

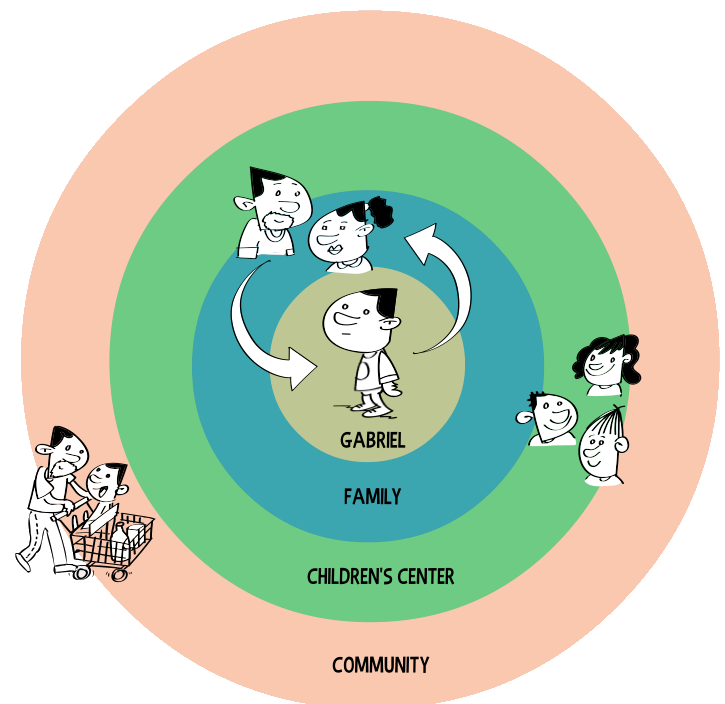
Systems Thinking in Early Childhood: *Why Systems Thinking?*

WHAT'S IN THIS PD2GO PACK?

Every day, teachers/providers must address a variety of situations and problems. They need to consider the big picture while also identifying the different elements that influence the situation. In this pack, we introduce systems thinking habits that teachers/providers can use for reflective practice and improved decision making.

Your Participants Will...

increase their capacity to identify multiple perspectives and consider the big picture in early childhood work.



SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Facilitator's Guide Everything you need to facilitate this PD2GO presentation on *Why Systems Thinking?* 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.

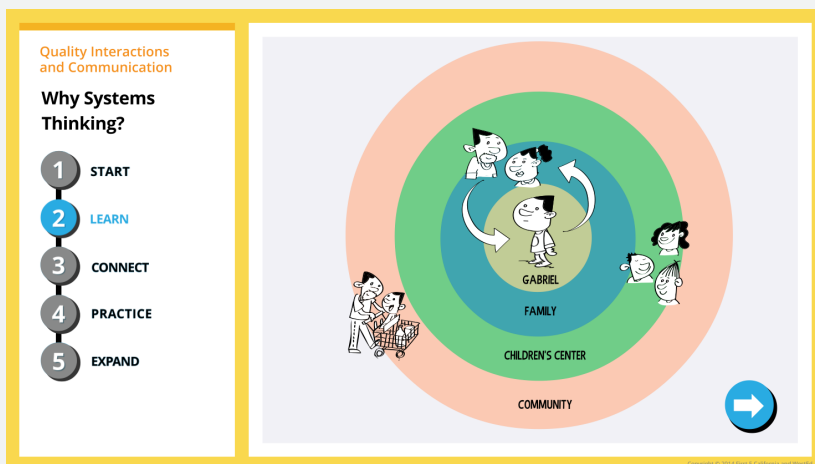
Other text, marked with this icon , offers important information such as instructions or suggested answers to facilitate the presentation of this PD2GO pack.

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.




EXPANDING ON THIS PD2GO PACK

This presentation on *Why Systems Thinking?* can be used individually or in conjunction with related packs in the bundle, including *Thinking Below the Surface*. 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.

