



The Early Childhood Developmental Health Systems (ECDHS): Evidence to Impact Center hosted the webinar, [“Systems Change in Early Childhood Using the Water of Systems Change Framework,”](#) on Thursday, May 16, 2024. Below are excerpts from the Zoom chat with resources and insights from presenters and attendees.

- **Melissa Passarelli, Presenter:** What comes to mind when you hear the word “system”?
  - **Across Attendees:** Gears, complex, a method, standardization, structure, structures, order, coordination, broken, parts and whole, policy, interconnected parts, comprehensive, process, network, bureaucracy, layered, an interconnected process, connections, government agencies, big picture, ecosystems (natural ecosystems vs unnatural), social, interconnected elements, collaboration, coordinated and systematic, same vision, interconnected yet siloed, stuck and slow, implementation, narrative change, funding, workflows, partnership, separate pieces that coordinate, interactions, uniform, relationships, puzzle, complicated, procedures, digestive system, organizational tool
- **Melissa Passarelli, Presenter:** What are some of the systems that you are currently part of?
  - **Across Attendees:** Child welfare, home visiting, early childhood, mental health consultation, health care, child care, community mental health, IDEA, First 5, Office of Child and Family Services, Department of Health, my family, my community, my organization, social services, public health, disabilities, community health, EHDI, behavioral health, university system, developmental screening, ECE policy development, early childhood systems building, philanthropy, ECE, Help Me Grow, primary care policy, infant and early childhood mental health, government, health care coordination, Medicaid, quality improvement, religious, teacher preparation, pediatric clinic, early intervention evaluation, food policy, adoptions and foster care, resource center, Smart Start Western Region System, higher education and research, ECCS, birth outcomes, school districts, shared advocacy, housing (social determinants of health), early childhood community outreach, early intervention, resource and referral, QRIS, workforce development, pediatric health
- **Claire K, Attendee:** Is the model shaped like this (a triangle pointed down) because you need to start at the top and work down? Or is that just a coincidence?
  - **Megan C, Attendee:** Re the pyramid question from Claire - I listened to a recording of a webinar from the authors recently, and they say that you don't NEED to start at the top and work down; it just generally happens that way usually, so it was more natural. But that any condition can be your starting point

- **Bethany G, Attendee:** Do you have a link to the original article?
- **ECDHS: Evidence to Impact Center, Host:** Here is the link to access The Water of Systems Change resources:  
[https://www.fsg.org/resource/water\\_of\\_systems\\_change/](https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/)
- **Maria E, Attendee:** Barriers to system change are often held up with those "power dynamics".
- **Susan S, Attendee:** A podcast sponsored by Blue Shield of California Foundation essentially said that we can have great policies for survivors of domestic violence, but if they are not implemented at the local level, we might as well not have policies.
- **Melissa Passarelli, Presenter:** When we talk about policy, practices, and resource flows, what examples come up for you in your work?
  - **Across Attendees:**
    - MIECHV in terms of funding but also in its narrowness of the evidence base in draws from everyone in our community is "screening"
    - Shared positions (having two organizations pay for a position that will serve all families from both organizations)
    - I love the policy work coming out on Supporting Fathers with funding and how the grants are now going to make relationships and connections
    - It can be difficult to shift thinking when these are in place
    - Sustaining Family Leadership Training program funding
    - Agencies do not want to collaborate it seems we may be duplicating services
    - Communication in general - we are often all saying the same thing to the same audience - because our funders want us to.
    - Great policy like CHIPS act, yet, mental models still need to shift to support child care as a priority and a collaborative opportunity
- **Chi O, Attendee:** My team is squarely in the bottom - mental models / narratives / beliefs about the purpose and sustainability of childcare etc.
  - **Melissa Passarelli, Presenter:** would love to learn more about that, @Chi!
  - **Kathy S, Attendee:** Great way to think about building a team.
  - **Joe G, Attendee:** Absolutely would love to learn more about that as well, Chi!
  - **Chi O, Attendee:** Very down to connect with you all! Email is chi@ideo.org just in case we have no access to attendee list!
- **ECDHS: Evidence to Impact Center, Host:** Source for the definition of power:  
<https://frontlinesol.com/case-study/rebalancing-power-examining-the-role-of-advocacy-and-organizing-in-collective-impact>



