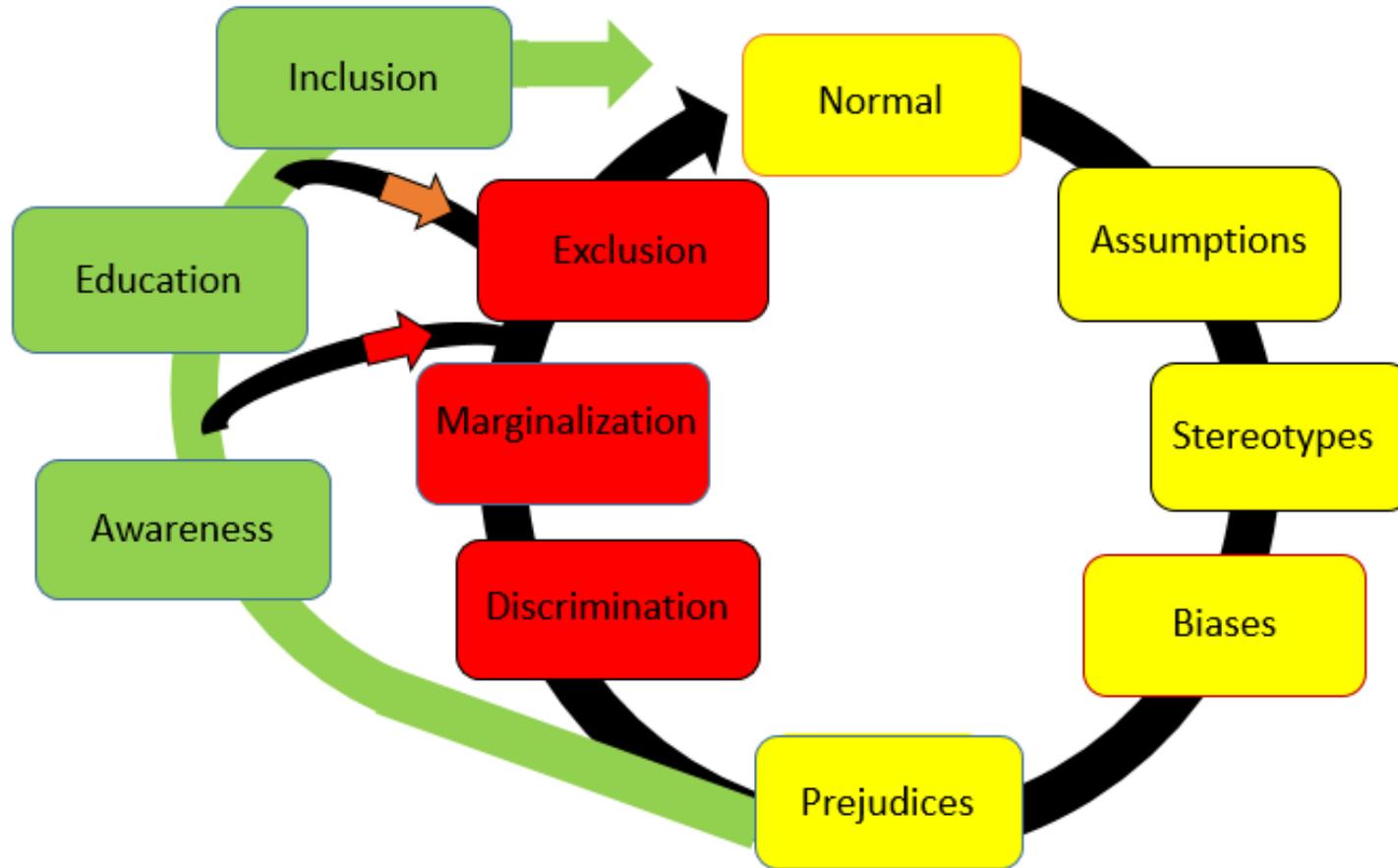


Deconstructing and Reconstructing Normal

A professional development activity

The Cycle of Normal



The Initial Components for the Cycle of Normal

The Cycle of Normal consists of five initial components: Normal; assumptions; stereotypes; biases; and prejudices. Each builds on the preceding component.

Normal

The normal that we maintain in our everyday social lives is a natural function of the human brain. Normal allows us to sustain attention on what we perceive as important for our survival. It provides us with comfort and security we need to navigate the complexities of our environment.

