



Transforming Engagement:
Keeping Children and Youth at the Center of Our Work

IMPLEMENTATION MANUAL

UPDATED JUNE 2025



QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CENTER
ON ENGAGING YOUTH IN
FINDING PERMANENCY



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Acknowledgements | 3 |
| Purpose of Implementation Manual | 3 |
| SECTION 1: | |
| Overview | 4 |
| Common Language | 5 |
| Characteristics and Competencies | 5 |
| Modules | 6 |
| Materials | 6 |
| SECTION 2: | |
| Classroom Based Training | 7 |
| Curriculum Approach | 7 |
| Curriculum Structure | 7 |
| Knowledge and Attitude Competencies | 7 |
| Connection Characteristics and Competencies | 7 |
| Tools to Support Delivery of the Curriculum | 8 |
| <i>Implementation Manual</i> | 8 |
| <i>Facilitator Guide</i> | 8 |
| <i>Participant Guide</i> | 8 |
| <i>Power Points</i> | 9 |
| <i>Videos and Podcasts</i> | 9 |
| <i>Toolkit</i> | 9 |
| SECTION 3: | |
| Tools to Support Ongoing Learning | 10 |
| Action and Reflection Guide | 10 |
| Activity Guidebook | 10 |
| SECTION 4: | |
| Best Practices | 11 |
| Engaging Participants | 11 |
| Co-Facilitation Tips | 11 |
| Personal Experiences and Strategic Sharing | 12 |
| Lived Experts | 12 |
| Use Humor as Part of the Learning Process | 12 |
| Parking Lot | 12 |
| Class Size and Structure | 12 |
| APPENDIX A: | |
| Characteristics and Competencies | 13 |

Acknowledgements

The Quality Improvement Center on Engaging Youth in Finding Permanency (QIC-EY) was funded by the United States Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Children's Bureau. The QIC-EY is led by Spaulding for Children and is working in close partnership with the following three national partners:

- The University of Washington
- The New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors
- The University of Nebraska - Lincoln



These agencies worked collaboratively with staff, people with lived expertise in the child welfare system and expert consultants to develop the curriculum and all accompanying documents. We want to express our deep appreciation to the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families for providing the funding to make this project possible.

Purpose of Implementation Manual

The Implementation Manual is a resource for facilitators that includes the overall information on the QIC-EY curriculum. It is a big picture document that provides facilitators with the information they need to **initially** set up the curriculum. It includes:

- Overview of the QIC-EY project
- Materials needed
- Curriculum approach
- What you need to know as a facilitator
- Best practices and more

SECTION 1

Overview

The Quality Improvement Center on Engaging Youth in Finding Permanency (QIC-EY) aims to advance child welfare programs and practice to ensure they are authentically engaging and empowering children and youth in foster care nationwide, especially in relation to permanency decisions. The goal is to bring about systemic changes in how children and youth are authentically engaged as reflected in intentional policy, practice, and culture shifts.

A systemic literature review was conducted. Some key findings were:

- Engaging youth in their own permanency planning improves permanency and transition related outcomes while enhancing both child and agency wellbeing.
- Youth involvement expands permanency options, resulting in fewer children leaving care without a connection to a stable, consistent adult.
- Youth value the fairness of the decision-making process over the decision itself, and when youth feel included and heard in these processes, their satisfaction and compliance with the outcome can increase.
- Results revealed 3 characteristics and 9 competencies of staff that support successful youth engagement.
- A definition of authentic child and youth engagement was needed.
- A training and coaching model was needed to support the workforce in authentically engaging children and youth.

Insights were refined with feedback from:

- The National Youth Engagement Advisory Council—21 members from 10 agencies from across the United States known for their partnership with youth currently or formerly in the child welfare system.
- The QIC-EY Workforce Council—experts in child welfare training, workforce development, and curriculum design.

These insights from lived experts and professionals from the child welfare workforce informed the creation of the QIC-EY Workforce Training Curriculum. The curriculum was piloted in seven sites, rigorously evaluated, and revised based on survey results and participant feedback.

