

Trainee Orientation Manual

Va-LEND

Family Mentorship Experience

2006-2007

It's going to be a great year for the FME!

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Objectives of the Family Mentorship Experience

1. To become sensitive to how families live with a disability in order to consider the family and its routine when developing treatment plans and interventions in your professional capacity.
2. To appreciate family strengths and recognize the family as the expert in their child, in order to promote parent-professional partnerships.
3. To recognize the similarities to families who do not have a member with a disability, in order to see families who do have a member with a disability as part of the community.
4. To appreciate the variety in families.
5. To develop leadership in promoting systems change among professional peers regarding family-centered care.

Overview of Your FME Commitment

Please enter all of these dates onto your schedule at the start of the year:

1. **Family Mentorship Experience orientation:** Thursday, September 7, 4:30-5:30 p.m. at LEND office.
2. **Picnic for trainees and families:** Saturday, September 23, 4:00-6:00 at Huguenot Park, Shelter #1.
3. **Five face-to-face visits with your mentoring family** (counting the picnic as one visit) between mid-September and mid-April. The deadline for completing all visits is Monday, April 16.
4. **One phone conversation a month**, September through mid-April, to stay in touch with your family.
5. **Journal to record your observations and reflections** on the visits you are having with your family, to be turned in for review to your faculty mentor and FME faculty member;
OR
Attendance at a journal discussion with your faculty mentor from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. in the LEND office to share your experiences and receive feedback from the group.

Journals are due and journal discussions will be held on:
 Monday, December 4
 Thursday, April 19
6. **FME training session on issues around chronic illness/death/grieving:** Thursday, October 5 from 4:00 to 6:40 p.m. at the LEND office.
7. **Two group FME meetings** for sharing/discussion of FME with your fellow trainees:
 Monday, January 29, from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. at the LEND office
 Monday, April 30, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. at the LEND office
8. **Participation in Blackboard (web-based) discussions** on specific FME-related topics/questions twice during the year (plus a practice activity). Postings will be due:
 Monday, October 2 (practice activity)
 Monday, November 6
 Monday, March 5
9. **Written evaluation of FME**, due Monday, April 23.
10. **End-of-year picnic with mentoring families:** Saturday, May 12, 4:00-6:00 p.m., location TBA.

Details of Your FME Commitment

1. **Family Mentorship Experience orientation:** We will meet from 4:30 to 5:30 on Thursday, September 7 in the LEND office to review this FME Trainee Orientation Manual, discuss the plans of any trainee pursuing an alternative plan to meet the FME objectives, and generally make sure everyone gets all their related questions answered! Attendance is mandatory. If you truly cannot attend, you are responsible for notifying Elaine Ogburn, FME Coordinator, in advance and for making arrangements with her to meet soon thereafter to cover the information you missed.

2. **Picnic for trainees and mentoring families, Saturday, September 23, 4:00-6:00, at Huguenot Park, Shelter #1.** This will be an icebreaker social and a chance to meet your mentoring family in an informal setting. The picnic will count as one of your 5 visits during the year. It's a good idea to bring your schedule book so you and your mentoring family can do some planning ahead. (Mentoring families are asked to bring their calendars also).

Please note that if you and/or your family are unable to attend this event, you must make your initial visit to your family by September 30, so be sure to phone them early in the month to schedule your first visit. This will be the first of your 5 visits for the year.

If you attend the picnic but your family is unable to attend, the picnic does not count as a visit; however, it will count toward your practicum hours, and it will be a lot of fun and give you a glimpse of some great families with kids with disabilities. So please come even if your mentoring family cannot!

3. **At least 5 face-to-face visits, including the picnic, throughout the LEND year.** Included with this manual is a contacts log, and you will receive a copy by email also. Please use it! Be sure to record every visit (as well as phone or email contacts with your mentoring family) on your log. Plan to make two visits with your family at their home, and use the remaining visits to be with your family at locations chosen by the family and you, to give you exposure to significant or typical experiences. **Please be sure to have all of your visits completed by Monday, April 16 in order to complete the FME on schedule.**

The first home visit will be for getting to know the family members, learning about the family's history and life, and interacting with and observing the family. You may want to spend part of the time talking with just the parent(s), in a room where the child(ren) cannot overhear the conversation and possibly misconstrue terms and emotions the parents may wish to share with you.

The second home visit can be for further exposure to the family's real life. Plan to stay long enough on that visit to get a real feel for what home life is like for this family. Some previous trainees have found it enlightening to spend a stretch of several hours with the

family – helping out at homework time, eating dinner with the family, and staying through bath time and bedtime, for example, or being there when the child(ren) wake, dress, eat breakfast, and head off for the day's activities. Some trainees have cooked a meal for their mentoring family at the family's home. You and your family can arrange whatever works best for you both. **Just a note:** Past trainees highly recommend bringing along a treat for the kids, a baked goodie for the whole family to enjoy, or some other small, informal gift.