Assumptions

Assumptions are the driving force for maintaining normal. Assumptions allow people to move forward blind to the plurality of persons' group, cultural and self-identities.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes are perceptions of groups based on grossly simplified characteristics or qualities made to categorize individuals. People often struggle to process stereotypes because they are trying to combine many at one time (gender, race, ability, native language, etc.).

Biases

Stereotypes lead to preferences and biases. People have a countless number of biases influencing their moment to moment decisions. Some are conscious; others are subconscious (implicit). Some biases can be meaningless. Others can have significant impacts on other people.

Prejudices

Based on stereotypes, people develop prejudices. The prejudices define what people see as normal/abnormal and different/worse.

Assumptions, stereotypes, biases, and prejudices often occur without any consideration. In many cases stereotypes, biases and prejudices are essential for survival. They allow us to tune out noise, build a knowledge base and make quick decisions. In other cases, they cause damage.

Maintaining the Cycle of Normal

Maintaining the cycle of normal means following the status quo and remaining blind to prejudices. There are three components for maintaining the cycle of normal in a manner that excludes individuals or groups of people: Discrimination; marginalization; and exclusion.

Discrimination

Discrimination is acting in a way that restricts a person from the access the rights that other people have. If people do not recognize their prejudices, those prejudices can lead to acts of discrimination.

Marginalization

To put or keep (someone or a group) in a powerless or unimportant position within a community in response to discrimination.

Exclusion

Exclusion is the outcome of discrimination and marginalization. A person who experiences exclusion is deprived of the legal and social rights in their community.

Disrupting the Cycle of Normal

The Cycle of Normal is hard to disrupt. It takes time, effort, commitment and reconstruction of normal. Disruption means: Constantly expanding awareness of the cycle of normal; continuously receiving formal and information education; and being inclusive.

Awareness

There is a growing call in the field of early care and education for an anti-bias curriculum and implicit bias training. These are all part of an effort to increase early childhood professional's awareness of their biases and prejudices.

Educate

It is difficult to become fully aware of our stereotypes, biases, prejudices, and acts of discrimination without formal and informal education. Education provides a better foundation for the inclusion of all individuals.

Inclusion

Inclusion tends to be the stage where many tend to return to their old pathway of normal. Inclusion is not just about providing opportunities but providing meaningful opportunities leading to optimal outcomes for all individuals.

Maintaining the flow of normal permits inequities, where individuals who are excluded do not achieve optimal outcomes.

Disrupting the flow of normal opens up the possibility of inclusion, where individuals have all the necessary resources to achieve optimal outcomes.

Deconstructing and Reconstructing Normal Activity

This three-part activity supports professionals who recognize that their understanding of “normal” potentially leads to the discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion of those who do not share the same group, cultural, or self-identities. Before starting the activity have a conversation about the cycle of normal. Identify your prior knowledge and comfort level of these concepts.

It is common for participants to initially identify their normal and the assumptions, biases, stereotypes, etc. that follow. A brief activity that can get “juices flowing” is to think about specific characters and the initial image that comes to mind when that role is spoken. For example: Teacher, doctor, construction worker, a parent with a child who has a disability, child with challenging behaviors, etc. How does the cycle of normal unfold when those roles are spoken? Kind nurturing young white women? The more details and examples, the better.

This activity is best done independently, but if this is relatively new then work in groups. Given that the content may be very personal to an individual, it is recommended that participants not be required to share their work.

Part 1: Deconstructing your perception of normal

- 1) Identify an issue in your professional practice that appears to be caused by another person’s flaws. For example, a colleague does not fulfill professional commitments, a child does not follow specific class expectations, or families are not fully engaged with the team meeting process.
- 2) Complete the table on the **Deconstructing Normal** activity sheet. At the top of the page, identify the circumstance and issue. Then complete the chart from left to right, following the *Cycle of Normal*. Be sure to document your assumptions underneath each aspect of the *Cycle of Normal*. These may be very difficult to recognize because they typically occur collectively without any conscious effort.
- 3) After completing the table write a statement summarizing how your *Cycle of Normal* flows. Stop after “prejudices.”
- 4) Write a statement of exclusion. The statement should be based on “discrimination” and “marginalization” in your *Cycle of Normal*.

Part 2: Identifying the roots of the issue

- 1) Complete the **Roots of the Issue**. Begin by writing the issue you identified in Part 1 in the top oval.
- 2) Ask yourself *WHY* is this an issue? Respond with two to four “I” statements. Place each statement in an oval.
- 3) Create two to four ovals for each “I” statement and write “I” statements that provide insight into why you do what you do.
- 4) Continue to ask yourself *WHY* until you can no longer identify answer(s). The last ovals are the roots of your issue.
- 5) Organize your root issues into ovals at the bottom of the page.

