

## Supporting Family Systems: *Families Are Systems*

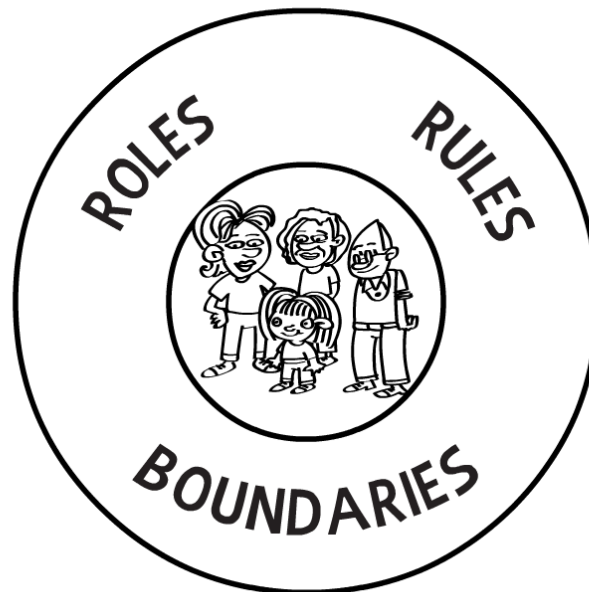
### WHAT'S IN THIS PD2GO PACK?

Discover how families behave as systems, with their own interactional patterns and dynamics. This pack helps participants gain an understanding of family systems, which can help teachers and providers work more effectively with the families in their programs.

#### Your Participants Will...

increase their capacity to identify the underlying family structures and relationships and how they influence behavior.

### Below the Surface Family Dynamics



#### SUPPORTING MATERIALS

**Facilitator's Guide** Everything you need to facilitate this PD2GO presentation, *Families Are Systems*, including an interactive presentation page along with step-by-step presenter's notes.

**Coaching Corner** One-page resource with self-reflection and practice opportunities that can be explored individually, with peers, and in professional development sessions.


Additional resource materials related to this pack provide opportunities to explore and expand your skills and knowledge through **Digging Deeper**, **Resource Links**, and **Family Connections**.

## HOW TO USE THIS FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

This Facilitator's Guide will provide you with step-by-step information on how to present this session using the interactive presentation page and downloadable materials specific to this PD2GO pack. We recommend [opening the pack presentation](#) as you go through this Facilitator's Guide.

### Presentation Information

*Text written in italics is meant to be spoken out loud during the course of the presentation.*

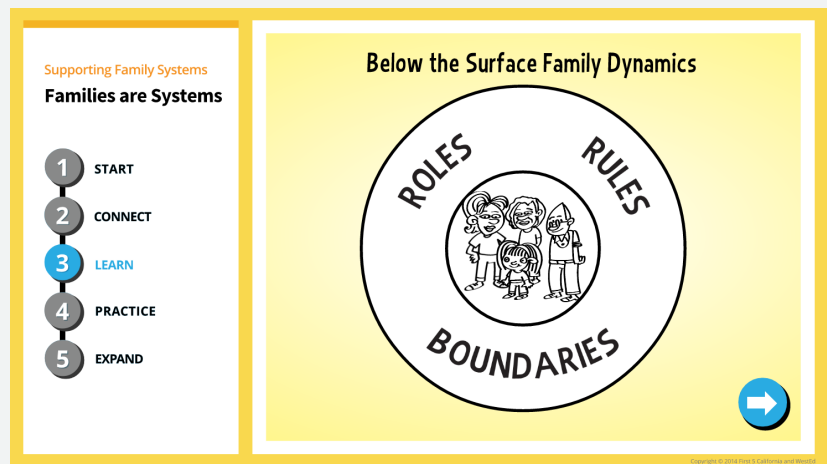
Other text, marked with this icon , offers important information such as instructions or suggested answers to facilitate the presentation of this PD2GO pack.

### THE INTERACTIVE PRESENTATION PAGE

The presentation page includes the following elements:

#### ■ Steps

Click on each number icon to begin the section of the presentation—use the presenter's notes in this guide to facilitate each step of the presentation.



### DOWNLOADABLE MATERIALS

#### ■ In This Pack

Click on the downloadable materials hyperlink to access all materials related to this presentation.




#### ■ In This Bundle

Click on the downloadable materials hyperlink to access all additional resources and materials that can be used with this presentation and other related packs.