COMMON LANGUAGE

The QIC-EY leadership team carefully considered curriculum language, and the QIC-EY suggests explaining the intentional language choice to participants to promote a shared understanding of the use of these terms.

Children and Youth - Anybody under the age of 18. The team intentionally chose the term “children and youth” because children and youth of all ages can be engaged. We don’t need to wait until a young person is 12 to engage them. We can start with a 6-year-old, a 3-year-old, or a 15-year-old, which is why we consistently use the term children and youth.

Child Welfare Professional - Anybody who works in the child welfare field. They may or may not have lived expertise. Instead of us tacking on “lived expertise” as an additional descriptor, we allow the professional to reveal this expertise how they would prefer.

People with Lived Expertise - Anybody who is 18 or older who is or has been involved with the child welfare system at some point in their life. Adults with lived expertise share they are often still referred to as children or youth, regardless of their age. The QIC-EY wants to acknowledge their role as lived experts and respect them as adults. It should be noted only a lived expert should identify themselves as a person or youth with lived expertise. If we know a person who is a lived expert, it is not our place to share that information.

Youth with Lived Expertise - Anybody under the age of 18 who is or has been involved with the child welfare system at some point in their life.

CHARACTERISTICS AND COMPETENCIES

Three characteristics and nine competencies were identified by the QIC-EY that are most important to authentically engage children and youth. The characteristics and competencies are included in the definition of authentic engagement and are woven throughout the curriculum modules. The full definitions can be found in Appendix A – Characteristics and Competencies.

| Characteristics | Competencies |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Committed• Flexibility• Self-Awareness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partner with Children and Youth• Use Communication and Listening Skills• Build Trusting Relationships• Understanding Child and Adolescent Development• Use a Trauma-Informed Approach• Use a Strength-Based Approach• Support Cultural Connections• Inform and Prepare Children and Youth• Advocate for Children and Youth |

MODULES

The curriculum consists of 7 modules. Each module highlights a specific competency.

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Using Engagement to Move Toward Permanency: Foundational Module. Learn the core principles of authentic engagement and how it drives relational, cultural, and legal permanency for children and youth. | 4 hours |
| Having Difficult and Sensitive Conversations. Master strategies for open, honest communication that build trust and support children and youth through life's toughest discussions. | 2 hours |
| Informing and Preparing Children and Youth for Transitions. Reduce trauma by engaging youth in transition planning, ensuring they feel informed, prepared, and supported. | 1 hour |
| Trauma's Impact on Engagement. Understand how trauma affects behavior and engagement, and develop skills to create safe, supportive environments. | 1 hour |
| Supporting Cultural Connections. Explore the power of cultural permanency and how cultural curiosity strengthens engagement and identity. | 1 hour |
| Partnership and Shared Decision Making. Shift power dynamics and equip youth with decision-making skills that foster true collaboration. | 1 hour |
| Supporting Child and Youth Voice. Go beyond transactional engagement—empower youth to lead, make decisions, and drive meaningful change. | 1 hour |

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| TOTAL HOURS | 11 hours |
|--------------------|-----------------|

MATERIALS

The QIC-EY recognized that initial training on engaging children and youth is essential, but ongoing learning and support is just as critical. The QIC-EY offers both Classroom Materials and Ongoing Learning and Support Materials

- Classroom Materials – to deliver the classroom-based training
 - » Implementation Manual
 - » Facilitator Guide
 - » Participant Guide
 - » Handouts
 - » Power Points
 - » Videos and Podcasts
 - » Tool Kit
- Ongoing Learning and Support Materials – tools to supplement classroom training
 - » Action and Reflection Guide
 - » Activity Guide Book

These materials will be reviewed in more detail in the section “Tools to Support Delivery of the Curriculum” and “Tools to Support Ongoing Learning.”

SECTION 2

Classroom Based Training

CURRICULUM APPROACH

The QIC-EY curriculum focuses on **engagement with children and youth**, specifically exploring how key factors—such as trauma and culture—**impact engagement**. The curriculum does not provide in depth training on individual topics (e.g., trauma or culture), but rather emphasizes understanding **how various elements influence engagement**.