Part 3: Reconstructing your perception of normal

- 1) Now that you have begun to recognize the potential negative impacts of your perception of “normal” you can begin to create a “new normal” using the **Reconstructing Normal** activity. Notice that each box in the activity sheet is labeled slightly different for “deconstructing” and the box for discrimination and marginalization have been changed to awareness and educate. To understand why, revisit the *Cycle of Normal* in the activity description.
- 2) Complete the “educate” funnel using your responses from the **Roots of the Issue** activity.
- 3) Like Part 1, you will write a summary statement for your “new normal.”
- 4) Complete the activity by creating a statement on inclusion. This statement is intended to guide your work as a more effective, inclusive practitioner.

Deconstructing Normal: Activity Example

Location/Context/Circumstance: Kindergarten Transition Meeting Issue: Families don't advocate for their child

Cycle:	Normal (Expectations)	Stereotypes (Categories)	Biases (Preferences)	Prejudices (Pre-judgement)	Discrimination (Actions)
Thoughts/ Actions:	-Professionals share their assessment results, provide recommendations and consider the interests of families -Families accept the expertise of professionals	-Professionals understand technical procedures -Families do not understand the procedures	-Professionals who understand child development, family-centered practices and follow procedures -Families who look and act like the professionals.	-Professionals who do not come to meetings prepared or speak the jargon are not competent -Families who do not look and act like the professionals will not understand and don't need to understand the technicalities	-Professional's positions and perspectives are not valued -Families are not provided with appropriate support
Assumptions:	Everyone is at the table for the same reasons	Professionals have training and families do not	People who compliment my biases are good people	I am the most qualified person.	People want me to take control

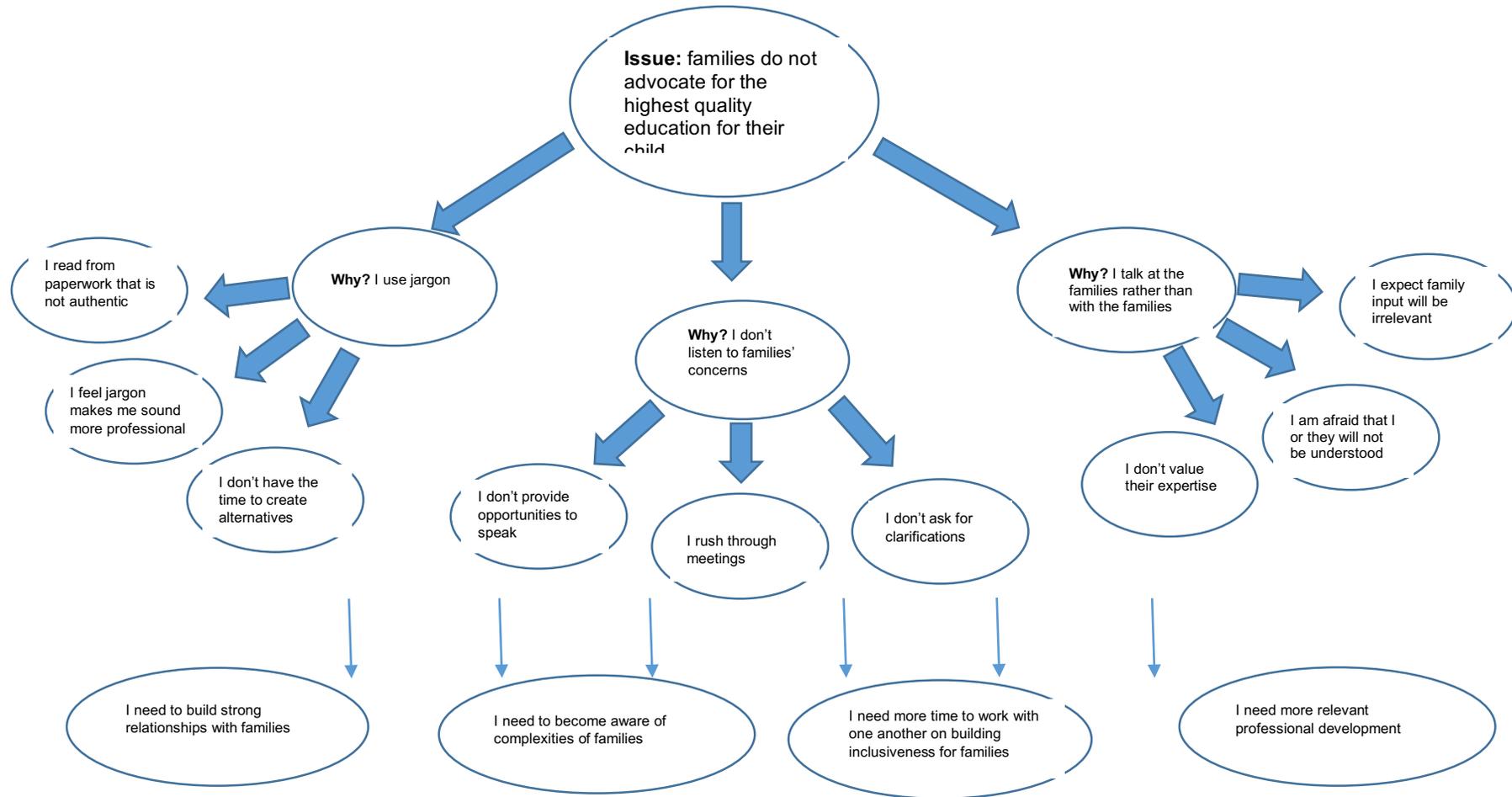
Marginalization (What rights are not being met): Education? Love? Relationships?