### MATERIALS




In this pack, you will find:

[Download all \(5 MB\)](#)

-  [Facilitator's Guide \(5.1 MB\)](#)  
Everything you need to facilitate this PD2GO presentation, Families Are Systems, including an interactive presentation page along with step-by-step presenter's notes.
-  [Coaching Corner \(150 KB\)](#)  
One-page resource with self-reflection and practice opportunities that can be explored individually, with peers, and in professional development sessions.
-  [Handout - Teresa's Family \(180 KB\)](#)

In this bundle, you will find:

[Download all \(310 KB\)](#)

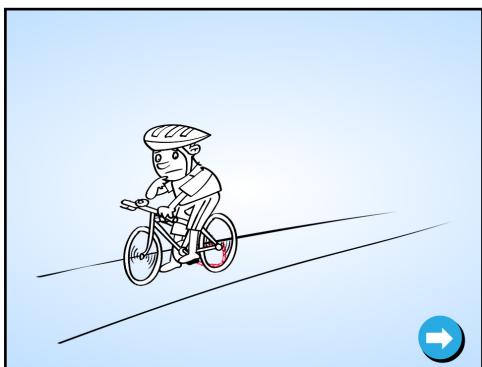
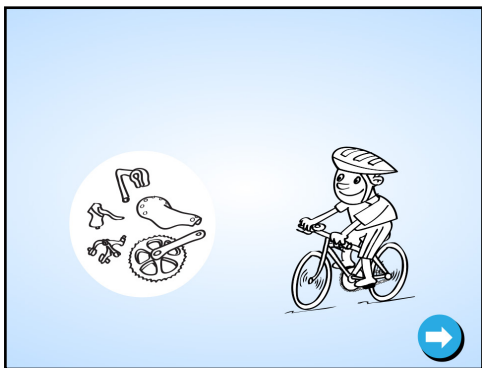
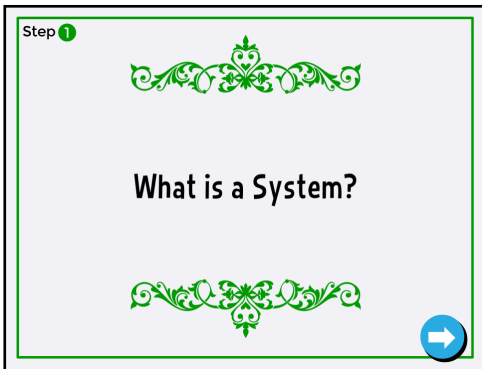
- Additional resource materials related to this pack provide opportunities to explore and expand your skills and knowledge. The resources include:
-  [Digging Deeper \(240 KB\)](#)
  -  [Family Connections \(240 KB\)](#)
  -  [Resource Links \(230 KB\)](#)

### EXPANDING ON THIS PD2GO PACK

This presentation, titled *Families Are Systems*, can be used individually or in conjunction with related packs in the bundle, including *Building Relationships with Families* and *Collaborating with Families*. Additional resources and materials in this bundle (*Digging Deeper*, *Resource Links*, and *Family Connections*) are designed to extend skills and knowledge around these related packs, provide links to resources, and promote partnerships with families.

# STEP 1: START

## PRESENTATION SEQUENCE



## FACILITATOR'S NOTES

[1 min]



### Step 1 - Start

**Facilitator:** *What is a system? Let's begin by thinking about bicycles.*



**Facilitator:** *One picture shows bicycle parts—wheel, handle bar, seat, etc. The other shows a bicycle. They have some similarities, but what is a key difference between the two?*



Invite participants to respond. If not stated, note that the bicycle can be ridden; it serves its primary function. By themselves, the parts cannot function as a bicycle.

**Facilitator:** *The bicycle is a system; bicycle parts are individual components in the system. The assembled bicycle parts and the rider work together to accomplish a purpose: transportation. Like a bicycle, all systems consist of parts that work in conjunction with each other for a purpose. Systems are not just unrelated parts. The parts need each other to achieve their purpose.*

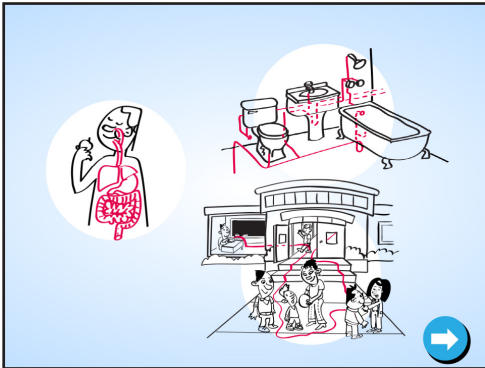




**Facilitator:** *If we remove one of the bicycle parts from the pile, the rest of the parts in the pile don't change. But what happens to the bicycle if the chain becomes loose? The bicycle doesn't function and can no longer accomplish its purpose.*