While training the curriculum, it is important to acknowledge the participants varying experiences (new workers, experienced workers, not yet carrying cases, etc.) and to utilize their knowledge to bring the curriculum alive. It is encouraged to model the engagement skills in the classroom that we are asking our workers to do with children and youth. Adults learn by sharing and doing.

CURRICULUM STRUCTURE

The modules are designed to be quick moving with lots of interaction and are presented using various teaching modalities such as short lectures reinforced through activities, small and large group discussions, videos, and podcasts.

Although sites are free to make their own decisions regarding the selection and order of the modules the “Using Child and Youth Engagement to Move Toward Permanency: Foundational Module” is foundational and should always go first. The module includes four sections that are critical to the training. Sites that are using this curriculum must offer the entire foundational module.

We encourage sites to ensure the other modules are offered as well. However, there is some flexibility in how this can be done. Some sites may decide to offer the other modules as ongoing training. The other modules can be presented in any order.

KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE COMPETENCIES

Each module has knowledge and attitude competencies woven into the learning that are important to authentic child and youth engagement. These can be reviewed on page 4 of each module’s Facilitator Guide. Facilitators will not read these aloud to participants but will need to emphasize the key points throughout the module.

CONNECTION TO CHARACTERISTICS AND COMPETENCIES

The curriculum uses the following graphic to show the three characteristics and nine competencies identified by the QIC-EY that are most important to authentically engage children and youth. Each module focuses on one or two of the characteristics and competencies that are central to the topic.

It is important to note that in addition to the competencies that are highlighted in each module, there are likely more competencies that will be touched on. Facilitators should feel free to identify any of the competencies mentioned.

TOOLS TO SUPPORT DELIVERY OF THE CURRICULUM

The Tools to Support Delivery of the Curriculum will aid facilitators in the implementation and delivery of the curriculum.

Implementation Manual

The Implementation Manual is a resource for facilitators that provides the overall information on the QIC-EY curriculum. It is a big picture document that provides facilitators with the information they need to **initially** set up the curriculum. It includes:

- Overview of the QIC-EY project
- Materials needed
- Curriculum approach
- What you need to know as a facilitator
- Best practices and more

This manual is different from the Facilitator Guide, which is an individual guide for each module.

Facilitator Guide

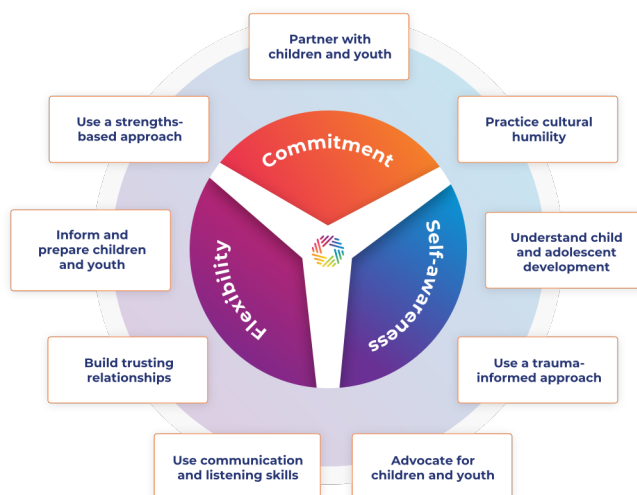
Each QIC-EY module has its own Facilitator Guide that contains all the information the facilitator will need to train the module. In the guide, an image of the power point will appear at the top of the page, followed by notes for the facilitator. The notes are broken into the following categories:

- **Facilitator Notes:** This is general information that the facilitator needs to know about the slide, including the purpose of the activity and the time allotted.
- **Paraphrase:** The information in this section is not written in a manner that is conducive to reading directly to the participants. Instead, the facilitator must read the information and then determine how they want to transfer the information to the participants.
- **Say:** This information contains specific things for the facilitator to state to the participants. They are worded in a manner that can be read directly to the participants.
- **Ask:** This is a discussion question to ask the participants.
- **Do:** These are specific instructions about something the facilitator will need to do for that activity, lecture, and/or discussion.