Professionals don't grow and build relationships with families, children and

Summary statement: During kindergarten transition meetings, I assume everyone is at the table for the same reasons. Professionals should share their results, provide recommendations and consider the interests of the family. The family should accept the professional's expertise. I assume professionals have training that has prepared them to understand the district policies and procedures. Families have not received any training, nor do they need it. Professionals who follow procedures and families who do not challenge them are good people. They understand that I am the most qualified person at the table. If professionals do not appear competent, I can speak for them and parents will appreciate that.

Statement of exclusion: families and professionals who do not align with my expectations of normal are not valued in the same way others are. Families are not provided with the necessary support. Because of this, Professionals do not have the opportunity to grow and build relationships with families. Families are not able to advocate for the highest quality education for their child.

Identifying the Roots of the Issue: Activity Example



Reconstructing Normal: Activity Example

Location/Context/Circumstance: Kindergarten Transition Meeting

Issue: Families don't advocate for their child

Cycle:	New Normal (Expectations)	Recognize Stereotypes (Categories)	Question Biases (Preferences)	Disrupt Prejudices (Pre-judgement)	Awareness (question differences)
Thoughts/ Actions:	-Professionals consistently question the inclusiveness of their practices -The family's interests and perceptions are at the center of the discussion.	-Families and professionals may or may not be familiar with the technical language. Technical words will be defined for the family and professionals in a family center language before the meeting	-Everyone can improve their use of family-centered practices -Families have different experiences and have unknown differences in access to opportunities.	-Jargon is culturally specific and can mean different things to different people -Families understand special education in different ways.	-Ask why questions -look for root causes -work to better understand social injustices and inequities -interrogate normalized systems
Assumptions:	Everyone is at the table has different perceptions	Everyone at the table is learning	Everyone is unique and brings something meaningful to the table	Everyone at the table has strengths and needs	I must always work to challenge my perceptions

Educate: (Confronting the roots of normal?)

By building stronger relationships, increasing awareness of discrimination and marginalization, participating in meaningful professional development and additional planning time, we will support families with advocating for the highest quality education for their child

Expectations of new normal: During kindergarten transition meetings, I will assume everyone at the table has different perceptions. Professionals work to challenge their perceptions of families and each other. The family will be at the center of the conversation. To keep the family and professionals engaged, the technical language will be avoided and I will recognize that everyone is learning, becoming better at using family centered practices. Each at the table brings with them different experiences that have shaped their understanding of the circumstances. I must recognize that with that comes individual strengths and needs.

Statement of inclusion: All families must be given access to opportunities and systems of support that allow them to effectively advocates for their child.