MATERIALS

In this pack, you will find:

[Download all \(82 KB\)](#)

-  [Facilitator's Guide \(100 KB\)](#)
Everything you need to facilitate this PD2GO presentation on "Why Systems Thinking?" including an interactive presentation page along with step-by-step presenter's notes.
-  [Coaching Corner \(100 KB\)](#)
One-page resource with self-reflection and practice opportunities that can be explored individually, with peers, and in professional development sessions.
-  [Handout: Using Systems Thinking for Reflective Practice \(100 KB\)](#)

In this bundle, you will find:

[Download all \(160 KB\)](#)

Additional resource materials related to this pack provide opportunities to explore and expand your skills and knowledge. The resources include:

-  [Digging Deeper \(120 KB\)](#)
-  [Resource Links \(100 KB\)](#)
-  [Family Connections \(100 KB\)](#)

STEP 1: START

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE

Step 1



A Moment of Reflection






Systems thinking offers tools and habits that help us reflect on our work and promote continuous quality improvement.



Go to step 2: LEARN

FACILITATOR'S NOTES

[1 min]



Step 1 - Start

Facilitator: *Let's take a moment to reflect on a situation that comes up in early childhood education.*



Facilitator: *Erica has just finished her work day at the Children's Center. She's exhausted and worried. She's thinking about one child in particular—Gabriel. Gabriel comes to school tired and cranky these days. He doesn't want to play with the other children like he used to; he prefers to be alone. Today he began throwing toys at the other children whenever they approached him. It took 10 minutes to get him to come inside from outdoor play. Erica feels stuck. She can't figure out what's going on with Gabriel.*

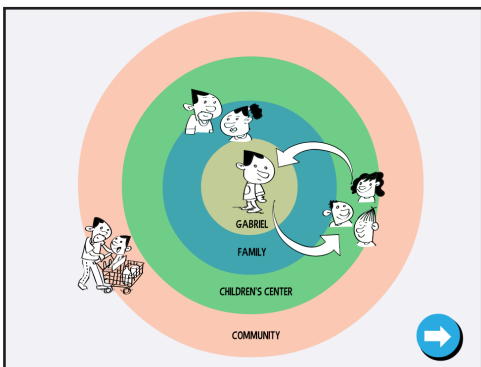
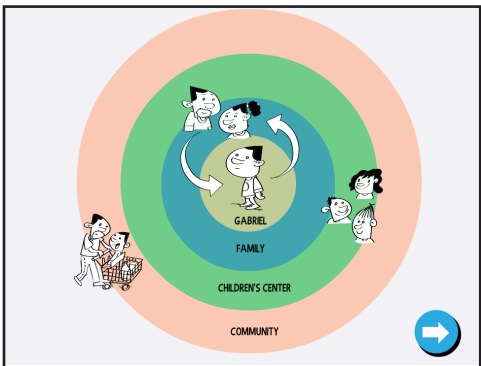
Have you ever felt stuck—like you can't figure out how to deal with a problem or prevent problems from recurring?



Facilitator: *Systems thinking offers tools and habits that help teachers/providers reflect and respond effectively to challenging situations and learn from our successes.*

**STEP 2:
LEARN**

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE



FACILITATOR'S NOTES

[4 min]

CLICK **Step 2 - Learn**

Facilitator: *Erica is reflecting on Gabriel's situation. Reflection means stepping back from the immediate, intense experience of hands-on work and taking time to wonder what the experience really means.*

Classrooms and family child care homes are systems with elements or parts, including children, adults, learning materials, and routines. When we use systems thinking, we consider how different parts of the system influence each other.

CLICK

Facilitator: *Erica knows that Gabriel is part of a family, a children's center, and a community. He is affected by the people and environment around him, and he also affects them. If he fights with his older sister, his mother becomes stressed. When his mother becomes stressed, she has less patience for Gabriel. Gabriel in turn becomes more frustrated; his fights with his sister increase.*

CLICK

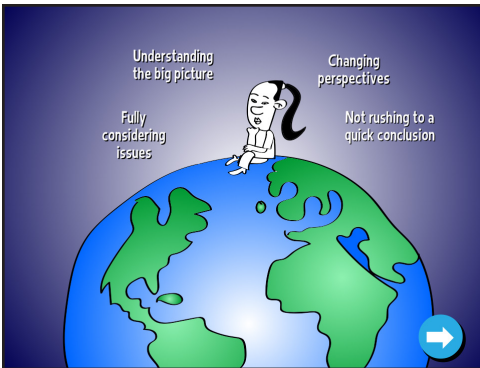
Facilitator: *If the assistant teacher is out on maternity leave, Gabriel misses her. He may be reluctant to engage with other adults, who may then see him as difficult. Gabriel lives in a dynamic system of relationships.*

A system is a collection of elements that interact with each other over time to function as a whole. For example, our bodies are systems; they are made up of various parts that work together so we can breathe, talk, think, and move.