Participant Guide

The Participant Guide includes the handouts needed to deliver the curriculum. The guide is an important component to supporting the curriculum and meeting different types of learning styles. During the pilot process, trainers recognized participants were more engaged and able to follow along easier when they had a copy of the participant guide in front of them versus electronically.

- **For in-person training,** facilitators will need to ensure participants have the guide on the first day. Participants will be asked to bring the guide to all remaining QIC-EY modules.
- **For remote training,** facilitators will need to consider the best way to provide participants with the participant guide – pick up at a central location, mailing, emailing, etc.



Power Points

The PowerPoint presentation is the vehicle the QIC-EY curriculum uses to structure the training. The presenter view shows the facilitator notes on the far-right side.

You will notice that there are some slides that are hidden. This means the facilitator can see the slides, but they will not be visible to the training participants. The slides that are hidden should stay hidden, except for those that are identified for specific activities.

Videos and Podcasts

Videos and podcasts were created to support the curriculum. The facilitator will need to decide if they want to embed the videos and podcasts in the PowerPoint or play them externally.

Toolkit

The Toolkit is referenced at the end of each module. It is a convenient online resource to support and enhance on-going learning. It includes power points and handouts from class, outside resources, videos and podcasts.

QUICK TIP

How to Hide or Unhide a Slide in a PowerPoint

Click on a slide and then click on the "Slide Show" tab. You should see a menu appear, and one of the options will be "Hide Slide" or "Unhide Slide." When you click "Hide Slide", you will see a line drawn through the slide number on the left side of the screen. When you click "Unhide Slide", the line will disappear.

SECTION 3

Tools to Support Ongoing Learning

The ongoing learning tools bridge the content from the classroom to the day-to-day work of engaging children and youth. They are designed to be quick and easy to use for busy workers wanting to connect with the children and youth they serve.

ACTION AND REFLECTION GUIDE

The Action and Reflection Guide introduces concepts and concrete action steps from each module to aid in incorporating the training into the actual work. This can also be used by supervisors or administrators to enhance knowledge about the training and assist in creating discussion points for meetings, coaching and supervision.

ACTIVITY GUIDEBOOK

The Activity Guidebook offers creative ways to promote connection with children and youth, and to “make moments matter.” Engaging with children and youth in activities provides a great opportunity to explore legal, cultural and relational permanency through discussions, movement, play and creativity.

SECTION 4

Best Practices

ENGAGING PARTICIPANTS

Strong engagement is key to effective learning. Since this curriculum focuses on engaging children and youth, facilitators should model those same engagement skills with participants. Here are practical strategies to support engagement:

- Start with a warm welcome: Greet participants at the beginning of each session. For virtual sessions, open the meeting early to chat and build connection.
- Support the transition from a busy workday into a classroom:
 - » Use tools like the color wheel (from the Foundation module) to help participants check in emotionally. Acknowledge feelings that are shared.
 - » **In person:** provide fidgets, coloring pages, or candy.
 - » **Remote:** play music, use polls, reaction buttons, or encourage chat participation.
- Foster connection:
 - » Use name tents (in person) or ensure accurate display names (remote).
 - » Start virtual sessions in gallery view and use participants' names during discussions.
- Adapt to engagement levels:
 - » Monitor body language and energy.
 - » Adjust methods as needed—change activities, offer breaks, or check in with the group.
 - » Stay flexible, recognizing that disengagement can stem from boredom, being overwhelmed, or fatigue.

As facilitators become more familiar with each group, they'll better understand how to meet participants' unique needs and sustain engagement.

CO-FACILITATION TIPS

Using a co-facilitation model—with two facilitators sharing responsibility for leading the training—is strongly recommended. A balanced team, with one facilitator from the child welfare field and another with lived expertise, adds credibility and enriches the learning experience. Both facilitators should be fully trained on the curriculum and share delivery equally.

Co-facilitation offers several benefits:

- One facilitator can deliver content while the other monitors participants' nonverbal cues, helping manage group dynamics.
- It brings a wider range of experience and perspectives, making sessions more engaging and relatable.

