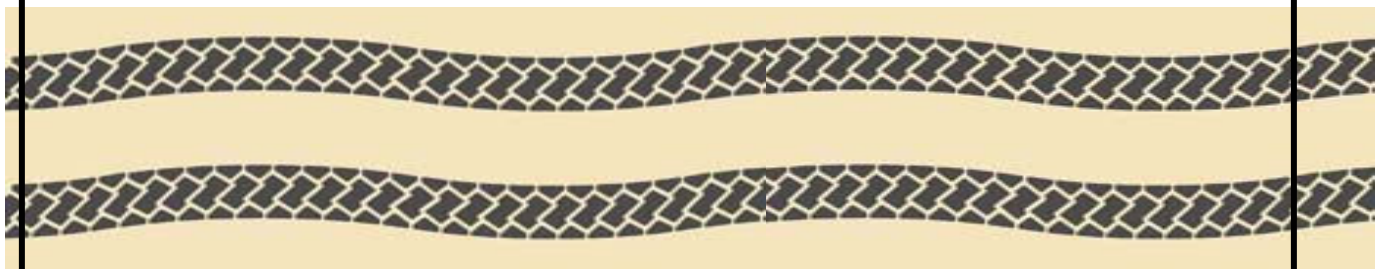
What do you think will interest your child in this book?

What will be some new or unfamiliar words you can emphasize?

Practice reading these in the book.

Have your partner guess which word you're highlighting.

What other times in your day could you highlight these words?



At Home

What did capture your child's interest?

What words did you emphasize?

What other times did you find to emphasize or highlight words?

Add

REPEAT REPEAT REPEAT

Find as many different ways to use the same action or words as you can. This will help your child understand and learn new words.

What do you think will interest your child in this book?

Identify some new words from the text.

Write some phrases you can use the new words in.

At Home



What did interest your child in this book?

What was a new or unfamiliar word(s) you focused on?

Record how you were able to repeat the new word(s).

Add

Use an action paired with words to help your child understand new words and to grab their interest.

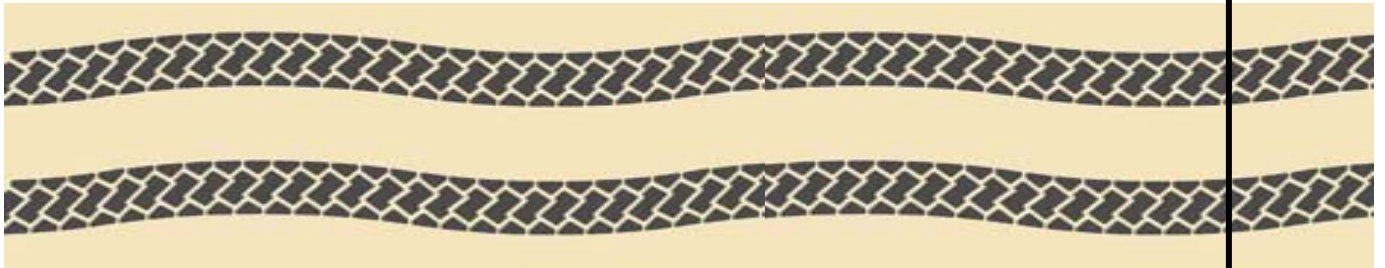
Example - The horn on the bus goes BEEP BEEP!
(As you touch your nose)



What do you think will interest your child in this book?

What are some words you could pair with actions?

Practice saying the words with the action



At Home

My child actually likes these actions:

He/She used these actions which I then imitated:

Other times we shared an action: (ie. Driving home we saw a bus, I touched my nose and said BEEP BEEP)

Add

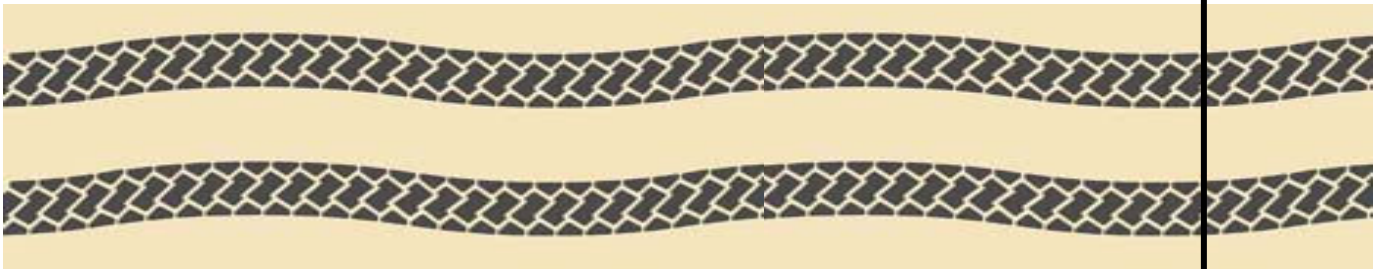
Label unfamiliar things for your child or give them a more specific label. This lets your child know you are listening to them and it expands their vocabulary. It also helps them to recognize several specific items belong to one category. (i.e. dump truck, moving truck, pick-up truck)

i.e. Little animals become prairie dogs

Bus becomes school bus

Truck becomes dump truck

What will interest your child? Find some specific labels in the story or some labels you could add specifics too.



