



March 2018

The 3 Pillars of Critical Hours Orientation for Frontline Staff: Learning Module with Videos and Quizzes

Background

Over the last decade, we have seen a significant rise in the number and importance of afterschool programs, or “Homework Clubs,” for elementary and middle-school aged children. These programs fill the critical hours between when children and youth finish school, and the end of their parents’ work day. They rest on three foundational pillars which are based in best practice and are measures by which we can evaluate their success.

The Critical Hours Task Group, under the Ottawa Child and Youth Initiative (OCYI), recognizes the need and importance of high quality training for frontline workers within Ottawa’s critical hours programs. Using a community of practice model, OCYI has provided various in person training sessions for many years. However, many programs struggle to send their staff due to budget limitation. In response, the Critical Hours Task Group developed a series of videos highlighting the 3 Pillars of Critical Hours Programming as a means to close this gap.

This year we are launching a learning module, complete with videos and quiz questions that aim to increase access to professional development resources for frontline workers, based in best practice to support and encourage high quality critical hours program planning and delivery in Ottawa.

What are the 3 Pillars of Critical Hours Programming?

1. Pillar 1: Skill Development

Social & Emotional Skills: After-school programs are key spaces where students expand their socio-emotional learning horizons. Self-esteem, self-regulation, psychosocial adjustment, empathy and school bonding are some of the emotional faculties which are critical indicators of positive development and successful outcomes, and are also a focus in after-school programs.ⁱ

Academic Skills: Although critical hours programs are not strictly scholastic, most include activities designed to improve academic outcomes for participants. Activities should consist of academic enrichment or homework, requiring children and youth to develop skills which are invaluable to academic success, such as persistence, focus, and sustained attention and engagement.ⁱⁱ

2. Pillar 2: Safe and Supported Spaces

Safe Physical Environment: For critical hours programs to be considered safe they must have several components: Staff turnover should be low,ⁱⁱⁱ Staff training and ongoing supervision (the capacity to address academic questions, but more importantly, participants’ personal problems) should be strong and evidence based,^{iv} and authority displayed by staff should be progressive, with lots of opportunity for participant’s autonomous choice.^v

Supportive Emotional Climate: Children are vulnerable when left alone in their time outside of school. Critical hours programs provide a safe, structured space where these children can be engaged in constructive activities during these risky hours. High quality critical hours programs help children



and youth establish positive, healthy behaviours which they will carry with them through their teen years and hopefully for the remainder of their lives.^{vi}

3. Pillar 3: Positive Relationships

Peer-Peer Relationships: Positive relationships with peer’s increases participant engagement, social competency, and relationships with peers. On peer bonding in critical hours, programs show “an increase in prosocial development in youth when peer social support is present. As peer social supports increase, prosocial behaviour and self-esteem increase while conduct disorder, emotional problems, hyperactivity and indirect aggression in turn decrease.”^{vii}

Child/Youth-Adult Relationships: The development of positive relationships between program participants and the adults who staff the programs can be complex due to various dimensions of social bonding but two studies found that they are in fact the singular most important program factor to enhance social and academic outcomes for youth.^{viii}

The Importance of Professional Development

A frontline worker’s capacity to affect positive change within a program is influenced by confidence in their skills, knowledge, and ability to carry out in-program tasks. This can be strengthened by providing opportunities for quality professional development and training.^{ix} Professional development refers to the resources available to the frontline worker for the purpose of developing or increasing capacity to intervene according to evidence-informed practices within the critical hours setting.^x When critical hours workers engage in professional development, they become better equipped to provide quality programming and assistance to participants. Investing in staff development is also directly linked to decreases in burnout and increases in staff retention at all levels.^{xi}

Exposing frontline critical hours workers to research and best practices not only ensures that participants are receiving high quality programming, it also supports collaboration between organizations using a shared language to highlight how essential critical hours workers are to the field of child and youth care.^{xii} Professionalism is listed as one of seven Domains of Child and Youth Care Practice, serving as a bridge between the domain of the self (worker’s internal strengths and personality) and the domain of communication within a program (interaction with and behavior around participants, families, and staff, which comprises of and affects the remaining four domains).^{xiii} Reflecting the diversity of participants within critical hours programs, frontline workers should be committed to continued learning and professional development, formally and informally, in order to improve upon professional skills and knowledge.^{xiv} As frontline workers tend to be casual or part-time staff, they usually do not receive the benefits that those in full-time positions receive, often leading to a gap in knowledge and negatively impacting quality service delivery.

What’s the Objective?

The goal of developing this learning module program is to provide fully accessible material to frontline workers when in-person training isn’t feasible. With the training material online, workers can access the material and complete the modules at their own pace. The online format also provides supervisors with a resource to enhance their annual staff training and new staff orientation.



What's included in the Learning Module?

This module includes engaging videos on the 3 Pillars (complete with conference clips, on-camera narration, program footage, and interviews with Ottawa program participants and staff), and a quiz portion. The module is organized into three sections: **Section One** contains the Intro and Skill Development videos and test questions. **Section Two** includes the Safe and Supported Spaces video and questions, and **Section Three** comprising of the Positive Relationships video and questions. Each video ranges in length from 18 – 20 minutes and there are 10 questions per section.

