

Building Healthy Relationships in Early Learning



Discussion Guide: Creating a Personal Mission Statement

Macomb Family Services' approach to nurturing development of social emotional health and school readiness in early childhood.

A Personal Mission Statement

“Personal relationships are the foundation of every positive movement forward in one’s life.”

Kathleen Macdonald, executive coach and business consultant

There are many valuable resources in the book called: *Building Healthy Relationships in Early Learning—Macomb Family Services’ approach to nurturing development of social emotional health and school readiness in early childhood.* (<https://www.amazon.com/Building-Healthy-Relationships-Early-Learning/dp/1942011571/>)

Among them are tips for running a multi-faceted Play & Learn group as well as inspiring true stories about experts intervening in early learning classrooms facing tough challenges with the social and emotional development of girls and boys. A second free Discussion Guide in this series explains how to run a Road to Relationships workshop or retreat. And there’s even more in these 132 pages!

This Discussion Guide explains how to organize a workshop, seminar or retreat that invites participants to develop a simple Personal Mission Statement. To make the best use of this Guide, read the book. You’ll find a helpful overview, for example, by Kathleen Macdonald starting on page 74. Here is a brief excerpt:

Macomb Family Services spends time inviting team members to stop and figure out a personal mission statement. This organization has its own twist on the process: It is different than other so-called mission statements that groups—organizations or companies—often try to develop. Usually, the three questions asked when creating a group mission statement are:

What do we do?

How do we do it?

Why do we do it?

At Macomb Family Services, they’re asking people to periodically stop and think about questions like:

What on earth am I doing?

How am I going to try to keep doing this work?

So, what am I all about?

What’s my best self?

What are my strengths?

How do I see myself as an individual within this organization?

And that all points to the question: What’s my preferred future?

Organize a Workshop

Note: You can call this a “workshop” or “seminar” or “retreat”—or use another term that’s popular among your friends, colleagues or staff. The point is to have enough time together—away from the daily routine—to really reflect on this process.

Step 1 is to read our book. You may not read every single page in our book, but the values embodied in this workshop are reflected in every story we chose to publish. Plus, if you read the book, you are likely to find quotes you want to highlight and share with participants. Most importantly, the overview of this workshop fills seven pages of this book, starting on page 77—and then makes a transition to the other Discussion Guide we are offering in this series: Road to Relationships. Reading the book shows how this activity fits into the overall context of our work.

Step 2 is inviting everyone. Please consider a broad invitation to this workshop. At Macomb Family Services, we did not limit this to supervisors, or any particular level of professional staff. We made sure that the people who answer our telephones and staff the office joined with social workers and managers. The point of our process is to build a team that values the contribution of every person, whatever their job description. If you are starting this process by limiting it to a particular small circle of workers, then please consider enlarging the circle of invitees.

Step 3 is crediting Christine Zimmerman and Macomb Family Services. While we welcome you to freely share these Discussion Guides, the whole point of this multi-year effort through the Corporation for National & Community Service’s Social Innovation Fund is to spread awareness. In that outreach process, the fund hopes we all will share ideas that work—and we will properly credit the original developers of these programs. So, somewhere in your workshop materials, be sure to include a way for participants to discover our organization and our book.

Creating Personal Mission Statements

This workshop was developed by Christine Zimmerman, a licensed master social worker, who served as director of early childhood programming at Macomb Family Services.

NOTE: The following text in this free Discussion Guide is about half the length of the complete overview of this workshop, written by Zimmerman for the book. You will be able to organize the activity with these instructions—but remember that there are many more insights about this workshop in the book itself.

At Macomb Family Services, we used this workshop as part of a staff retreat. We devoted part of our day to this process. Our focus in creating these statements was greater clarity on what each of us meant when we talked about our individual talents, our purpose, and our assumptions about quality work on a daily basis. Even more importantly, these statements became expressions of passion. Without passion, we

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One of the many personal mission statements that hang on our walls at Macomb Family Services.

tend to fall back on “going through the motions.” In that mode, professionals may still be effective—but our team expects a better outcome than that. We don’t want to simply meet minimum expectations; we want to exceed them and grow so that we can help more people. That larger, collaborative mission is possible only when team members are engaged in self-learning and individual growth, thereby sparking ideas for program improvements and coming up with fresh insights for creating the best environment for ongoing development.

So, to prepare our personal mission statements, I originally set aside time during our staff retreat to draft these texts. Then, months later, we reflected on them, again, in a second session. In our book—and in our Discussion Guide—we are sharing our basic approach to creating these texts. We are aware that a lot has been published online—from many different professional perspectives—about the process of creating personal mission statements. Feel free to use our ideas—or you may want to search for more ideas online and blend them with our practices to create your own unique workshop.