At Home

Was your child interested in the specific labels?

If not, what did interest them?

How were you able to add specific labels to your child's language?

Add

Adding language allows you to expand your child's vocabulary and gives them new ways to think/talk about things.

Complete the Language Wheel on the next page. Choose something from the book and add language.



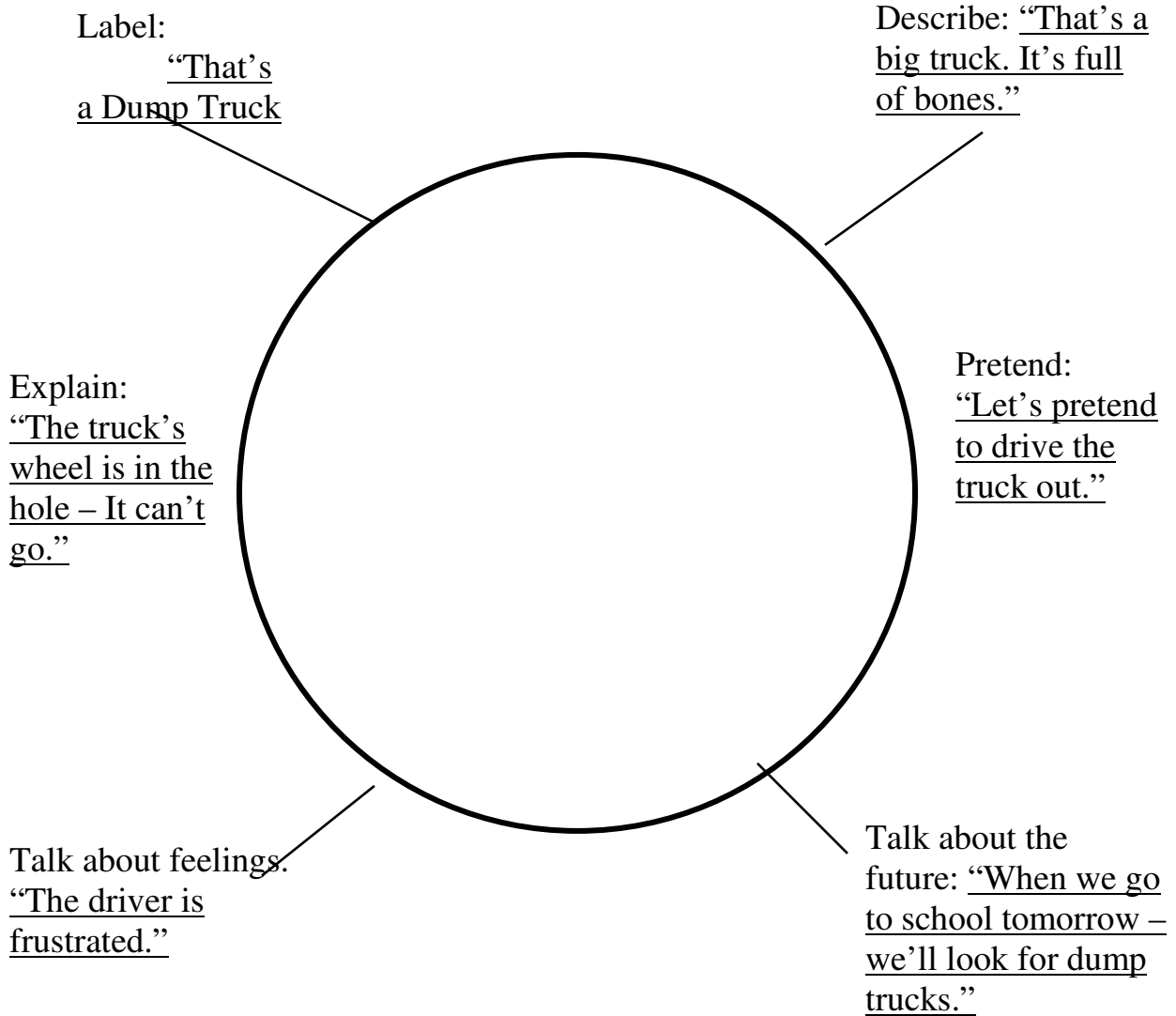
At Home

Did you choose something your child showed interest in?

If not, complete a new language wheel.

Remember your goal is not to use all expansions at once.

Add Language



Expanding on the child’s message gives him the chance to hear new words and gradually to understand them.

Add Language

Label: _____

Describe: _____

Explain: _____

Pretend: _____

Talk about feelings. _____

Talk about the future: _____

Expanding on the child's message gives him the chance to hear new words and gradually to understand them.

Action Plans - Allow
Notes

Action Plans – Adapt
Notes

Action Plans – Add
Notes

Child's Silhouette

