

It Starts with Us

Using Self-Awareness to Build Trust with Families

*"Today's goal is not to change who you are —
but to sharpen how you show up."*

Before you step in — C.H.E.C.K. in.

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VACSB | 1:00 – 3:30 PM

C

H

E

C

K

SESSION ROADMAP | 1:00 – 3:30 PM

1:00–1:15

Welcome & Grounding

Introduction, purpose, and opening reflection

1:15–1:35

Why It Matters in EI

The power and responsibility of the EI relationship

1:35–2:05

The C.H.E.C.K. Framework

Deep dive — each letter with discussion and reflection

2:05–2:20

Break & Reflection

Personal CHECK-in worksheet + pair share

2:20–2:50

Bias, Culture & Attunement

Exploring how our identities shape our practice

2:50–3:15

Practical Strategies

Tools you can use before your next family visit

3:15–3:30

Closing & Commitments

Group debrief and one personal commitment

Interactive session — bring your whole self. There are no wrong answers here.

OPENING REFLECTION

Think of a family you've worked with recently.

1 What was your first impression of that family?

2 Did anything surprise you — or confirm what you expected?

3 How did you feel walking in versus walking out?

4 What did that visit reveal about YOU?

Turn & Talk → 2 minutes with a neighbor

WHY IT MATTERS IN EARLY INTERVENTION

We partner with families during some of their most vulnerable moments.

We help caregivers build capacity, confidence, and connection.

Every visit, every conversation, every pause has the power to heal — or harm.

We don't just serve children. We support relationships.

Stress, bias, and burnout quietly shape our interactions — whether we know it or not.

"Families feel our tone, body language, and energy before we ever speak."

It starts with us.

The C.H.E.C.K. Framework

Your mental reset before every family interaction.

C

Center Yourself

Take a breath. Clear your mind. Be fully present for the family.

H

Hold Your Assumptions

Notice your assumptions without judgment — don't let them drive the interaction.

E

Engage with Empathy

Listen for understanding, not just to respond.

C

Communicate with Curiosity

"Help me understand..." instead of "Why didn't you."

K

Keep Perspective

Remember the family's journey. Stay focused on their strengths.

C.

CENTER YOURSELF

Take a breath, clear your mind, and be fully present for the family.

→ Sit quietly in your car for 60 seconds before entering

→ Do 3 deep breaths — in for 4 counts, out for 4

→ Name one thing you're grateful for about this family

→ Leave your last visit's stress behind — don't carry it in

BEFORE YOUR LAST VISIT, WERE YOU...

▶ Thinking about your next visit?

▶ Mentally writing your notes?

▶ Distracted by your own day?

▶ Giving the family your full presence?

REFLECTION | "Presence is a gift. Give it fully."

H.

HOLD YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

Notice them without judgment — don't let them drive the interaction.

COMMON ASSUMPTIONS WE CARRY

"They don't care about their child's development"

"They're not following through"

"They should know better"

"This family is difficult"

REFRAME → WHAT MIGHT BE TRUE

They may be overwhelmed, grieving, or surviving

Their daily reality may make follow-through impossible right now

Their knowledge comes from their own experience — not ours

This family may have been failed by systems before

GROUP DISCUSSION | What assumption have YOU had to hold — and let go of?

E.

ENGAGE WITH EMPATHY

Listen for understanding — not just to respond.

EMPATHY BLOCKERS

✗ Thinking about what to say next

✗ Comparing their situation to others

✗ Rushing to fix or advise

✗ Checking your phone or notes

✗ Judging their choices silently

EMPATHY BUILDERS

✓ Make eye contact and truly listen

✓ Reflect back what you hear

✓ Ask open-ended questions

✓ Honor silence — let them process

✓ Name the emotion you observe

Attunement is not a soft skill. It is the skill.

C.

COMMUNICATE WITH CURIOSITY

"Help me understand..." instead of "Why didn't you."

JUDGMENT LANGUAGE

"Why haven't you been doing the exercises?"

"You need to be more consistent with therapy."

"The IFSP says you agreed to this."

CURIOS LANGUAGE

"What's made it tough to fit in the exercises this week?"

"What would help make therapy feel more manageable right now?"

"Let's look at the plan together — does this still feel right for your family?"

Words either open doors or close them. Choose curiosity every time.

K.

KEEP PERSPECTIVE

Remember the family's full journey. Stay anchored in their strengths — not just their struggles.

Their World Is Not Your World

What looks like disorganization may be survival. What looks like resistance may be protection.

Strength-Based Lens Always

Every family is doing something right. Your job is to find it and build on it.

Zoom Out

One difficult visit does not define the relationship. Trust is built over time, not in one session.