CLICK

STEP 2:
LEARN *Continued*

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE



FACILITATOR'S NOTES

Facilitator: *How can we consider “the big picture” and pay attention to the various parts of a system? Systems thinking tools help us develop habits so we can understand what’s going on at a deeper level or “below the surface” of situations. We look for changes that have lasting impact rather than short-term, quick fixes.*

There are 14 habits of systems thinkers as identified by the Waters Foundation (©2014 Systems Thinking in Schools, Waters Foundation, www.watersfoundation.org). In this PD2GO pack, we introduce some of the habits, including fully considering issues, understanding the big picture, changing perspectives, and not rushing to a quick conclusion.

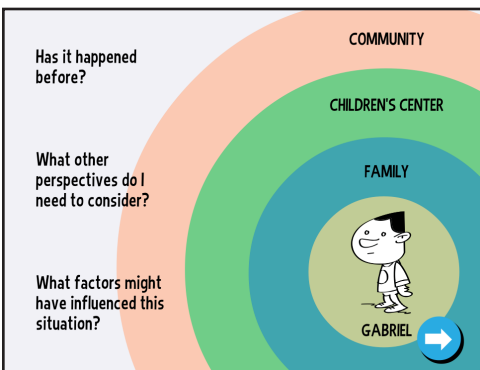


Facilitator: *When we come across a challenging situation or concern, systems thinking helps us focus on below-the-surface questions:*

- *Has it happened before?*
- *What other perspectives do I need to consider?*
- *What factors might be influencing this situation?*



Facilitator: *Taking time to ask these reflective questions prevents us from jumping to conclusions or making quick judgments.*




Taking time to ask reflective questions prevents us from jumping to conclusions or making quick judgments.


Go to step 3: REFLECT

STEP 3: REFLECT

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE



Step 3



Let's reflect on the story of Erica and Gabriel.





FACILITATOR'S NOTES

[2 min]

CLICK  **Step 3 - Reflect**

Facilitator: *Now, let's use systems thinking to reflect on the story of Erica and Gabriel.*

CLICK 

Facilitator: *As Erica looks back on the day, what did she observe about Gabriel? What did she notice?*



Invite participants to respond.

Facilitator: *Can Erica understand the situation fully based on what she knows so far? To understand Gabriel's behavior, she needs information from other systems that impact Gabriel. Most challenging situations have a lot going on below the surface, and whatever's going on there holds the key to responding effectively. Let's help Erica practice some systems thinking habits in order to uncover important information.*

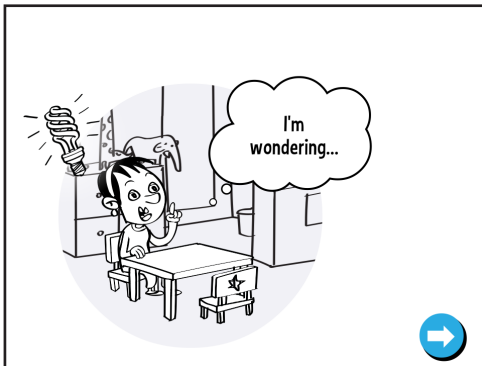
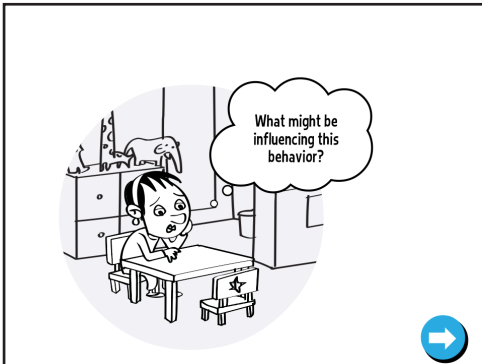
CLICK 

Facilitator: *Erica starts by reviewing the notes she took during the first home visit; she asks herself some systems thinking questions: "Has this kind of behavior happened before?" She remembers that Gabriel played alone when he first started at the children's center, but he quickly made friends.*

CLICK 

STEP 3: *Continued*
REFLECT

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE




Systems thinking encourages us to identify multiple perspectives.