# STEP 1: Continued START

## PRESENTATION SEQUENCE



  
**A system is a set of dynamic, interconnected elements organized in a way that achieves a purpose.**  


Go to step 2: CONNECT

## FACILITATOR'S NOTES

**Facilitator:** *The human body, household plumbing, and schools are all systems. They all have interconnected parts that influence each other and the way the system functions.*






**Facilitator:** *A system is a set of dynamic, interconnected elements organized in a way that achieves a purpose.*

# STEP 2: CONNECT

## PRESENTATION SEQUENCE

Step 2

  
**A family is a system, too.**  




## FACILITATOR'S NOTES

[2 min]



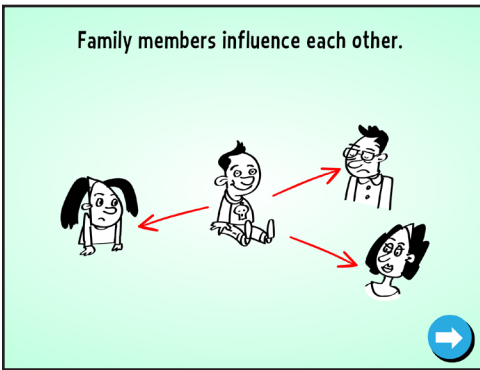
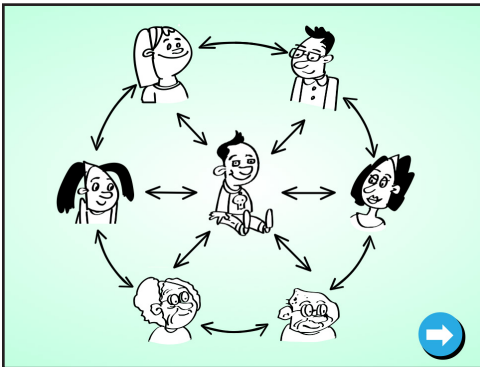
### Step 2 - Connect

**Facilitator:** *Like a bicycle, human body, and school, a family is a system, too.*



## STEP 2: *Continued* CONNECT

### PRESENTATION SEQUENCE



What are other examples of how family members influence each other?

### FACILITATOR'S NOTES

**Facilitator:** *The parts of the system — the family members — influence one another, and a change in one part can influence the overall functioning of the family.*



**Facilitator:** *For example, if a three-year-old doesn't sleep at night, how might this situation affect the entire family?*



Invite participants to respond. Possible responses include:

- The three-year-old wants to sleep with the parents, who then don't get enough rest.
- Parents have less energy to attend to their other children.
- The older children feel resentful that the younger sibling gets more attention from the parents; they don't include the three-year-old in their play.



**Facilitator:** *What are other examples of how family members influence each other?*



Invite participants to respond. Possible responses include:

- If a mother is unemployed, her stress and frustration may affect the rest of the family.
- When leaving the oldest child to care for younger siblings, it shapes decision-making and authority relationships in the family.

## STEP 2: Continued CONNECT

### PRESENTATION SEQUENCE



Families are systems with their own interactional patterns and dynamics.



Go to step 3: LEARN

### FACILITATOR'S NOTES



- If a parent works two jobs and is unable to be with the family, this will impact other family members' roles and responsibilities.




**Facilitator:** *Families are not just a group of people who happen to live together. Families are systems with their own interactional patterns and dynamics.*



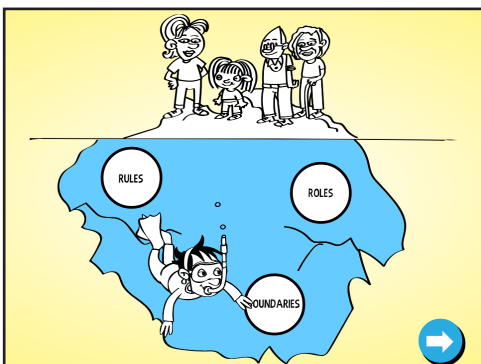

## STEP 3: LEARN

### PRESENTATION SEQUENCE

Step 3



Understanding Families Through a System Lens

### FACILITATOR'S NOTES

[5 min]



