This research-based tip sheet highlights the importance of proactive, tailored technical assistance to foster agency change and integrate healthy relationship education into existing social services.

The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families (Resource Center) was established in 2011 and is funded by the Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families to educate stakeholders on the importance of healthy relationship skills and build their capacity to integrate these skills into their existing service delivery systems as part of a holistic approach to strengthening families. In addition to numerous research-based resources, the Resource Center also provides free trainings and technical assistance.

The Resource Center uses a multi-step approach to equip service providers with tools and techniques for integrating healthy marriage and relationship education into existing service delivery systems by:

- Providing an interactive, one-day training, called the Integration Institute, which includes research on the importance of healthy relationship education, strategies for integrating these skills, and development of a draft action plan for integrating relationship education into existing service delivery systems.
- Providing personalized, ongoing technical assistance to attendees for 12 months following the training, including materials developed by the Resource Center (e.g., tip/fact sheets, research-to-practice briefs, reports/guides, toolkits, training resources)
- Evaluating efforts to integrate to determine appropriate knowledge, strategies, and supports that are most effective in assisting agencies that implement their action plans.

Effectively implementing a plan starts with preparing well. One way stakeholders can prepare well for implementing their plans is to be intentional with the time immediately following a training, especially a training designed to create change. As such, technical assistance in the form of coaching or implementation support is crucial to seeing that change actualized.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION?

The Resource Center’s experience with Integration Institute attendees has validated that in-person and virtual trainings are effective ways to introduce new content to a larger group and to initiate interest in developing an action plan around integrating relationship education into services. The Resource Center team also recognizes learning that modifies behaviors and produces results is not a one-time event, but an ongoing process.¹ The targeted education and capacity building
provided during the Integration Institute and the process of following up over time with those attendees are both necessary and critical to successful implementation of action plans. In following up with attendees, the Resource Center develops a personalized technical assistance plan that includes support and resources provided to service providers throughout the implementation process. Technical assistance plans are designed to continue the learning process, motivate agency staff, and build capacity to achieve results. Recent research has found that Integration Institute attendees who opted to receive technical assistance were 50 percent more likely to progress on their plans despite most stakeholders facing barriers to implementation (e.g., financial, lack of time).

Stakeholders reported that ongoing technical assistance served as a:
- Reminder of available resources: “It’s good to have a call...to get me back into reading everything again and...then realize the things that we’ve used and didn’t realize we were using them... I thank you so much.”
- Motivator on their efforts to integrate: “Thank you so much. Thank you for the phone call to just keep me – to advocate for me and keep me honest. I appreciate that...”

Types of Technical Assistance that Achieve Results

Agency service delivery systems, staffing, level of client interaction, and administrative processes vary. As a result, the Resource Center technical assistance team prepares for stakeholder follow-up sessions by developing a “menu” of available resources that can support stakeholders’ integration efforts. A recent study found that the way stakeholders viewed their ability to make decisions about the services offered was connected to how likely they would be to integrate.

Several relevant resources and supports emerged as instrumental in stakeholders’ efforts to integrate, including:
- Written products and research including the Resource Center’s list of products and online resources (e.g., website, media associated with relationship education).
- Connection to others (e.g., stakeholders, grantees, organizations).
- Interactive tools.
- Additional trainings (see Table 1).

Several stakeholders requested more in-depth technical assistance unique to their specific action plans. These stakeholders came from (a) child, youth, and family-based agencies; (b) non-profit agencies; (c) court systems or corrections agencies; (d) economic support agencies; and (e) workforce development agencies. Exhibit 1 represents the more unique requests received.

“If you think you can or you think you can’t; you’re probably right”
– Henry Ford

This sense of autonomy helps fuel the capacity building process.

Agencies demonstrated that a variety of formats were beneficial when taking steps towards integration of healthy relationship education.

Resource Center Products
- Learn how to set the stage for successful integration here.
- Discover the point of integrating healthy marriage and relationship education here.
- Equip others to integrate relationship education into their agency’s services here.