Example Topics Explored

- Cultural competency
- Collaborative problem-solving
- Being prepared to support
- Reporting
- Inclusivity
- Relationship types
- Belonging
- Participant engagement
- Autonomous decision-making
- Mentoring/modelling

Benefits

- ✓ No transportation: Accessible online, anywhere and anytime. This eliminates the need to be available in person for valuable training. (Videos are also available on YouTube, whenever you need them, as a refresher or otherwise).
- ✓ Zero cost to participate: Only access to the internet and a connecting device (computer, table, or phone) are required.
- ✓ No special facilitator training required: Supervisors are given unique links and passwords to incorporate into staff training. Supervisors will have access to their staffs test results.
- ✓ Customizability: With the module being divided into three sections, agencies have the choice of completing it within one session, about 1.75 hours total (1 hour and 5 minutes to watch videos, and 40 minutes to answer questions), or up to three sessions (35 minutes per section).
- ✓ Evidence-informed: Provides frontline staff across agencies with coherent understanding of critical hours programs and their role as frontline critical hour workers.

Implementation

By participating in the module, the agency supervisor (or staff leading this training) will receive access to the module quizzes with embedded videos via three weblinks (one per section) and one password, all of which are unique to the agency. The supervisor will then be responsible for distributing the weblinks and password to their frontline staff.



Try it out!

Take a few minutes to explore the module and decide if it's right for you.

Example:

Organization 1

1. Intro and Skill Development: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/org-quiz1>
2. Safe & Supported: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/org-quiz2>
3. Positive Relationships: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/org-quiz3>

Password: *frontline*

Every time a respondent starts a section of the module, they must input some personal information (i.e. name, agency, position, program, city/region, email) to be used for administrative purposes. Once the respondent exits the webpage, they cannot return to where they left off. If a respondent revisits a quiz that was abandoned before completion, they will need to restart. Upon completion of a section, respondents will immediately be shown their results and the correct answers. Answers to questions are only recorded if the entire module quiz section is completed. The supervisor will also be given a separate set of weblinks, one per section, and another password (meant to be kept private to supervisor or other managers) to gain access to the results of the quiz. On the results webpage, supervisors can view response summaries of the questions, data trends, and individual responses, specific only to their agency.

Example:

Results for Organization 1

1. Intro and Skill Development: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-W83BNPQB8/>
2. Safe & Supported: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-28YV7PQB8/>
3. Positive Relationships: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-D2VLK6QB8/>

Password: *supervisor*

The agency supervisor/manager is responsible for the distribution of their assigned links and passwords and the Ottawa Child & Youth Initiative will maintain access to your agency's quiz results and assigned links and passwords for administrative and maintenance purposes only.

How to Partake

If you would like to participate please send an email to Shannel Watt-Charley at swattcharley@growingupgreat.ca with your name, agency name, and contact info. We will get in touch and send you your agency unique weblinks and passwords.

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Endnotes

- ⁱ Shernoff, David J. "Engagement in After-School Programs as a Predictor of Social Competence and Academic Performance." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 45 (2010): 325-37. Web. 18 Dec. 2014 at 326.
- ⁱⁱ Vandell, Deborah Lowe, David J. Shernoff, Kim M. Pierce, Daniel M. Bolt, Kimberly Dadisman, and B. Bradford Brown. "Activities, Engagement, and Emotion in After-school Programs (and Elsewhere)." *New Directions for Youth Development* 105 (2005): 121-29. Wiley Periodicals, Inc. Web. 18 Dec. 2014 at 126.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Cross, Amanda Brown, Denise C. Gottfredson, Denise M. Wilson, Melissa Rorie, and Nadine Connell. "Implementation Quality and Positive Experiences in After-School Programs." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 45 (2010): 370-80. Web. 18 Dec. 2014 at 376.
- ^{iv} Noam, Gil G., and Beth Bernstein-Yamashiro. "Youth Development Practitioners and Their Relationships in Schools and After-school Programs." *New Directions for Student Leadership* 137 (2013): 57-68. *Wiley Online Library*. Web. 18 Dec. 2014 at 67.
- ^v Deutsch, Nancy L., and Jeffrey N. Jones. "'Show Me an Ounce of Respect': Respect and Authority in Adult-Youth Relationships in After-School Programs." *Journal of Adolescent Research* 23.6 (2008): 667-88. Web. 18 Dec. 2014 at 671.
- ^{vi} Wright, Robin, Lindsay John, Eric Duku, Giovanni Burgos, Amanda Krygsman, and Charlene Esposto. "After-School Programs as a Prosocial Setting for Bonding Between Peers." *Child & Youth Services* 31 (2010): 74-91. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group. Web. 18 Dec. 2014 at 77.
- ^{vii} *Ibid* at 77.
- ^{viii} Wright et. al. *supra* note xv at 76; and Gottfredson, Denise, Amanda Brown Cross, Denise Wilson, Melissa Rorie, and Nadine Connell. "Effects of Participation in After-School Programs for Middle School Students: A Randomized Trial." *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness* 3 (2010): 282-313. *Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group*. Web. 18 Dec. 2014 at 305.
- ^{ix} Leeman, Jennifer, Jonathan L. Blitstein, Joshua Goetz, Alexis Moore, Nell Tessman, Jean L. Wiecha. "Developing a Tool to Assess the Capacity of Out-of-School Time Program Providers to Implement Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change." *Preventing Chronic Disease: Public Health Research, Practice, and Policy* 13, no. 105 (2016): 1-9. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web. 1 Mar 2018 at 2.
- ^x *Ibid* at 2.
- ^{xi} Bowie, Lilian and Jacinta Bronte-Tinkew. "The Importance of Professional Development for Youth Workers." *Practitioner Insights: Research-to-Results* 2006, no. 17 (2006): 1-9. Child Trends. Web. 1 Mar 2018 at 2.
- ^{xii} *Ibid* at 3.
- ^{xiii} Stuart, Carol and Bill Carty. "The Role of Competence in Outcomes for Children and Youth: An Approach for Mental Health." *The School of child and Youth Care* (2006): 1-110. Ryerson University. Web. 1 Mar 2018 at 25-26.
- ^{xiv} *Ibid* at 31.