Your Story vs. Their Story

Your values, upbringing, and culture are not the measuring stick. Theirs is their own.

REFLECTION | Whose perspective is centered in your practice — yours or theirs?

PERSONAL C.H.E.C.K.-IN | BREAK ACTIVITY

Think about a family on your caseload. Complete this reflection honestly.

C

Center — Before your last visit, were you truly present? What was pulling at your attention?

H

Hold — What assumptions did you enter with about this family? Where did they come from?

E

Empathy — Did you listen to understand, or to respond? What did you notice about the caregiver?

C

Curiosity — Did your language invite openness or close it down? What would you change?

K

Keep — Whose lens were you using — yours or theirs? What strength did you build on?

After completing individually — share one insight with a partner. → 5 minutes

BIAS IN EARLY INTERVENTION PRACTICE

We all have them. The question is: do we let them run the show?

Confirmation Bias

We notice what confirms what we already believe about a family.

Cultural Bias

We measure families against our own cultural norms without realizing it.

Affinity Bias

We connect more easily with families who look, think, or act like us.

Attribution Bias

We explain our behavior by situation — theirs by character.

Bias is not a moral failure — it's a human one. The work is not to eliminate bias, but to build awareness strong enough that it doesn't silently shape your practice.

TABLE ACTIVITY | Share a time when you caught a bias operating in your work. What did you do?

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS IN EI

Culture shapes everything — how families define roles, receive help, express emotion, and value time.

What Families Bring	What We Must Do	Warning Signs We're Missing It
Their own definition of 'family'	Ask before assuming	We feel frustrated when families 'don't engage'
Cultural norms around help-seeking	Learn about their culture — not from stereotypes	We use our values to judge their choices
Language and communication styles	Use trained interpreters, not family members	We stop trying after language barriers
Spiritual beliefs about disability	Honor their timeline, not ours	We treat culture as a checkbox, not a lens
Historical relationships with systems	Recognize our own cultural lens	Families go quiet in meetings
What 'good parenting' looks like to them	Co-create the IFSP — don't hand it to them	Families miss visits without explanation

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES

Tools you can use before your next family visit.

Before the Visit

Do your C.H.E.C.K.-in — take 60 seconds to reset

Review the family's history with fresh eyes, not habits

Set one intention: 'Today I will listen more than I speak'

Leave your last visit's emotional residue behind

During the Visit

Start with what's going well — not the goals

Mirror body language — get on the family's level

Use curious language: 'Tell me more...' / 'Help me understand...'

Notice your emotional reactions — pause before responding

After the Visit

Write one thing the family did well in your notes

Reflect: Did any bias show up today?

Ask yourself: Did this family feel seen?

Consult a colleague if you're holding something heavy

Small shifts in how you show up create big shifts in how families feel seen.

WHEN WE MISS THE MARK — AND HOW WE REPAIR

We will all have moments we carry bias in, miss an emotional cue, or say the wrong thing. The work is not perfection — it's repair.

Signs We've Missed the Mark	Repair Looks Like	What Protects the Relationship
Family becomes guarded or quiet	"I want to revisit how I handled that last visit"	Consistent self-reflection practice
You feel defensive about your approach	Acknowledge the impact — not just the intent	Supervision and peer consultation
You're dreading the next visit	Ask the family what they need going forward	Using the C.H.E.C.K. framework proactively
Notes feel task-focused, not relationship-focused	Consult a supervisor or reflective practice group	Humility — you don't always get it right
Family misses visits without contact	Come back with a renewed commitment	Genuine curiosity about each family

Repair is not weakness. It is one of the most powerful things you can model for a family.

GROUP DEBRIEF

Large group discussion — 20 minutes

1 Which letter of C.H.E.C.K. do you find hardest to practice consistently — and why?

2 Think about a family you've really connected with. What did YOU bring to that relationship?

3 How does your own cultural background show up in your practice — in ways you've noticed?

4 What's one thing you're going to stop doing after today?

5 What's one thing you're going to start doing?

"No wrong answers — only honest ones."

MY COMMITMENT | CLOSING ACTIVITY

Before you leave today — write one commitment. Be specific. Be honest.

C One thing I will do to CENTER myself before family visits:

H One assumption I will HOLD (and not act on) this week:

E One way I will ENGAGE with more empathy:

C One language shift I will make to COMMUNICATE with more curiosity:

K One way I will KEEP perspective when it gets hard:

Share your commitment with one person in this room.

It Starts with Us.



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Thank you for showing up with openness and reflection.

*It's not about perfection — it's about presence.
Relationships grow when we lead with reflection.*