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Table 1: Requested Resource Center Products

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Written Products</th>
<th>Online Resources</th>
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<td>Every agency we spoke to requested written products and research on healthy relationships.</td>
<td>About half of the agencies we spoke to requested online resources to use towards integration.</td>
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- Importance and Relevance of Healthy Relationship Education
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- The Justice System
- Reentry/Rehabilitation
- Service Providers’ Relationship Health
- Head Start
- Co-Parenting/Blended Families
- Handouts on the Core Components of Healthy Relationships
- Interpersonal and Critical Skills
- Youth-Related Research
- Financial Management
- Homelessness
- Military Toolkit
- Resource Center’s Free-to-No-Cost Curriculum Guide
- Employment/Workforce
- Child Welfare/Foster Care
- Noncustodial Parents
- Spanish Resources
- Culturally Diverse Families
- Native American Families

Online, interactive Virtual Training Center
Resource Center website or media information to use on their own websites
Resource Center archived webinars

Exhibit 1: Customized Technical Assistance

- Connections to peers/others in the field
- Advice on curriculums for youth in juvenile justice system
- Training specifically for workforce development staff
- Targeted, interactive webinars and in-person trainings
- Conference calls with project director for guidance
- Department of Corrections tailored information

TIPS FOR MOVING FORWARD

Perhaps you are curious about next steps and finding supports and resources to activate your plan in order to achieve results. Proactively seeking technical assistance yields large dividends, with one study showing that most stakeholders made progress towards integration in the days following the training with extra assistance/support.7

For example, when the Resource Center spoke with Integration Institute alumni at 12 months post-Institute, many stakeholders shared how they were continuing to rely on the support of the Resource Center to integrate.

The Resource Center offers information for those who want to learn more. Here are just a few ideas to get you started:

- Think about your plan and identify where you need help moving forward.
- Find online resources through the Resource Center Library, Virtual Training Center, or partner organizations on the Resources page.
• Request technical assistance from the Resource Center for your customized needs.

If you invest in your plan and seek out the necessary assistance and supports to sustain your plan on the front end of your integration efforts, then you will have a greater chance of yielding big dividends on the backend by getting closer to your goal to build healthy families that attain self-sufficiency.

INTEGRATION INSTITUTE ALUMNI STORIES

• One alumna, at 60 days post-training, requested additional bound copies of the military and family violence prevention toolkits and, by 12 months post-training, she was able to distribute these toolkits at a number of different conferences.

• After several conference calls with the Resource Center team following the training, an alumna and two members of her staff became master trainers in the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) interface, and now offer the free ACE training to their partners across South Carolina. The alumna added that grant funding for teenage pregnancy prevention ended in September 2017, but they can now offer a teen pregnancy prevention program that focuses on healthy relationships, which some of their communities are interested in implementing. Last year, the alumna invited the Resource Center project director to give a presentation, which was well received, at their Summer Institute. The alumna has also been extremely involved with the Resource Center, presenting on both a webinar and at the Policy Academy.

• After requesting Level 1 integration resources, a video link on integrating healthy relationship education, and resources on marriage and mental health, an alumna worked with various partners to offer healthy relationship education training in 46 counties. In addition to the trainings, which provide information about healthy relationship education as a means for family resilience, the alumna was also working with the Department of Education to offer more school-based trainings. The information from the Integration Institute was a good fit for this alumna’s agency and for other ongoing initiatives. In February 2016, the alumna attended the Police Academy and said it was a great forum for her to hear about what other tribes and territories were doing with this information. She added that South Carolina has benefited from the information and resources offered by the Resource Center and that it has been a great experience.

• An alumna wanted more information about the Resource Center’s Virtual Training Center and attended a webinar on toxic stress, at 60 days post-training. At 12 months post-training, her agency was continuing to work with victims of domestic violence by providing education about healthy relationships and dealing with the fallout when the relationship is unhealthy. The agency was also working on how to regularly integrate more prevention strategies from the Resource Center curriculum on building those healthy relationships and keeping them healthy. The alumna sent out an email blast with healthy marriage and relationship education information and tracked who used the links. She found that about 25 percent of the email list (approximately 200 people) clicked through the links, in comparison to other email blasts that only about 10 percent of people click through. The alumna stated that being able to access resources from the Resource Center website at any time has been helpful for continued integration. She added that having the ability to provide additional resources for families is always something that her agency is looking to do.
REFERENCES


3 See note 1 above.


6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

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