- **ECDHS: Evidence to Impact Center, Host:** Source for the sources of power to understand and address: <https://aura.antioch.edu/etds/574/>
- **Chi O, Attendee:** Really like this! One thing that we've done in our work in learning groups / narrative reframing and building in this space and in the work we've done in some work we did in the foster care system is turning 'sources of power' like this into more specific 'power cards' to facilitate convos in mixed spaces that name and articulate who holds what power + who wields said power + who has power but doesn't wield it + what 'powers' should be shifted or traded etc.
  - **Jennifer Splansky Juster, Presenter:** That's great Chi - that sounds like a really helpful approach and activity.
- **Rebecca U, Attendee:** Would a parent family advisory committee assist with both structural and relational change?
- **Stephanie W, Attendee:** In our funding landscape, it's common for organizations serving the same catchment area to compete for the same funding. We're all trying to keep our services alive, to serve families, but that dynamic between orgs can also undermine collaboration. I'd be interested to hear thoughts on how this dynamic could be changed -- the dynamic between grantees, as well as how funders could shift this format.
- **Kathy S, Attendee:** We have "action learning teams" in our county that braid funding and leverage each other's efforts.
  - **Chi O, Attendee:** Kathy - are they housed in county government?
- **Chintana A, Attendee:** We are exploring how "systems tables" can better create safe, collaborative spaces for family voices to be amplified and effective for systems changes
  - **Chintana A, Attendee:** Are starting with conducting listening sessions across different spaces
- **Carrie Z, Attendee:** Moving away from "best practices" and shifting to promising practices and other language that honors the cultural wisdom and knowledge systems of families and communities.
- **Kathy S, Attendee:** Mental Models are also how biases are acted out. Helping folks know their own bias is important. Using data that's disaggregated can help folks see where it exists.
- **Marlene C, Attendee:** Mental models are the hardest to shift.
- **Carrie Z, Attendee:** A mental model shift that is needed is one that teachers/agencies/govt/orgs know best/better etc more than the children, youth and families they "serve"



- **Susan S, Attendee:** Mental models are often clear in policy - pay ECE workers who are typically women of color - we see structures do not value this workforce.
- **Kathy S, Attendee:** For readers out there - Adam Grant's Think Again book is a seriously good book about how minds are changed.
- **Lynn P, Attendee:** Is there perceived value in "educating" multi-sector partners about what systems are/how they can work and how they differ from simply "collaborating"? How best can system players be engaged in understanding frameworks such as "Waters of Systems Change" in cases where they're focused on their own practices/programs and don't generally work in the "systems" space?
- **Leslie M, Attendee:** One mental model that needs to change is belief in the superiority of rugged individualism that often paints needing support or working for the collective good as negative - not recognizing that interdependence is the way humans have survived/thrived through history
- **Carrie Z, Attendee:** Interesting that these 3 strategies [shift attention to a new cognitive frame, support people in developing different relationships, and support people in having a different experience] improve empathy and decrease apathy too.
  - **Maria E, Attendee:** Carrie, I was literally thinking this!
  - **Jennifer Splansky Juster, Presenter:** Great point Carrie. The relational and human components are so essential. It is called "mental models" but is also about the heart and whole person
  - **Carrie Z, Attendee:** Changing hearts and minds.
- **Jennifer Splansky Juster, Presenter:** Asset Based Community Development is a great framework
  - **Jennifer Splansky Juster, Presenter:** The work of BMe Community, with Trabian Shorters, is another great resource on asset framing
  - **Fiona S, Attendee:** asset based rather than deficit based - collective instead of individualism – Yes
- **Melissa Passarelli, Presenter:** What other examples can you think of for transformative change (mental models) in early childhood?
  - **Across Attendees:**
    - Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE) framework. Adverse childhood experiences --> positive childhood experiences
    - supporting Positive Childhood Experiences instead of mental health "problems"
    - I think about welfare reform and requirements put in place for parents to work, because of the assumption that people who don't work are "lazy."