Facilitators should plan time to prepare before each session and debrief afterward. This allows them to assess participant engagement, identify what is working, and adjust strategies to strengthen learning.

Effective co-facilitation relies on strong collaboration. Facilitators should get to know each other's strengths and plan how to use them to enhance delivery. When co-facilitators are comfortable working together, they can present content in a more natural, conversational style while staying focused on the learning objectives.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND STRATEGIC SHARING

Incorporating personal experiences of engaging children and youth helps bring the curriculum alive. When information is embedded in the context of a story, it is more readily retained and provides a way to relate to the content in a real-world way. This helps participants consider how they might apply the information when engaging children and youth. The sharing should be strategic, in that it does not break confidentiality, and should relate to the content in a way that enhances the key learning points and supports a transfer of learning.

LIVED EXPERTS

Facilitators with lived experience offer a unique and valuable perspective. Pilot site feedback consistently highlighted how hearing from lived experts made the curriculum more meaningful and helped participants feel more connected to the content.

When possible, lived experts should co-facilitate and share equal responsibility in delivering the training. Personal stories should be honest and used intentionally to support the curriculum.

USE HUMOR AS PART OF THE LEARNING PROCESS

Humor can be a powerful tool for building connection and engagement with children and youth. By modeling appropriate use of humor during training, facilitators can support a positive learning environment and demonstrate how it can be used effectively in practice.

PARKING LOT

The idea of a parking lot should be established at the start. This is where unanswered questions or questions that are not directly related to the theme being covered can go. This approach helps participants to know they are being heard but not taking up class time with something that either can't be answered or is not relevant to the topic at hand.

CLASS SIZE AND STRUCTURE

The recommended class size is no more than 25 participants to allow for meaningful interaction and group activities. Larger groups can make it difficult to create the engaging and supportive learning environment intended by the QIC-EY curriculum.

The training can be delivered in person, virtually, or in a hybrid format. Facilitator notes include guidance for virtual adaptations. In hybrid settings, a co-facilitation model is strongly recommended—one facilitator delivers the content, while the other manages the chat and supports virtual participant engagement.

APPENDIX A

Characteristics and Competencies

Three characteristics and nine competencies were identified by the QIC-EY that are most important to authentically engage children and youth. The characteristics and competencies are included in the definition of authentic engagement and are woven throughout the curriculum modules.

CHARACTERISTICS FOR AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT

Committed. To engage in authentic ways, child welfare professionals need to be personally motivated to engage children and youth. To support this work, agencies need to provide organizational support for child and youth engagement work and to communicate those values to the professionals who are part of that organization. Child welfare professionals must remain hopeful that all children and youth can achieve permanency, even when children and youth have traits or behaviors that others believe makes them “hard to place”. This characteristic provides a good foundation for authentic relationship building.

Flexibility. Being flexible means adapting the engagement approach according to the child and youth’s unique experience, situation, and abilities. Child welfare professionals show flexibility when they offer children and youth a range of ways to participate in the planning process rather than mandating a one-size- fits-all approach. Child welfare professionals must also be flexible and adaptive when responding to children and youth’s needs in the moment. For example, when gathering information, if the child welfare professional notices children and youth withdrawing, they can adapt and change direction to move at the pace that is most beneficial to children and youth. Organizational cultures that are open to creative and individualized problem solving – as opposed to agencies that are more bureaucratic – open the door for child welfare professionals to be more flexible in their approach to youth work.

Self-Awareness. Self-awareness is about a child welfare professional’s ability to acknowledge that their own personal biases, style, values and idiosyncrasies impact engagement. With self-awareness, child welfare professionals can create space for working with children and youth from different backgrounds. Self-awareness includes the ability to recognize the power imbalance that exists between professionals and children and youth in the system. With self-awareness, child welfare professionals are more willing to accept that they may not know what is best or be the expert in every situation. Being self-aware is what prevents child welfare professionals from projecting their own feelings onto children and youth while sharing information with them during the planning process.