Go to step 4: PRACTICE

FACILITATOR'S NOTES

Facilitator: *Then she thinks, "What factors might be influencing his behavior?" She recalls that Gabriel's parents separated over the summer break. Now that his parents have divorced, what are the parenting arrangements? Is he sharing his time between two households? Has his parents' marital situation disrupted his relationships with siblings or extended family?*



Facilitator: *What other factors might Erica wonder about in relation to Gabriel and his behavior? How would you complete the sentence: I'm wondering...?*



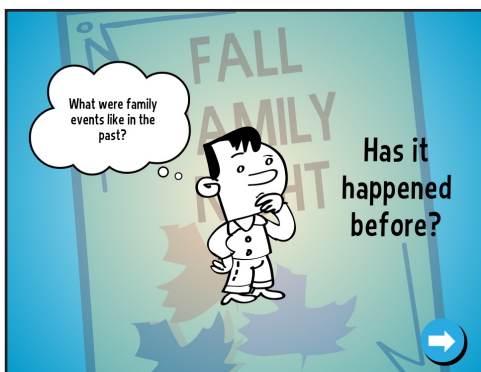
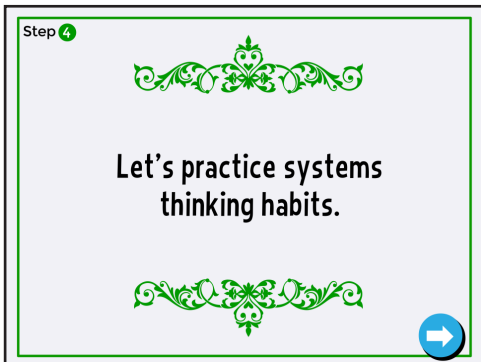
Invite participants to share their ideas. Encourage participants to wonder and ask questions rather than come up with an immediate answer for the problem behavior.



Facilitator: *Just like Erica, we're trying to understand this situation, to make better meaning from it. Erica is learning about systems thinking and working on developing the habits of a systems thinker. She's learning to identify multiple perspectives in order to understand the big picture.*

STEP 4:
PRACTICE

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE



FACILITATOR'S NOTES

[6 min]



Step 4 - Practice

Facilitator: *Let's practice using systems thinking habits to reflect on working with children and families.*



Reference handout.

"Using Systems Thinking for Reflective Practice"

Participants will use it to consider different perspectives about two events.



Facilitator: *Think about hosting an evening event for the families in your program. What would a successful family night look like?*



Encourage participants to respond and acknowledge their ideas. Here are some suggestions if not stated by the group:

- The turnout was great—most families came.
- Families actively participated in the event.
- Families expressed their satisfaction with the event; they want us to plan another one!



Facilitator: *Now let's use the handout to think more about this event.*

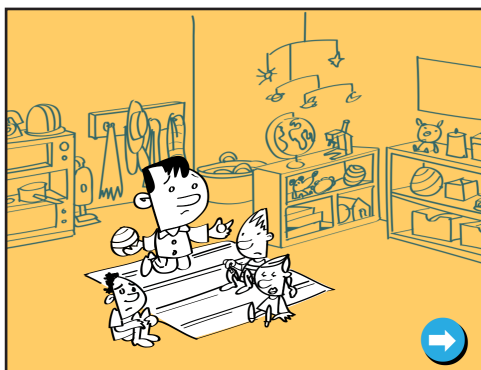
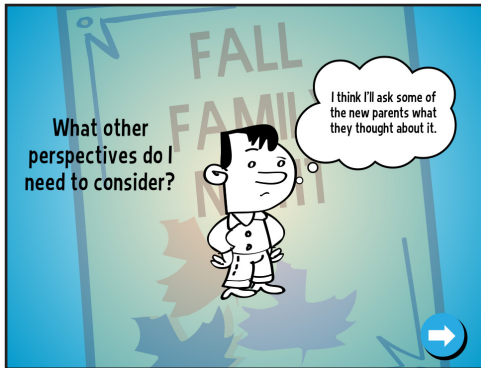
Just like Erica considered multiple perspectives when she reflected on Gabriel's behavior, we can ask systems thinking questions to learn more about why Fall Family Night was successful.