I began our process by facilitating a discussion around the passion of our collective work, then asking the group to spend about 15 minutes with paper and pen, sitting quietly somewhere and listing personal accomplishments that continue to be a source of pride.

I explained it this way: “Quickly jot down things you have accomplished in your life that you still remember to this day. You’re recalling things you did that make you feel good when you remember them. You can call this a sense of pride, or a warm feeling or a pleasant memory of something you

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accomplished. Whatever wording you use, your goal is a list of accomplishments, large and small, that are encouraging for you to remember. Don't write about each one at great length. Just try to remember and jot down a list that fits this description."

Then, as people began to look as though they had finished this task, I called: "Time!"

Next, we asked participants to silently read back over the lists they had made. "Can you draw connective lines between items you've listed? Take a few more minutes, now, to do this. You'll be thinking about how the accomplishments you've noted on your paper connect with each other. Is there a central pathway among the memories that are surfacing? Draw lines on your paper, if that helps. Circle things. Jot down some words that describe the pathways you see that connect what you've remembered."

Then, I said: "Please take a fresh sheet of paper. Now, I'm going to ask you to list some of the values that you consider essential in your life. Don't get hung up on what the word 'value' means. There are many definitions of value in various academic disciplines. You probably can best answer this question by simply using your own first impression of the phrase '*my* values.' Another way to think about this step is to ask yourself this question: 'What are the underlying truths—your basic assumptions about life—that help you to navigate through each day?'"

If you are working with professionals from many disciplines, you can wind up in a deep discussion of terms like values and ideals. Participants may even bring up tangential themes, ranging from spirituality to politics. But observe your participants' reactions. If they are deeply engaged in this task, give them plenty of time. If they become restless at some point, you could end this process sooner. Some may enjoy this; some may resist it. Some people are empowered by this kind of reflection; other people think on a more concrete level and find this frustrating. When participants are finished, their notes about values may look similar—or they may reflect diverse responses to the question. Either way, the exercise is valuable.

When the participants' individual values lists are complete, move on to the final step of creating a mission statement. At this point, you could say something like: "Three questions we face every day are: 'Who do I want to be?' 'Why am I doing what I am doing?' and 'How can I best accomplish this?' Now that you know for yourself what, why and how—you can begin distilling your reflections into a mission statement.

Make your own judgment about how long your team members should work on their final statements. Depending on the dynamics of your gathering, you might want to take a break after the statements are drafted—then, after the break, ask your team members to revise their statements. They may want to tweak a few phrases at that time.

Finally, ask participants to read their statements aloud. You could structure this reflective part of the day toward the end of your time together, and have participants depart with these positive affirmations in mind. Or, alternatively, you may want to couple your sharing of the statements with a strength-based discussion. Are participants surprised at how much they share? Are there distinctive responses? How might individual mission statements fit together to form a shared pathway? How can individual strengths build a healthier community?

At Macomb Family Services, we held a second session of reflection on our mission statements a few months after the first session. Before that second experience, a team member volunteered to print out all of our statements on 8-by-11 sheets of paper with decorative backgrounds and borders. Together, we revisited what we had written earlier.

This process was so meaningful to staff that they decided to hang their mission statements on the wall near our desks as both individual affirmations and pledges that we will hold each other accountable. We want to travel a shared pathway, drawing on all of the gifts, talents and passions that light up the lives of our team members—and the clients we serve.

So Much More Inside the Book

If you are developing your own discussion or retreat, you may want to share some of the remarkable, inspiring resources within these pages. Here are some examples of what you can find in the book.

Sample Personal Mission Statements: Turn to page 82 of the book for samples of real statements written by our colleagues in this workshop. One insight in reading these samples is: They can be short. Two of the best samples are only 11 words in length. Some are longer. One is seven sentences long. Overall, you will realize that these statements need not be exhaustive in their scope.

Planting Healing Seeds: Among the nationally known experts recommending these ideas is Dr. Robert J. Wicks, author of more than a dozen of his own books on resilience and well being among the men and women who regularly serve our communities. Through his writing and training events, Wicks specializes in counseling a wide range of public servants, among them: health-care workers, teachers, caregivers and men and women in military service. In pages 71-74, Dr. Wicks writes about the importance of this particular focus on shoring up the relationships within a community. Here is a brief excerpt from Wicks' chapter:

“This book comes out of Michigan at the right time. Wherever I travel around the world, I find people who are doing very difficult work to help people in need—but they often find that their biggest challenge is finding the resiliency to keep going with their work, day after day. I am a caregiver for other caregivers. I work with highly motivated individuals who often are serving in communities where so much trauma surrounds them that they wind up feeling fatigued. Sometimes, they are so drained that they feel like failures, even when it’s obvious to me that they are not. . . . In offering friendship and community and an opportunity to become intrigued again about the possibilities of life, that’s what we can do to help our world: Together, we can plant healing seeds.”

