

<Optional exercise>

Bias Exercise A: *Respecting Differences*

One aspect of preparing to be a La Leche League Leader is developing communication skills. To do our jobs well, Leaders have to hear what the other person is saying. “Biases” -- the things we think of as “right” -- can interfere with communication in many ways. When we hear ideas which are different from our own, we may feel threatened, challenged or disapproving. We may unwittingly send out conversation-stopping messages, or we may close our minds to new information.

For instance, it can be difficult for us to help mothers who choose to be away from their babies or parents who use sleep training. We may not be able to communicate the same caring and unqualified acceptance as we offer to mothers and parents whose choices, for whatever reasons, are more like our own. Some people are impatient with those who resist suggestions, especially if it is over a long period and there has been an investment of time and energy. Because body language and tone of voice communicate most of our message, the other person may sense our discomfort and feel turned away.

The following exercise can help us identify and feel comfortable with our biases. When we recognize that we have valid reasons for believing as we do, we are more likely to respect other people’s different ideas, too. Then the feelings that strengthen us cannot weaken or interfere with our communication with others.

1. Pick a topic you feel strongly about. Some examples: home birth, vegetarianism, family bed, homeschooling, methods of discipline, staying at home.
2. Look at an opinion you hold strongly regarding this topic.
3. Identify the reasons for your belief.
4. Understand that you have a right to your opinions.
5. Think about why someone might hold a different opinion on this topic.
6. Recognize that others have a right to their beliefs, too.
7. Think about how you might help a mother or parent with a belief different from yours.

By thinking through our own personal beliefs now, we can prevent less-than-helpful reactions when leading meetings or helping mothers. We need to remember that the Leader’s goal is to empower the other person by giving facts needed to make informed baby choices. We need to support mothers and parents as the experts on caring for their own baby.