For example, "Has it happened before?" could become "What were family events like in the past?"

What other questions would you ask at this point?

STEP 4:
PRACTICE *Continued*

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE



FACILITATOR'S NOTES



Invite participants to respond.



Facilitator:

“What other perspectives do I need to consider?” could become “I think I’ll ask some of the new families what they thought about the event.”

What other perspectives would you want to know more about?



Invite participants to respond. If not stated by the group, another example is “What about the family members who helped plan the event? What is their perspective?”



Facilitator:

“What factors might have contributed to this situation?” could become, “Wow! That was the first time we partnered the adults with a buddy for the evening. That seemed to work really well!”

What other factors could have contributed to the success of this event?



Invite participants to respond. If not stated by the group, another example could be, “This is the second time we offered child care during a family event, and our attendance was high again.”

Facilitator:


When we look at these factors, we identify small changes that can lead to long-lasting, positive effects.

Let’s think about another situation that we experience from time to time when working with young children. Imagine you planned and introduced a new activity to your children, but it didn’t go well. The children were restless and didn’t seem interested.



STEP 4:
PRACTICE *Continued*


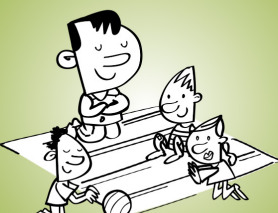

PRESENTATION SEQUENCE




Has it happened before?


What other perspectives do I need to consider?

What factors might have contributed to this situation?



When we consider issues fully, we can identify small changes that lead to long lasting, positive effects.



[Go to step 5: EXPAND](#)

FACILITATOR'S NOTES

Facilitator: *Using the handout, think about this event with a partner and develop possible answers for these systems thinking questions:*

- *Has it happened before?*
- *What other perspectives do I need to consider?*
- *What factors might have contributed to this situation?*
- *What small changes can I make to engage the children in this activity?*



Invite participants to share their responses to the first three questions.



Facilitator: *What small changes can you recommend that might engage the children in the activity?*



Invite participants to share their responses. If not stated, add:

- *Make the activity an interactive one.*
- *Make sure the activity is developmentally appropriate.*



Facilitator: *Reflecting on these questions and ideas increases our understanding of day-to-day situations. When we fully consider issues, we can identify small changes that lead to long-term, positive effects.*

Systems thinking tools and habits remind us to:


- *fully consider issues;*
- *identify multiple perspectives;*
- *see the big picture;*
- *avoid quick judgments and fixes.*

**STEP 5:
EXPAND**



PRESENTATION SEQUENCE

FACILITATOR'S NOTES

Step 5



Systems thinking is a practical tool to continually improve your work with children.





[2 min]



Step 5 - Expand

Facilitator: *Systems thinking is a practical tool to continually improve your work with children.*


Facilitator: *Think of a situation in your own work that you've been wondering about. It can be a situation that went well or one that you would like to improve. Turn to a partner and briefly share the situation. Discuss with your partner one or more systems thinking questions that can help you reflect on this situation:*

- *Has this happened before?*
- *What other perspectives do I need to consider?*
- *What factors may have contributed to this situation?*

Together, answer the questions based on what you know right now. Then discuss how you will gather more information to see the big picture.



Facilitator: *In the following PD2GO packs, you will become familiar with a variety of systems thinking tools. These tools will help you see connections in the world around you—your classroom, your community, the families you serve, and your profession. Developing the habits of a systems thinker can deepen your reflective practice and improve the quality of children's experiences.*



Systems thinking provides tools to deepen reflective practice and improve the quality of children's experiences.




THIS PD2GO PACK WAS INFORMED BY THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kim, D. (1999). *Introduction to systems thinking*. Westford, MA: Pegasus Communications.

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