- Also that there are enough children for us to support without needing to compete
  - There are also those who do not believe that "systems" is what is working for or against children, youth and families. Their mental model is that its all based on poor choices, bad planning etc. The bias and assumptions run deep.
  - We started with the relational approach paired with learning and sharing to get at the mental models, and process, resources shifts
  - Theory of Change frameworks can center the outcomes and not just the steps or programs.
- **Julya L, Attendee:** How can philanthropy more intentionally support efforts around narrative shifting/changing mental models?
  - **Molly H, Attendee:** I think there's a fine line between acknowledging possible 'competition' between organizations especially related to funding and leadership not acknowledging those dynamics. I think in relationship building it's important to address some of that and where those thoughts might be coming from- creating a foundation of collaboration (especially if those dynamics are historical). Any tips for someone in a relationship-based role to break through some of the historical thoughts related to this between organizations?
  - **Kathy S, Attendee:** I adhere to the ADKAR method for change. You have to build Awareness and Desire first, add in some Knowledge before you get to Action and Reinforcement. So for each of these shifts that needs to happen, good to think through each step either planfully or as a diagnostic tool if you're stuck.
  - **Joe G, Attendee:** That's what I felt about the [Water of Systems Change inverted triangle] image- like the transformative work is the "singularity," so to speak. It's the deep work that everything ultimately traces back to
  - **Carrie Z, Attendee:** What recommendations do you have for ways to track system changes in early childhood education in simple ways --as many of our community partners in ECE do not have a data and evaluation team/database.
  - **Adrienne G, Attendee:** How can we pitch to funders to fund "Systems change in early childhood" ... working on an application for that right now!
    - **Carrie Z, Attendee:** Adrienne --this is a tool that can be used to track systems change happening legislatively and via advocacy: <https://pluralpolicy.com/>
  - **Kathy S, Attendee:** Often, funders have the ability to shift mental models through the tools they create, the requirements they have of their grantees and subtle ways like



how they ask questions in their proposal templates can often shift mindsets. It doesn't always have to be explicit.

- **Kathy S, Attendee:** Sadly, we've found that systems change work isn't "sexy" or quick enough for a lot of funders. You need to find those who are willing to provide patient funding. Who are willing to understand systems - sometimes it requires building their understanding of what it means. Not an easy road. But really worth it.
- **Stephanie W, Attendee:** Such an interesting point. I think about this as it relates to limited term funding. So often the funding disappears and so do the funded activities. Thinking about the theories of change or tools they can create could be a great way to extend its impact.
- **Kathy S, Attendee:** @stephanie - there's definitely a lot of opportunity and I know some funders who are sharing this thought space and trying to change their practices. I'm hopeful.
- **Carrie Z, Attendee:** Stephanie--in Minnesota I often say we are the land of 10,000 lakes, 10,000 initiatives and 10,000 nonprofits etc....so often there's one time funding and short term funding that can't sustain early childhood work at a level that is realistic
- **Carrie Z, Attendee:** Decolonizing Philanthropy: <https://elevatechildren.org/>
- **Carrie Z, Attendee:** Community Solutions Fund New Tool for Equity: <https://startearlyprd.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Community-Solutions-Fund-Report.pdf>
- **Chi O, Attendee:** Would also recommend the folk at RadComms for the communications managers in the room. They've done a ton of research that feels much more activist-y / community / collectivist etc.
  - **Chi O, Attendee:** Have also found the work at Next River (Mia Birdsong) to be an interesting framework around liberation and collectivism etc.
- **Carrie Z, Attendee:** I think shifting mental models and how we frame the SocioEcon status of families can be supported by ALICE <https://unitedforalice.org/>
  - **Carrie Z, Attendee:** ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed)
- **Fiona S, Attendee:** If helpful - (as I didn't join with any intent to mention this - but it is very related to this presentation) - another resource may be Building Together: Collaborative Leadership in Early Childhood Systems - <https://www.redleafpress.org/Building-Together-Collaborative-Leadership-in-Early-Childhood-Systems-P1997.aspx>
- **ECDHS: Evidence to Impact Center, Host:** Here is the link to the Action Learning Exercise: <https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Water-of-Systems-Change-Action-Learning-Exercise.pdf>



- **Melissa Passarelli, Presenter:** What are two or three things that you are taking away from this session? How will you share these with your colleagues?
  - **Across Attendees:**
    - Great Pyramid image to guide collective convo as a visual
    - the unstick mental models!
    - I took extensive notes and we are working on a policy overhaul, so this will be very helpful moving forward.
    - Invest in the unseen ...
    - SO much, tons of notes and inspiration to use the tool and to reframe our approach to helping folks understand systems using the pyramid.
    - Will discuss the activity with colleagues and taking away the opportunity to partner for systems change
    - More focus on communications, stories and narrative change
    - Levels of change and the digging deeper. Love the image and will use with our systems work
    - I will look into Resource Asset Based Community Development and I enjoyed having a concrete definition of Systems change
    - Simply Systems change will bring better outcomes.
    - Lots of overlap with our current work with the MCH Workforce Development Center. Will take back for more work on mental models
    - I learned about the 6 conditions and I took notes on how we can use historical data to track trends to improve our goals of system change. I also made note to look into the framework institute
    - Take-aways: mental models and sources of power
    - How to unstick mental models and the levels of change. love the water metaphor too, powerful.
    - Definitely the pyramid, but also the idea and definition of systems.