Your remaining family visits can be held wherever and whenever the family and you decide would be the best learning experience for you. Following are just a few examples:

- Taking a trip to the grocery store or doing holiday shopping with your family
- Accompanying the family to the doctor or therapist
- Participating in playground time, swim class, or other recreational activity
- Eating dinner out at a restaurant or McDonald's
- Visiting the child if hospitalized
- Visiting with family members, extended family members, or family friends who play a big role in the family's life
- Observing the child in the classroom
- Attending your child's birthday party
- Playing with the children while mom or dad chills out in another room.
- Helping your family do something together that they wouldn't get to do without the help of an extra adult (YOU) – perhaps see a play, go miniature golfing, or some other fun activity!

It is highly recommended that you attend an annual IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) meeting with your family at the child's school. Be sure to ask your mentoring family about their previous experience of IEP meetings also. The IEP can be an experience like no other, and it is an aspect of life for special-needs families that you definitely need to experience if you haven't had the opportunity before (and even if you have). IEP meetings of parents and school personnel can range from collaborative, child-focused work sessions to dysfunctional, antagonistic, service-focused sessions, or anything in-between. Since IEP's are the customized educational plans for each child in special education, IEP meetings should be a big focus for your mentoring family. (If they are not, your family may welcome some information on their rights under the law for their child's education, which is something we can help with – contact Elaine Ogburn). **NOTE:** If you cannot attend an IEP with your mentoring family, you can contact Janet Willis for another IEP opportunity.

Seek to develop an in-depth understanding of the disability or disabilities with which the family lives, but beyond that, seek to gain a real understanding of each member of the family. Dad may handle things very differently than Mom does, and both perspectives are real and have a powerful impact on the family. The child identified as having a disability will have a uniquely valuable perspective, so listen and watch and learn from the child as much as possible about how s/he lives and feels and thinks. Depending on the child's age and disability, s/he may have a great deal to share with you. Let the child tell his/her own story – this is a good chance to begin practicing the skills s/he will need for moving into self-advocacy, such as focusing on his/her strengths and looking for solutions to problems. Be intentional about paying special attention to

siblings as well as to the child who has a disability. Brothers and sisters need to feel included in FME and in your attentions. Sibs have their own special needs – and their own special perspectives. They are dealing with the realities of their sibling’s special challenges in their own lives and will be doing so for a long time to come, possibly their whole lives. They have a lot to share and may need your listening ear as much as their special sibling or their parent does. Let the kids know you are coming to see them, too, not just to talk with their parent(s). They may need to know that they are important to you personally, not only for your training. And – PLAY with all the kids in your mentoring family! They will love it and you will learn from it!

It is a good rule of thumb in general to not talk about a child in front of that child.

Always be mindful about what you are saying and who may be listening. Even very young children absorb the feel, if not the actual meaning, of things that are said about them. Be sure not to talk in front of the child about issues such as the child’s diagnosis, challenges, or behavior problems, or about sensitive issues such as adoption, previous history of abuse, serious medical conditions, etc., unless you have checked first with the parent. (Obviously this rule may be safely bent in the case of a young baby, or in the case of an older child who understands his/her disability and may want to talk with you about it him/herself). Also, do not mention such private matters in the presence, for example, of a neighbor who may be visiting the family when you are there.

Once you are comfortable with your family, **make a point of telling them how valuable it is for you to see the entirety of their lives.** Families naturally want to show their best side to the outside world, including you, and they often need to be gently but directly told that it’s OK to show their weaker, needy, down side, too – and that if they want to share it, you will listen and learn from that, too, without judging them in any way.

Talk specifically with your family about how professionals have been helpful to and supportive of them, and also about times that professionals have been less than helpful and supportive. Think about how what they tell you can help you to be more responsive and helpful to future families in your own professional practice.

Always keep in mind that it is an honor and a privilege for you to be welcomed into this family’s life. Learn all that they are willing to teach you, and always show respect and appreciation for their willingness to allow you into the very personal and private world of their family life. Keep your promises and be dependable. If you disagree with something or feel you know better – be sure to listen, look, and think before you speak!

4. **One substantive phone conversation or email exchange monthly, September through mid-April (at least 6 or 7 calls/emails).** These contacts are important for helping you keep up with the family between visits. A lot can happen in the life of a child or a family in a very short period of time! Be sure to record your calls and emails on your contacts log. Some folks like to set a mutually agreeable day of the month and time of day for a phone visit (e.g., second Tuesday evening at 7 p.m.). If you set something like this up with your family, write it in your calendar! You will usually talk to a parent, but you may also talk with any of the children or perhaps Grandma or another person who spends a lot of time in the home.