### Step 3 - Learn



Reference handout.  
 □ **"Families Are Systems"**

**Facilitator:** *Understanding families through a system lens helps us consider how family members are connected to one another as we think below the surface.*



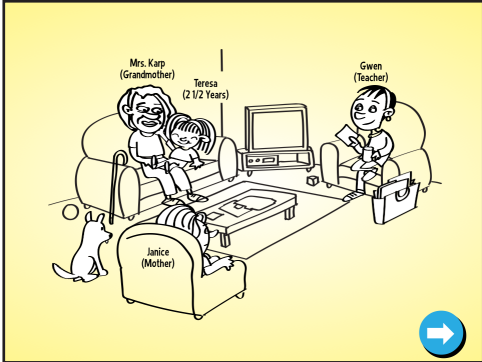
**Facilitator:** *For example, we may ask ourselves:*

- *What are the roles of family members?*
- *What are some rules or patterns of interactions in the family?*
- *Are the boundaries more open or closed? How open is the family to other people? What level of privacy and togetherness do they prefer?*

**STEP 3:** *Continued*  
**LEARN**

**PRESENTATION SEQUENCE**

**FACILITATOR'S NOTES**



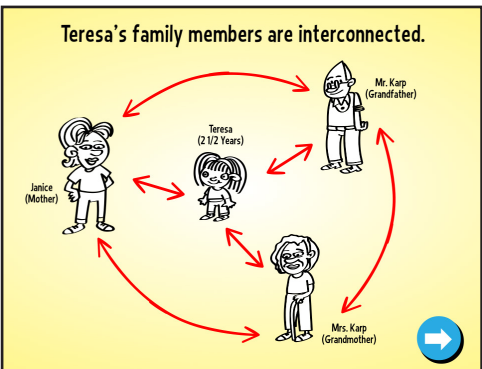
**Facilitator:** *Let's read the story about Teresa's family from the handout, Families are Systems, and think about how these family members are interconnected. Can someone read it aloud for us?*



Janice, a single mother, enrolled her daughter, Teresa, in a center-based program. Teresa's teacher, Gwen, asks Janice if she can visit the family in their home. Janice is reluctant, as her family generally doesn't have visitors, but eventually agrees.

During the visit, Gwen learns that Janice's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Karp, also live in the home. Mrs. Karp is present during the home visit and sits quietly, holding Teresa on her lap.

A week later, Janice tells Gwen that she doesn't want Teresa "roughhousing" with boys and playing on climbing structures. Janice says she doesn't have a problem with these activities, but her mother doesn't want Teresa to "play like boys."



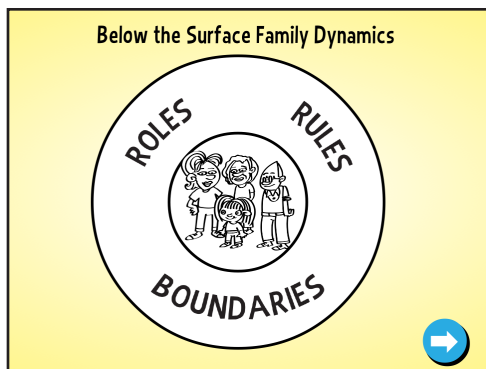
**Facilitator:** *Systems thinking helps us see "below the surface" family dynamics and consider interrelationships in the family that are not readily apparent. Let's consider "below the surface" dynamics when working with young children and their families:*



**STEP 3:**  
**LEARN** *Continued*

**PRESENTATION SEQUENCE**

**FACILITATOR'S NOTES**

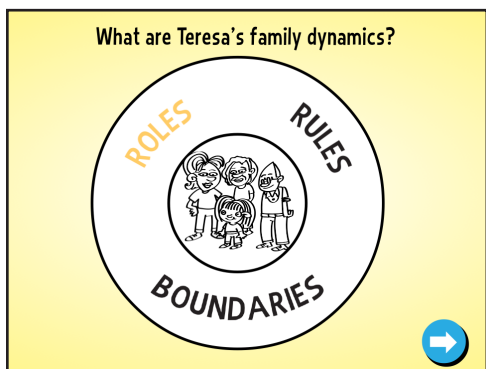


- Facilitator:**
- **Roles:** All family members have roles to play. One person may be the primary decision-maker. Others may be the family helper, comedian, or other role.
  - **Rules:** Families have spoken and unspoken rules that define acceptable behavior. Sometimes these rules are similar to rules in the early childhood program, and sometimes they are not.
  - **Boundaries:** Some families have boundaries that are more closed than others — family members are more private and focus on the family unit, emphasizing their togetherness. They may be reluctant to allow people from outside the family into their family system. Other families have more open or flexible boundaries and more easily welcome people from outside the family.

