



Third Annual
Minnesota Child
Welfare Conference
UNCONFERENCE TOOLKIT

CHILD WELFARE UNCONFERENCE TOOLKIT

The Unconference Toolkit was developed in preparation for the inaugural Child Welfare Unconference Fridays, offered as an extension of the Child Welfare Conference hosted by the Minnesota Department of Human Services in November 2019.

We believed an Unconference approach could disrupt traditional perceptions of what happens at a child welfare conference and allow for open conversations about the issues that matter to Minnesota Child Welfare Workers. It is thought that we can create deeper pools of understanding and establish more accurate frameworks about how society is and how it might be changed for the better when we blend research, theory, practice, and policy. Knowledge exchanges are seen as one way to accomplish this goal, and as we strive to build on the vision of “One Minnesota,” we have recognized some of the best learning is a direct result of connecting with one another. However, this can be challenging to achieve. And so, with this challenge in mind, the Child Safety and Permanency division set out to conceptualize and deliver a more innovative approach to such exchanges and knowledge mobilization across the state of Minnesota: an Unconference.

As we were developing this year’s Child Welfare Conference, we envisioned equipping Minnesota child welfare workers and their leaders with relevant resources that they have deemed important to their practice and leadership efforts. It has been our hope that these days of research and learning would culminate into a larger event where attendees could present their ideas, knowledge and bodies of work within these themes, as well as ask questions, get answers, and help inform future action at the state level.

However, we appreciate that this new format is unfamiliar to most workers, so we have developed this toolkit as a guide to these Unconference events. We hope it will be helpful to others as we embark upon a more organic and participatory approach to sharing and mobilizing knowledge.

Further information about the Minnesota Child Welfare Conference can be found on the Minnesota Child Welfare Conference website (<https://mn.gov/dhs/mn-child-welfare-conference/>).

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WELCOME

We firmly believe that each Minnesota child welfare worker has the ability, knowledge, tools and creativity to be highly successful in their work. We also believe that these workers have ideas to strengthen other state and tribal workers, agencies and tribes in the areas of equity, professional partnerships and supporting the families they work with. Some of these ideas are already being implemented across the state.

Unfortunately, there are few opportunities for networking in meaningful ways that would allow for this exchange of valuable knowledge. So, we began our work on the Unconference by envisioning what conversations between child welfare workers could look like and what our role would be in guiding participation. It became clear that an Unconference is not something you go to. Instead it is something you – the participant – make happen.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

ROLES

Intended to disrupt traditional practices of a conference, the Child Welfare Unconference focuses on creating opportunities for conversation and learning, rather than speaker-audience modes of delivery. We have thus defined three simple modes of participation:

Teacher: one who provides resources, experiences, ideas and theory to an individual or group while encouraging the learner to challenge their current understanding and thought processes.

Learner: an audience actively seeking deeper knowledge and insight.

Moderator: selected to aid in the facilitation of open and effective communication. Acts as a neutral participant, holding focus to the topic at hand and documenting the session for future reference.

One sign of a truly successful Unconference is when we observe the roles of teacher and learner being continually interchanged throughout the day. Don't be surprised if one moment you find yourself on both ends of the spectrum!

RESPONSIBILITIES

In an Unconference, expertise is distributed: participants dialogue in a variety of configurations and new modes of collaboration are fostered. We have fashioned these principles into "rules" that frame our Unconference events and guide the design, development, and implementation decisions. These four basic rules are:

1. Whoever shows up are the right people.
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.
3. Whenever it starts is the right time.
4. It's over when it's over.

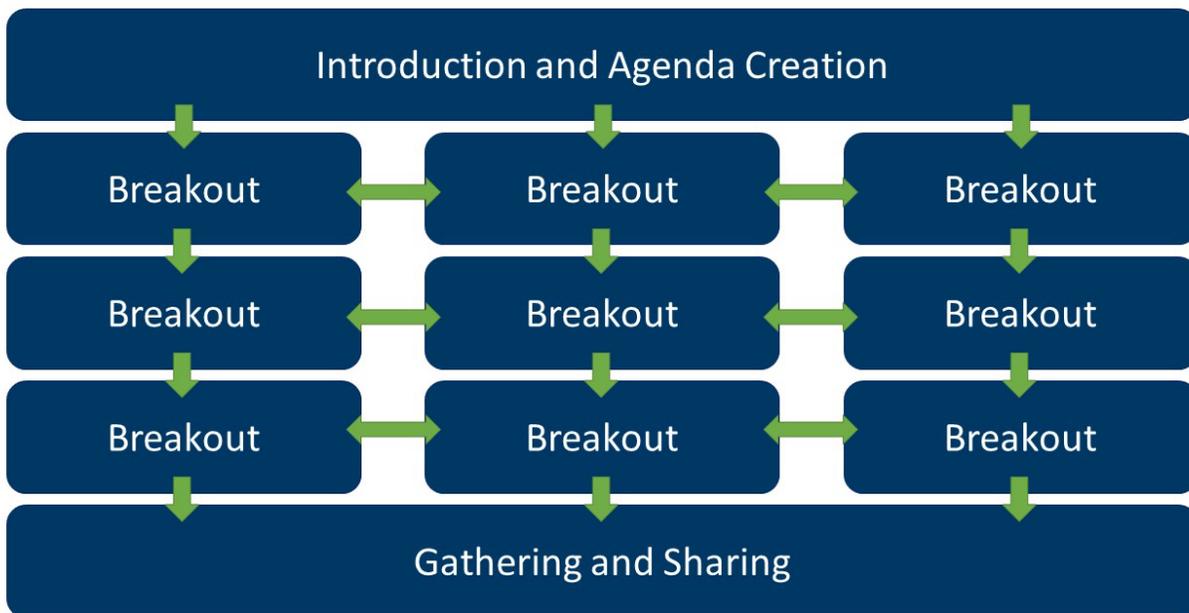
UNCONFERENCE FORMAT

GETTING STARTED

At the beginning of the unconference session, we will do a crowd sourcing of topics and participant-led presentations. There will be Post-its in several colors, sharpies and painters tape to craft a large, modifiable agenda.