Deconstructing Normal

Location/Context/Circumstance:

Issue:

Cycle:	Normal (Expectations)	Stereotypes (Categories)	Biases (Preferences)	Prejudices (Pre-judgement)	Discrimination (Actions)
Thoughts/ Actions:					
Assumptions:					

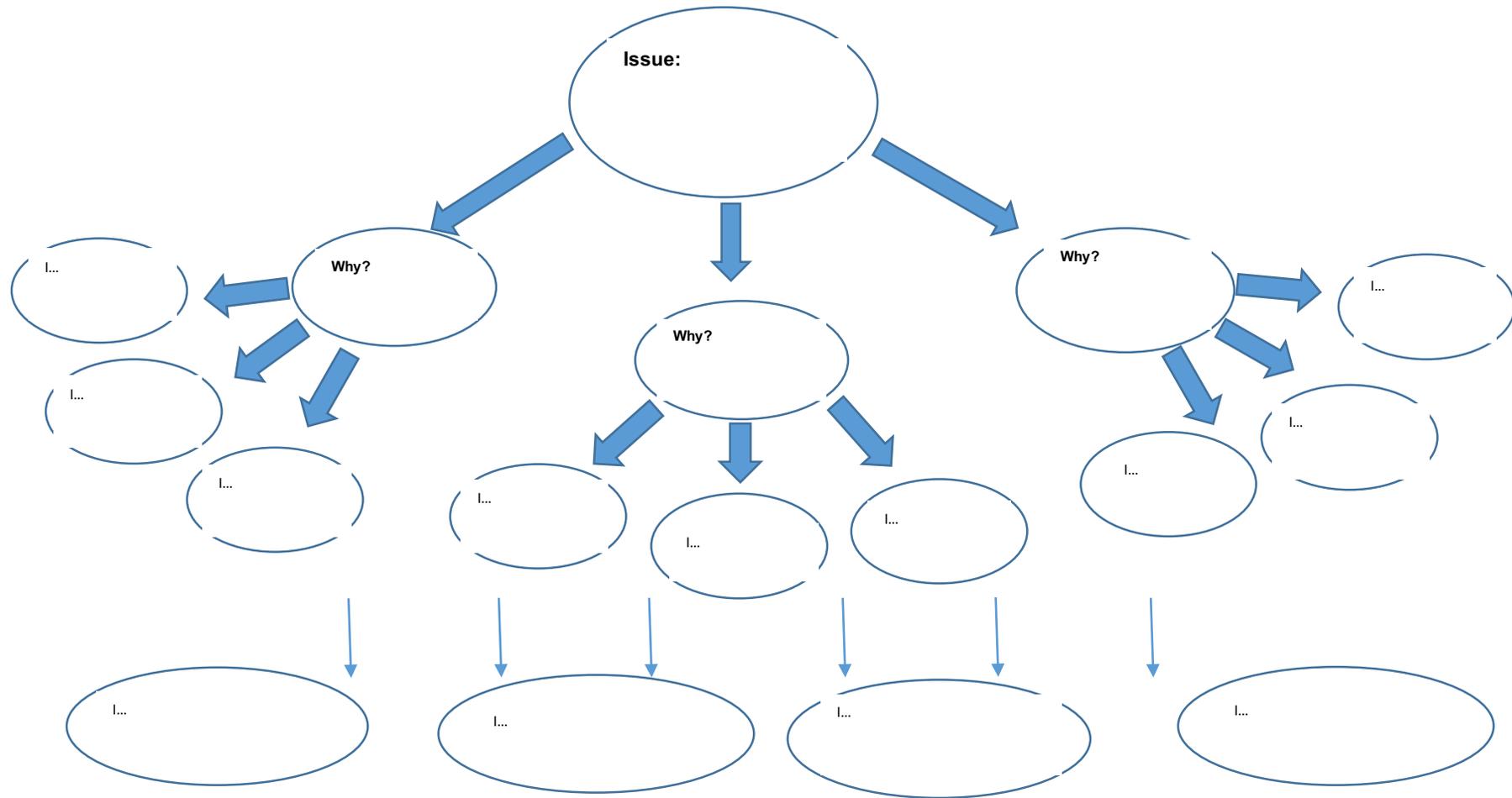
Marginalization (What rights are not being met): Education? Love?
Relationships?



Summary statement:

Statement of exclusion:

Identifying the Roots of the Issue



Reconstructing Normal

Location/Context/Circumstance:

Issue:

Cycle:	New Normal (Expectations)	Recognize Stereotypes (Categories)	Question Biases (Preferences)	Disrupt Prejudices (Pre-judgement)	Awareness (question differences)
Thoughts/ Actions:					
Assumptions:					

Educate: (Confronting the roots of normal?)



Expectations of new normal:

Statement of inclusion: