

Improving the Child Welfare Workforce Through Training: Common Questions and Evidence-Informed Answers from the QIC-WD

Training is often the first intervention child welfare agencies use to address critical workforce development issues. This QIC-Tip aims to answer child welfare agency leaders' questions about effective training strategies to increase knowledge, enhance skills, and improve job performance. Answers are drawn from the QIC-WD [Umbrella Summaries](#) which present a synopsis of the published meta-analyses of specific workforce topics.

What broad-based training approaches can improve employee learning outcomes and job performance?

[Coaching](#) uses a [structured learning process](#), over time, to help the learner reach specific goals. Meta-analytic research on the use of professional coaches (not managers or experienced coworkers) has found that coaching increases self-efficacy, job performance and self-regulation while greatly impacting attitudes and behavior. Coaching has also been shown to help lower employee stress levels and improve coping skills and sense of well-being.

[Leadership training programs](#) have also demonstrated significant gains in learning, leadership behaviors, overall job performance, and organizational outcomes. Such programs are most effective when they are instructor led; held on site over multiple sessions; include information-, demonstration-, and practice-based methods; and use feedback and face-to-face training methods.



[Emotional intelligence training](#) (EI) has been found to help employees better recognize, understand, and manage emotions. These skills are associated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and improved performance. Research indicates that EI training has a moderately positive effect on EI but there is still much to learn about other factors influencing training effectiveness. There is no standard curriculum or training method; employees participate in lectures, behavior modeling, creation of diaries, reflection, case studies, feedback, coaching or self-directed learning.

Are there evidence-based training programs our agency can implement to reduce racism and increase cultural competency in the workforce?

Yes, although more research is necessary to better understand the specific delivery mechanisms through which diversity training causes change. [Diversity training](#) generally aims to facilitate positive intergroup interactions, reduce prejudice and discrimination, and enhance the skills, knowledge, and motivation of participants to interact with diverse others. Overall, studies have shown that diversity training leads to positive participant reactions and improvements in attitudes, knowledge, and behavior. Mandatory, lengthier training that includes skill-building and that is part of other diversity efforts is most effective. Employees prefer a variety of instructional methods and experience good outcomes regardless of participant age or the racial or gender composition of the training group. Child welfare training programs, especially those in partnership with universities, offer great opportunities to design diversity training based on existing evidence and to develop more rigorous research and evaluation.

What kinds of evidence-based strategies can enhance outcomes for training programs that are already operating in our agency?

[Pre-training interventions](#) are relatively easy to implement and have a positive impact on employee learning outcomes. For example, orienting participants on what they will learn by going over learning objectives and how essential components of the training directly relate to their jobs is an effective strategy as is helping participants develop goals to direct their attention and efforts while learning. Other helpful pre-training strategies include providing participants with tools such as outlines, flow charts, timelines, and Venn diagrams to help learners visually understand the overall structure of the training content; directing them to engage in self-assessments while they are learning; and encouraging participants to look for connections between concepts.

Research shows that training tests improve subsequent learning outcomes, even more than spending time restudying the information. Tests are more effective when they include both multiple-choice and short-answer questions, and when feedback is provided. Training should include low-stakes practice tests, quizzes or other retrieval practice activities. Tests can be of varying lengths, formats, or labels, and should require learners to practice retrieving training-related information from memory.

Are there key features or tips that we should always consider when designing training programs?

Yes, and these are simple to implement! For example, instructional materials are perceived as more friendly and easier to learn when they use a [conversational style](#) instead of a more formal style or presentation. Research indicates that this leads to improved retention of information and enhanced ability to apply the material to new circumstances.

Studies also show that simpler presentation styles are better. For example, there is no need to add [interesting but extraneous content](#) that is not necessary to achieve the learning objective. Illustrations, photos, animation, narration, music, anecdotes (which are often used in child welfare to engage new learners) may impair learning, especially if they are not dynamic, are on paper rather than digital, and when learners are novices. Similarly, the use of [3D characters presented on computer screens](#) to guide users through multimedia learning environments is unnecessary. Simple 2D characters (without the use of facial expressions, motion, or gender) are fine and improve learning outcomes.

How can we help workers engage in real-time learning?

[After action reviews](#) (AARs) involve task feedback, reflection, and discussion about a real or simulated event and have shown positive effects on attitudes, knowledge, processes, and task performance. They are particularly effective when the review includes objective records of the event, such as a video or documents, to avoid relying on memory.

Another effective strategy is the use of [video feedback](#) of an employee's behavior in a real or simulated environment with an instructor reviewing the video with the learner. Research indicates that video feedback leads to improvement in interpersonal skills development and is most effective when the focus is on broad and positive behaviors and when a structured form is used to guide the feedback process.

These training methodologies have been applied and evaluated in fields such as healthcare, the military or education and have important implications for child welfare. It should be noted that many interventions have significant variations in design and practice and would benefit from additional research.