*These characteristics lie on a continuum; families rarely lie at one extreme or the other. For example, all families have rules, but some may have more than others. Some families may be strict about enforcing their rules, and others not so much. One style isn't better than the other; they are just different. Also, family dynamics and patterns of interactions often change over the course of family development.*



**Facilitator:** *Now let's think about some of the dynamics of Teresa's family system. What do we know or not know about their family roles?*



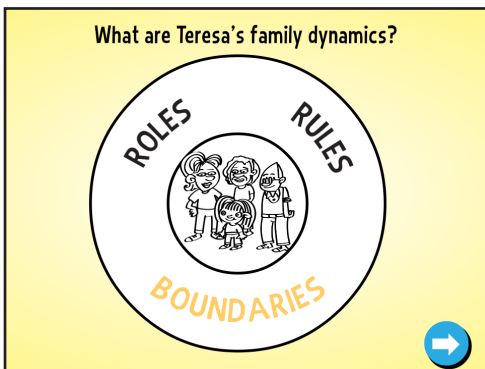
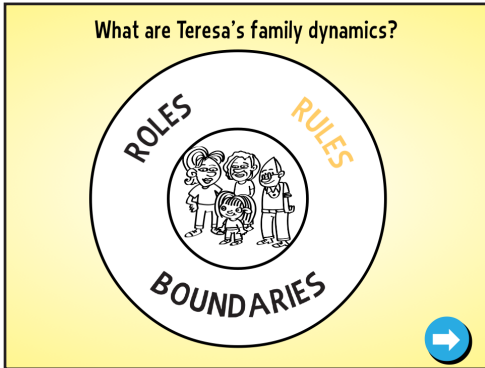
- Possible responses include:
- From what we know so far, Mrs. Karp (Teresa's grandmother) seems to be the primary decision-maker.



**STEP 3:**  
**LEARN** *Continued*

**PRESENTATION SEQUENCE**

**FACILITATOR'S NOTES**



- Janice may share some of the major decision-making in the family.
- We don't know the father's or grandfather's role.



**Facilitator:** *Can you identify any rules in this family? Are they the same or different from school rules?*



- Possible responses include:
- Girls and boys play differently.
  - Girls don't participate in active play with boys.
  - Some school rules and home rules may be different while others are the same.



**Facilitator:** *What do we know about this family's boundaries?*



- Invite responses from the group. Possible responses include:
- Janice is reluctant to have a home visit, which may indicate a family with closed boundaries.
  - The family generally doesn't have visitors.
  - Mrs. Karp is very quiet.

**Facilitator:** *Though responses may vary, from what we know so far, the boundaries of this family seem to be more closed than open.*

*We've now reviewed key features of a family system: below the surface structures and dynamics such as roles, rules, and boundaries. Each family we work with is unique, but they all have these features.*



**STEP 3:**  
**LEARN** *Continued*

**PRESENTATION SEQUENCE**



Understanding roles, rules, and boundaries helps us work effectively with children's families.



Go to step 4: PRACTICE


**FACILITATOR'S NOTES**

**Facilitator:** *Understanding roles, rules, and boundaries helps us work effectively with children's families.*


**STEP 4:**  
**PRACTICE**

**PRESENTATION SEQUENCE**

Step 4




It takes time to understand family systems.



→

Family Open House



→

**FACILITATOR'S NOTES**

[3 min]

CLICK →

**Step 4 - Practice**



Reference handout.  
 "Families Are Systems"

**Facilitator:** *We don't learn about families all at once. It takes time to understand family systems. Let's consider "below the surface" dynamics in this example.*

