

Dissolving Barriers to Learning

A one day workshop for parents, teachers and other professionals who work with children to help resolve children's learning and behavioural issues using constellations.

0930 - 1630

**21st October 2008
and
8th December 2008**

Bath

Many children, despite their best efforts, find it difficult to engage with learning. Sometimes this affects their behaviour or their desire to go to school; always it affects their attainment. The impact on schools and parents can be considerable. The coping strategies and the resources they offer can make a major difference especially if they enable parents and teachers to see some of the wider dynamics in the child's context.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families, through their Next Practice initiative, has supported a new systemic way of working with teachers and parents called '**Dissolving Barriers to Learning**'. Using a technique called 'constellations' the workshop enables participants to look at difficult and pressing issues in the wider context of family, school, classroom and peer groups – simply and quickly. It is an opportunity for parents, teachers and other professionals, either together or separately, to build a common understanding of the key aspects that are shaping a particular child's situation.

A constellation helps to provide answers to questions such as:

'What is going on in the wider context?'

'What has happened in the past that might affect the present?'

'What patterns of behaviour are keeping things as they are?'

'What lies at the root of the problem?'

A view of the whole context often helps participants to identify why a child is experiencing particular difficulties and to understand better the nature of their barriers to learning. Participants can see the inter-relationship of influential people and events, and acknowledge things as they are, without any notion of blame. Importantly, they can use these insights to explore new ways forward that bring strength to the child, the parents, teachers and indeed the whole system.

The workshop

This workshop offers a safe and confidential space for around 12 – 16 people to develop ideas about how specific issues children are experiencing might be resolved.

Participants can include:

- Parents bringing an issue about their child
- Heads, heads of year, teachers, SENCOs and support staff from the school (primary or secondary) involved in helping parents and children with difficulties
- External support/other professionals who are also involved in offering support
- Others who want to learn about the process whilst participating by acting as representatives in the constellations

Often parents and teachers attend together to work on an issue. Staff and child welfare professionals can also use the workshop as part of a supervision or support process, without any parental involvement. In either case the children themselves do not attend.

Each constellation typically lasts 40 – 50 minutes and is followed by discussion to help the parents and teachers draw out the important insights and ideas for future action. Short talks and discussions are used throughout the day to develop understanding of the method. In this way, three to four issues can be worked on in each workshop.

Bringing an issue: A constellation begins with a short discussion between the person bringing an issue and the facilitator. This provides sufficient information about the system – the family, friendship groups, school – for a living map or constellation to be set up. Other workshop participants are asked to represent the key people and events in the map enabling the embedded dynamics to be explored, underlying patterns identified and possible solutions tested.

Being a representative: The workshop offers an opportunity for participants to experience and learn about the approach at first-hand, and to support the development of strategies for change.

The workshop facilitators

The workshop is run by **Judith Hemming**, who has taught in primary, secondary and teacher – training settings, and who is also a UKPC registered psychotherapist. She has over 14 years experience in developing the constellating approach for use with families, schools and organisations. She is supported by **Jane James**, who leads the enhancing children's learning initiative and has been instrumental in researching and developing the use of systemic approaches in primary and secondary schools.

Prices and further information

Issue-holders – £120 + VAT (parents/carers and teachers count as one – the fee is often shared between the school and the parents/carers)

Representatives – £50 + VAT

For a discussion about the approach contact **Jane James** on 077 34 05 49 34 or email her at jane.james@nowherefoundation.org

To book a place email **Lucinda Leachman** at lucinda.leachman@nowherefoundation.org