COMPETENCIES FOR AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT

Partner with Children and Youth. The ability to partner refers to the child welfare professional's ability and commitment to form an equal, respectful alliance with children and youth. When child welfare professionals partner with children and youth, children and youth are invited to contribute to the decision-making process and to share responsibility for challenges and successes. To effectively partner with children and youth, child welfare professionals need to set clear expectations, clarify roles and responsibilities and recognize the power imbalances inherent in the relationship. In the partnering relationship, child welfare professionals and children and youth evaluate how the partnership is working and adjust as needed to support working together on established goals.

Use Communication and Listening Skills. Effective child and youth engagement requires child welfare professionals to have open, honest, direct, and respectful communication with children and youth. This includes providing children and youth with current information to aid them in making decisions and making active efforts to elicit the child and youth's preferences. Key communication skills include the ability to understand children and youths' experiences and to feel care and warmth for children and youth (empathy) and the ability to relate to children and youth in an honest, compassionate, and genuine manner (authenticity). Use of everyday language and humor to connect with children and youth are also key communication techniques to use when engaging children and youth.

Build Trusting Relationships. To build trusting relationships, child welfare professionals must be motivated to connect with youth in ways that are enduring and supportive. They are committed to spending time with children and youth, flexible in their approach to meet children and youth where they are and understand the importance of creating a sense of safety. The ability to be dependable, reliable, constant, and consistent allows children and youth to know what they should and should not expect from the relationship. A key element of building a trusting relationship is to remain authentic and to replace transactional interactions with children and youth with interactions that are transformational. Child welfare professionals who are affirming, accepting, and non-judgmental as children and youth explore hopes, dreams, and fears can build trusting relationships with children and youth.

Understand Child and Adolescent Development. Having a strong understanding of developmental milestones across the lifespan is important so that child welfare professionals can tailor their approach to match children and youth's social/emotional, cognitive, and communication abilities. The ability to see children and youth's behaviors and actions in the context of developmental stages and tasks allows child welfare professionals to respond to children and youth's needs more effectively and validate and support children and youth at each life stage.

Use a Trauma-Informed Approach. Because children and youth who have experienced trauma may have more difficulty communicating their experiences and sharing decision making with adults, child welfare professionals have the responsibility to understand how trauma may impact development. Child welfare professionals can become responsive to trauma by creating a safe physical, social, and emotional environment for the children and youth they serve. Use of a trauma-informed approach also includes building trust, collaborative interactions, and empowering children and youth; helping children and youth who have experienced trauma feel more comfortable exploring their permanency options, building skills, and sharing power.

Use a Strength-Based Approach. A strengths-based approach refers to the ability to focus on the unique strengths and abilities children and youth bring to the table. Child welfare professionals using a strengths-based approach view children and youth as the experts on their own lives and build on children and youth's confidence by recognizing their positive qualities and achievements. A strengths-based approach is demonstrated by encouraging children and youth to define their own role in participation according to their strengths and abilities and by helping children and youth to feel comfortable participating in meetings by speaking positively about them and limiting deficit-based conversation.

Support Cultural Connections. Supporting cultural connections is about engaging children and youth from diverse back grounds (including but not limited to those of various races, ethnicities, identities, disability statuses, and socioeconomic backgrounds). Child welfare professionals value children's and youths' cultural perspectives and backgrounds and have an awareness of how their own background affects how they perceive and interact with children and youth. They use what they learn about children and youth to promote cultural permanency.

Inform and Prepare Children and Youth. Preparing children and youth to engage in planning efforts begins with helping children and youth understand what to expect from the process. This includes clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all of those involved in the process. Child welfare professionals provide accurate and relevant information about options to ensure children and youth can make informed decisions and use practice and coaching techniques to build children and youth's level of comfort with the planning and decision-making process.

Advocate for Children and Youth. Advocacy refers to the child welfare professional using their power to act in support of children and youths' wishes. When children and youth see child welfare professionals as people who can support their goals, they are more likely to engage in planning efforts. Child welfare professionals show this support by speaking up for what children and youth want to see happen, connecting them with resources, and addressing any obstacles as they arise.



QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CENTER
ON ENGAGING YOUTH IN
FINDING PERMANENCY

To learn more
Email: info@qic-ey.org
or
Visit us at: QIC-EY.org