CLICK →

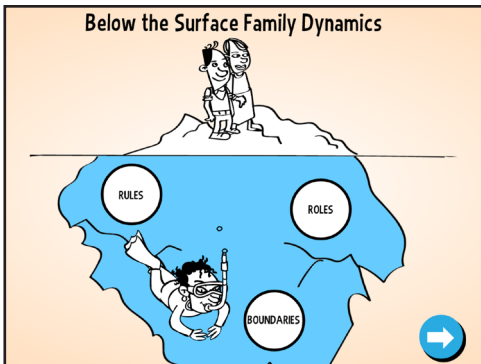
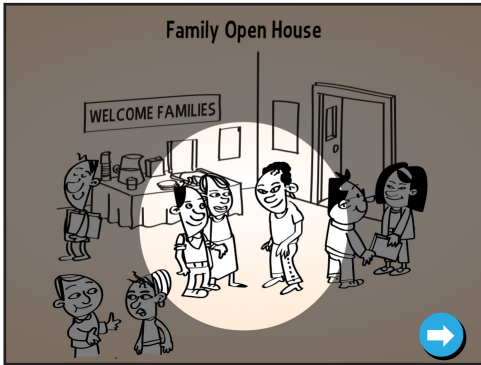
**Facilitator:** **Family Open House**

*Yvonne, the lead teacher in the preschool room, knows little about Ray and Dina, the parents of one of her students.*

CLICK →

## STEP 4: *Continued* PRACTICE

### PRESENTATION SEQUENCE



### FACILITATOR'S NOTES

**Facilitator:** *She would like to know them better. Both parents are polite and quiet; they rarely initiate conversations with the preschool staff or other families. They attended the Family Open House event, but arrived after the potluck. When Yvonne asked them about it, they said they preferred to eat at home with their family.*



**Facilitator:** *With a partner, identify a "below the surface" dynamic or pattern that may be present in Ray and Dina's family.*



Reconvene the group and invite them to respond.

**Facilitator:** *What are some dynamics or patterns for Yvonne to consider about this family?*



Invite participants to respond. Possible responses include:

- Relationships outside the family may not be a high priority.
- They may be more private than other families in the program.
- They may have dietary habits that differ from the center.

**Facilitator:** *Thinking carefully about each child's family system has several benefits for teachers/providers, such as:*

- *Finding ways to work with the unique style of each family.*
- *Becoming aware of our own assumptions and beliefs.*
- *Considering the family's perspective before taking action.*



## STEP 4: *Continued* PRACTICE

### PRESENTATION SEQUENCE



Learning about a family's interaction patterns helps us to collaborate more effectively with them.



Go to step 5: EXPAND

### FACILITATOR'S NOTES

**Facilitator:** *When we view the family as a system, we learn about the family's interaction patterns and how we can collaborate more effectively with the family members.*

## STEP 5: EXPAND

### PRESENTATION SEQUENCE


Step 5




Families and early childhood programs are important influences on young children's development.







What do I want to understand better about this family?



### FACILITATOR'S NOTES

[3 min]

CLICK 

#### Step 5 - Expand

**Facilitator:** *Families and early childhood programs are important influences on young children's development. Understanding families' roles, rules, and boundaries enables you to interact with them in ways that respect their family dynamics. How can you think below the surface to better understand families?*

CLICK 






**Facilitator:** *Think of a family in your program that you'd like to understand better. On side two of the Families Are Systems handout, fill in the boxes based on what you currently know about the family.*



Allow two minutes for writing.

**Facilitator:** *With a partner, discuss the roles, rules, and boundaries in this family. Maintain confidentiality by not using the family members' actual names.*

**STEP 5:**  
**EXPAND** *Continued*

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE	FACILITATOR'S NOTES
<div data-bbox="97 772 578 1138" style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 10px; text-align: center;">  <p>When we seek to understand the family system, we improve our relationships with them and support their child's development.</p>   </div>	<div data-bbox="734 340 792 403" style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Allow two minutes for discussion.</p> <p><b>Facilitator:</b> <i>As you work with this family in the coming weeks, reflect on the ways the family members influence one another. Think about how you also influence and interact with this family system.</i></p> <div data-bbox="656 697 782 751" style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p><b>Facilitator:</b> <i>Each family is a complex, dynamic system. When we seek to understand that system, we discover ways to improve our relationships with the family and support their young child's healthy growth and development.</i></p>

**THIS PD2GO PACK WAS INFORMED BY THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES**

Anderson, S. & Sabatelli, R. (2011). Family Interaction: A Multigenerational Developmental Perspective, 5th Edition. Pearson.

Christian, Linda G. (2006). Understanding Families: Applying Family Systems Theory to Early Childhood Practice. Beyond the Journal – Young Children.  
<http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200601/ChristianBTJ.pdf>

Meadows, D. (2008). Thinking in Systems: A Primer. Diana Wright (editor), Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing.