

HORIZONS

A Newsletter for La Leche League Leader Applicants
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Learning through Role-Play

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How do Leaders become confident at leading Series Meetings? How do they know what to say when mothers call with questions? Most Leaders did not start out being highly skilled at “talking like a Leader;” they learned through practice.

Role-play exercises are a great way to get that practice in a low-key situation, where it doesn't matter if you say everything “just right.” We highly recommend that Applicants use the *Preview of Mothers' Questions/Problems and Group Dynamics/Management* to practice talking with mothers. The *Preview* is a required part of the application, and is usually sent to the Applicant towards the end of the application period. If you would like even more practice, you can set up practice situations with Leaders and other Applicants.

First, plan what skills you'll work on:

Look through Chapters One and Two of *Leader's Handbook* for ideas. For phone helping, these might include: being friendly, using active listening, responding without judging, asking questions, letting the mother set the pace, sharing information, discussing options, recapping the discussion, and taking notes.

For leading meetings, skills to practice might include: keeping everyone focused on the main discussion, asking open-ended questions, responding to the feelings and concerns of the mothers, conveying LLL philosophy while being respectful of other opinions, encouraging everyone's

participation, presenting information, handling distractions, responding to mothers who strongly disagree with something they hear, preventing arguments, keeping LLL's purpose clear, sharing your own experience appropriately, and ending the discussion. It might work best to focus on one or two of these skills at a time.

Next, plan some questions or scenarios:

Good sources for questions mothers ask are the *Breastfeeding Resource Guide (BRG)*, the *Preview*, questions or situations that have come up at Series Meetings, and phone calls recently received by Leaders (the Leader should protect confidentiality).

During the role-play practice:

In the beginning, it might be most instructive for Leaders to act the part of Leaders, and have Applicants either observe or act the part of non-Leaders. Later, an Applicant may want to act as the Leader.

You can stop the role-play at any point to discuss what participants might have said instead. Try repeating scenarios you have done already, with different people playing each part to concentrate on a different leadership or counseling skill.

Keep in mind that role-play sessions are for your benefit. You can set up as many or as few sessions as you think will be useful to you. Be clear about what you want to work on, and how.

Role-play can be a great way for you to get the practice you need to help you feel more confident in helping mothers and leading meetings.

Tough Questions?

It is not unusual for Leaders to be asked questions to which we do not have the answers. Sometimes we don't have enough information available. Sometimes we are unsure of how to help the mother, or whether her query is even within the realm of what a Leader may respond to.

When a Leader encounters an unfamiliar situation or problem, the first place to look for information is in her own LLL resources, such as *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding* and *Leaven*. If the Leader cannot find the information she needs, she may contact a Professional Liaison (PL) Leader.

The PL Leader has access to a wide range of published materials, including medical references on breastfeeding. She also has a chain of support when she needs further input. Like all LLL Leaders, the PL Leader does not give medical advice. However, her extensive reference materials and experience serve as an excellent resource for Group Leaders.

When faced with an unfamiliar situation, the Leader should not ask the mother to contact the PL Leader. Instead, the Group Leader passes on the information she has obtained from the mother to the PL Leader. In this manner, the Group Leader learns more about handling difficult situations, and the mother benefits from maintaining contact with the same Leader.

Many Applicants and Leaders belong to a variety of online chatlists, where it may be tempting to ask for help with a tough question. Please be mindful that sharing details of a mother's concerns online may risk violating the mother's confidentiality. Also, the broadcast to dozens of a request for help is often less effective than a query sent to a single PL Leader who will give the request prompt attention, and whose response can be counted on to contain the most up-to-date information. The PL Leader can also help the Leader "package" the

information in a way that delivers the information without appearing to "practice medicine."



How Do Leaders Plan Meetings?

Here are some places a Leader might look for meeting ideas:

- *Leader's Handbook*, Chapter Three
- The Leader section of the LLLI website
- Other Leaders she knows
- Leader email lists
- Back issues of *Leaven* and the Area Leaders' Letter
- *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*
- Copies of old meeting reports.

No matter how carefully a Leader has planned a meeting, however, she needs to be responsive to the needs of the mothers at the meeting. For example, a plan to discuss introducing solids for Meeting 4 might not meet the immediate needs of a room full of mothers with newborns. During a Series Meeting, a Leader might decide to shorten, lengthen, modify or even altogether abandon her original plan.

You might want to talk with a Leader in your Group as she plans an upcoming meeting to get an idea of how she does it. Then, during the meeting, you can see how she uses her plan and also responds to the mothers at the meeting.



Applicant Resources Online

Eager to move ahead on your leadership preparation? Most of the materials that an Applicant needs can be found online at:

<http://www.texaslll.org/leader-applicant-resources>



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