

<Optional exercise>

Bias Exercise B:

Conscious and Unconscious Biases

This is an exercise for both Applicants and Leaders. It is helpful to review it regularly after accreditation. Consider doing this exercise in a small group setting such as a Leader Day or Area Workshop, if available.

Goals of this exercise:

- To identify our own biases, conscious and unconscious, and understand how these can affect communication with mothers, parents, Leaders, and healthcare professionals.
- To learn the difference between a conscious and unconscious bias.
- To raise awareness and learn how minimizing the effects of one's biases can lead to productive and satisfying communication

Bias is a strong inclination of the mind or a preconceived opinion in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way that is considered to be unfair. Biases may be held by an individual, group, or institution and can have negative or positive consequences. They are beliefs that define our expectations; things we think of as "normal."

There are two types of biases:

Conscious or explicit bias

This includes any strongly held belief one has, for example, about a behavior or parenting choice.

Unconscious bias or implicit bias

All of us have unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups which may be in conflict with our conscious beliefs. These are:

- Learned stereotypes that are automatic, unintentional, deeply ingrained, widespread, and influence behavior.
- Social stereotypes about certain groups of people that form outside our conscious awareness.

How might strongly held beliefs and unconscious biases affect a Leader's ability to help someone?

As Leaders, we may have such strongly held beliefs that we are amazed that anyone could seriously disagree with them. When our beliefs are challenged, we may show disapproval (verbally or nonverbally) of another's opinion and not be open to new information. We may dismiss or feel threatened by any view that is different from our own. This creates a barrier to communication. If a mother or parent believes they have said something "wrong," they may feel unwelcome and become silent; we may have lost the opportunity to help them. Unconscious biases may affect the way we welcome or respond to Leaders as well as parents. Unconscious biases may make us say or do things without our awareness that imply to others that they are not welcome or are somehow wrong in our estimation. We may not take extra effort to ensure that a parent feels warmly welcomed and accepted, when they are especially wary about attending a meeting.

What can we do to minimize the effects of our biases?

Thinking about our conscious and unconscious biases ahead of time can help us create a welcoming atmosphere at LLL meetings and when communicating with parents, Leaders or healthcare professionals. When we identify, recognize and accept our own beliefs as valid reasons for thinking as we do, we can accept that others may have valid but different views on the topic. This recognition of our beliefs allows us to step aside from our feelings about the issue, so that these biases don't interfere with communication. Recognizing that everyone has unconscious biases and identifying our unconscious biases can raise them to a conscious level. This can help avoid "conversation-stopping" messages.

Thinking about Conscious Biases

What is one conscious bias or “hot topic” you have a strong opinion about? Some examples might be home birth, vegetarianism, bedsharing, homeschooling, staying at home, methods of discipline.

What reasons do you have for believing as you do?

List at least three reasons someone might hold a different opinion on this topic.

Imagine a situation or helping question related to this bias that might be challenging for you. How might you respond so that the other person feels respected and understood even if they have a different opinion from yours?

Thinking about Unconscious Biases

Parents and Leaders in your community might have a different race, ethnicity, faith, identity, language, culture, ability, income level or educational level than you or the attendees at your meetings.

How comfortable do you feel with people who are different from you?

How would you describe the mothers and parents who attend the Group’s Series Meetings?

What groups in your community are not represented at your meetings?

Where could you go or where could you find resources to help you be more accessible or welcoming to one of the groups currently not attending your meetings?

Are there changes you could make so that LLL is accessible and comfortable to different populations within your community? (In some Areas this may mean having meetings in different languages, at different times, or in different formats.)