Why Does This Matter? Further along in the book, on page 84, you’ll find a very helpful section written by Christine Zimmerman, widely known for her work in early childhood programs with a special focus on social and emotional development. Christine’s chapter is titled, *Why Do Relationships Matter So Much?* Christine directly addresses community leaders and professionals who may be considering using ideas from this book. She writes in part: “In our field of expertise, research confirms a link between the strength of professional relationships and the range of positive program outcomes, for the adults who are the caregivers—parents and teachers—as well as for our children.”

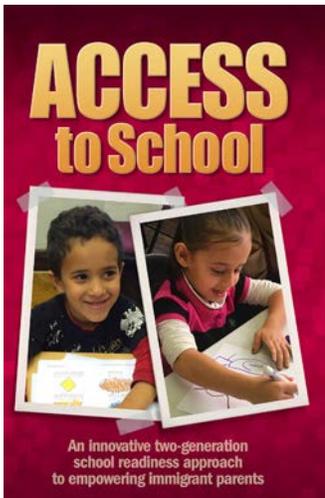
Expand the Conversation

If you’ve read this book, used this Discussion Guide and care about these issues, then please help with the larger overall effort. Now more than ever, Americans need to be reminded of the challenges we face in early childhood education and nutrition. With funding cuts and shifting public priorities nationwide, assistance from community-based nonprofits will be urgently needed. You can help meet these needs by letting others know about your personal interest—and the potential of group discussions. Many men and women feel isolated in their concern for the welfare of young children. Simply letting other people know of your concern can help to touch off a growing community-wide awareness.

One way you can expand the conversation is by visiting the book’s Amazon page and adding a review of the book. Of course, we hope you’ve found this book helpful, so we welcome Amazon reviews that may prompt others to pick up a copy and extend the discussion.

But that’s not all! Share your thoughts on Facebook or in your own newsletters. (*Note: You are free to quote from our book in a blog post or column you might write about your experience in reading and discussing Macomb Family Services. We want you to share these important ideas far and wide.*)

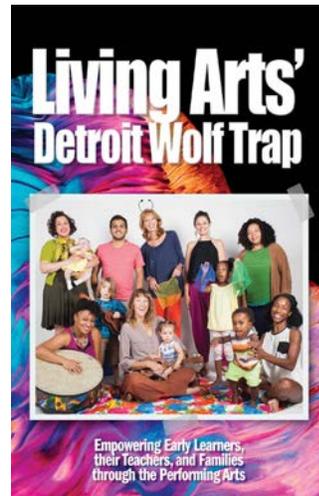
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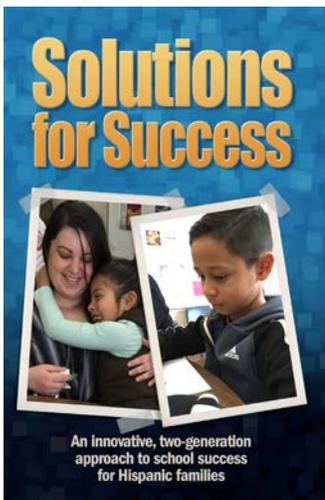
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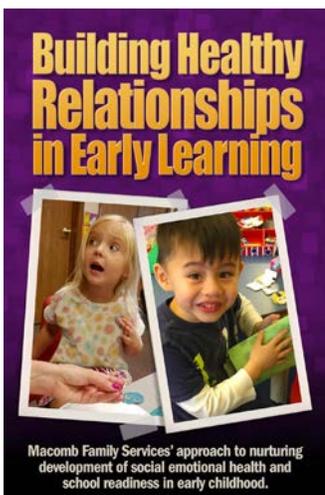
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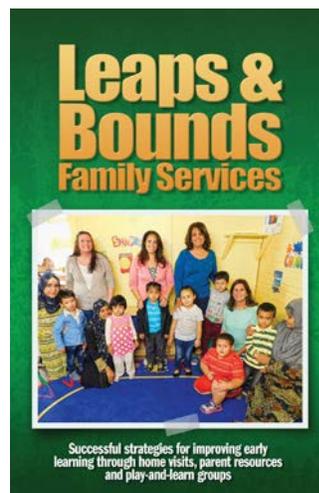
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