Each participant writes as many notes as they want and sticks them on the wall. Be creative and free-flowing here. During the keynote address, our facilitators will work together to categorize these into sub-topics and draft an agenda. Feel free to move your idea(s) to a different category or offer input as to where they might go. You may want to suggest a preferred discussion format discussed below. Of course, if you have questions about any of this, your facilitators will be there to help with that as well!

SAMPLE AGENDA



BREAKOUTS

The room(s) will have a few breakout locations, each with a flip chart and some chairs. Participants choose where to go based on Law of 2 Feet and can move between breakout sessions as they see fit. Spontaneous conversations are encouraged and can happen between two people over a cup of coffee or in a whole new breakout session that wasn't planned for on the agenda. The time given on the agenda is meant to act as a guide and does not need to be permanent. Sometimes a conversation will be over in 20 minutes, sometimes people will want to continue for another hour. Please refer to our four simple rules.

Each planned breakout session will have a moderator present to capture any actions, decisions, and insights from the group.

“If you aren’t contributing or learning or having fun where you are now, use your two feet and find a space where you are.”

- Law of 2 Feet

END OF DAY

At the end of the day, participants and moderators will gather together. Participants will have the opportunity to share what the most important takeaway of the day has been for them, how they plan to incorporate this into their work, and any useful tips and tricks they have learned along the way.

Finally, we will end with a brief thank you message.

UNCONFERENCE SESSION IDEAS

Throw your traditional ideas of a conference to the side and have fun with this. There is no one “right” way. Make your approach to the unconference sessions your own.

INTRODUCTIONS

WHAT IS IT?

At an unconference everyone is a contributor; it is important to bring everyone’s voice into the room. Three hundred people can introduce themselves to each other in under 10 min. If you have a smaller number you can do an icebreaker game.

UNPANEL

WHAT IS IT?

Similar to a traditional panel, there are 4-6 discussants on a topic. Instead of facing an audience in a row with a moderator, however, the discussants sit in a circle with the audience in concentric circles around them. An UnPanel is a way to support dialogue in a community about critical issues.

Those in the center can either be selected or volunteer from the group. Letting those who have passion about a topic or issue step forward is a good way to launch this style of conversation. There is always one chair left empty in the center circle. This chair is open for someone else to step into. When someone steps into the empty chair one of the existing center circle people should self-select and step out.

One option to consider is breaking the conversation that the center is having and go around the outer circles to see what others are thinking about the center conversation. This creates a feedback loop and gives voice to the rest of the room.

If you choose to lead an UnPanel, you can frame the opening of the conversation and then let go. Moderating should be kept at a minimum – except for keeping the conversation wandering too far off track.

You can expect to dialogue for about 30 min with a good rotation of people through the center.

RAPID DEMOS

WHAT IS IT?

Teachers do a five minute presentation/demonstration/workshop for a small audience of learners. After five minutes, the learners moves on to the next demo/presentation. This repeats for a full hour.

SPECTOGRAM

WHAT IS IT?

The spectrogram is a way to highlight the range of perspectives in a group and spark dialogue on critical issues. The goal of this is to support sharing of a range of point of views to understand where people are coming from. It is an interactive whole group exercise.

The exercise begins with a line of tape on the floor with agree at one end and disagree at the other; the center of the line is considered neutral. The moderator asks a somewhat controversial question and directs participants to take a stand on the spectrum. This should not be something everyone agrees or disagrees with but something with some friendly contention in the community. The moderator then interviews people at different points on the spectrum about the opinions they hold. This process creates a shared experience while demonstrating the range of opinions in a community. It can serve as an anchor for additional conversations.

WORLD CAFÉ

WHAT IS IT?

World Café can be modified to meet a wide variety of needs. Tables are set like a small cafe with 4-6 people per table. The moderator will act as host, beginning with a warm welcome and an introduction to the World Café process, setting the context, sharing the Cafe Etiquette, and putting participants at ease.

A topic, question, or series of questions are presented and attendees begin with the first of three or more twenty minute rounds of conversation. At time's end, a teacher is chosen to stay behind and summarize the conversation to the next group that comes to sit at the table. The other people move on to different tables and another round of conversation happens. The same questions can be used for more than one round, or they can be built upon each other to focus the conversation or guide its direction.

After the rounds have completed, learners are invited to share insights or other results from their conversations with the large group

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

WHAT IS IT?

Appreciative Inquiry asks what is working in our communities. Participants begin by framing a strengths-based, unconditionally positive question, usually seeking out what is already good and right about the work we do. For example, "When have we achieved optimal outcomes with kids and families, and what can we learn and apply from those moments of success?"

This practice of active inquiry will help drive innovation and imagination through three core phases: discovery, dream, and design.

1. Inquire into the exceptionally positive moments and share the stories that make them happen.
2. Create a narrative or shared image of a preferred future.
3. Innovate and improvise ways in which this preferred future could come to fruition.