Trainees in the past have shared the following suggestions: Be sure to call at a time

when you really have time to listen and be present to the family over the phone. Ask them at the start of the conversation whether this is a good time for them to chat. If it is not, call back when they have more time to focus on the conversation. Say, “Hi, how are you?”

and really mean it. Listen well to the response before you move on to any other topics. If you have a hard time reaching your family, keep trying! As one mentoring mom put it, “Remember that you are not infringing on your family’s time and energy -- they really want to talk with you, they may just be really busy!”

Plan to call your family a day or two before each scheduled visit, to confirm their (and your) availability. This is not only a courtesy but may be essential if your family has a lot going on, which they probably will. And be sure to call your family immediately if you find that you cannot keep a scheduled visit or make a scheduled phone call.

Some families may prefer that you keep in touch by email. If you go this route, be sure to have a few phone conversations throughout the year too, for two-way conversing and really catching up. Email does offer some advantages. You and your mentoring family can email each other at any time of day or night. Your family may be willing to email you their schedule every other week or monthly, and let you identify possible opportunities for a visit. You can also keep in touch more often with a quick email just to say, “Hi, I’m thinking about you and your family today and wondering how you’re doing.” However, be sure to use email etiquette. Reply to every email you receive from your mentoring family, even if it’s just to let them know you received it. And respond promptly to any email from your family which requests or requires a response.

Whether you are phoning or emailing your family, the initiative for getting and staying in contact is always your responsibility.

5. **Journal OR journal discussions:**

Some people love to journal. If you are one of these folks: You are asked to (1) record your experiences, feelings, and reflections in a journal, to assist you in learning the most you can from your family mentorship experience, and (2) keep a simple log of all your visits and calls/attempted calls. Your journal will be reviewed twice by your faculty advisor and Elaine Ogburn, and you will receive written feedback within two weeks. (Janet Willis, VA-LEND Coordinator, will receive a copy of this written feedback also). The easiest way to submit your journal will be by email, so you may want to do your journal entries directly on the computer. See more details under “Journallers” below.

If you do not enjoy and benefit from the process of journaling: You may instead attend a journal discussion twice during the year, with other non-journaling trainees and some faculty, at which you will share your FME experiences verbally and receive immediate feedback from the group gathered. **If you choose this option, you are responsible for arranging with your faculty advisor for him/her to be present at the meeting also. You are also required to turn in your visits/calls log at the time of the discussion.** See more details under “Journal Discussion Folks” below.

All trainees: The contacts log is a one-page synopsis of all your visits, calls, and email

exchanges with your mentoring family. Please keep it up to date. You will need to turn it in twice a year along with your journal or at the journal discussion group meetings. A contact log is included with this orientation manual, and an email version of it will be provided to you also.

Journallers: Please take the time to use this journal for reflection and learning, recording in some detail. **Be sure to practice confidentiality in your writing, taking care not to use any identifying information about your family** (see page 9). There is no set format (other than including the contacts log as part of your journal), but the following suggestions may help get your creativity going: Include in your first journal entry a summary of family history, diagnosis, and treatments for future reference. Record your observations and experiences with your family; your feelings and thoughts; what you feel you learned from various experiences; and how you think the experiences might affect the way you work with children with disabilities and with their families in your professional practice. Keep in mind the objectives for the FME (see page 1). It may be helpful to turn the objectives into questions: How does this child's disability impact the marriage, family dynamics, allocation of family resources? How, specifically, is this family like and unlike other families who do not have a child with a disability? In what specific ways are the parents, the child, and the siblings experts in the disability and in their own ways of dealing with it? Also pay attention to experiences with your mentoring family that may surprise you, challenge your values or your ways of thinking, and otherwise stretch you. Your journal will be read by only two other human beings, so feel free to utilize it for self-disclosure and self-evaluation in the FME as well.

Journal Discussion Folks: During the discussion all participants will be required to observe full confidentiality, so come prepared to talk about your family without using any identifying language (see page 9). Although you don't need to submit in writing anything except the contacts log, you may find that you need to keep at least some sketchy notes to help you recall specific incidents and points. You may wish to review the suggestions under "Journallers" above as you think over your FME experiences in preparation for each journal discussion.

Either option you choose, the dates are the same:

Monday, December 4 (journal discussion 4:00-5:30 in LEND office)

Thursday, April 19 (journal discussion 4:00-5:30 in LEND office)

6. **Training session on chronic illness/death/grieving, Thursday, October 5, 4:00-6:40 in the LEND office.** This is a special session offered by a team of LEND faculty and a former LEND trainee. The purpose is to give you further insight into extremely serious issues that some children and their families have to face, and to help you as a professional to deal with these issues as you encounter them. Trainees in the past have found this session extremely helpful for their professional training. **Attendance is mandatory.**
7. **Group FME meetings.** You will meet twice with all your fellow trainees in the FME (and faculty as available) for sharing your FME experiences with the group. This sharing will expose you to your fellow trainees' experiences with a wider diversity of families, broadening everyone's experiences and appreciation of families' lives. Confidentiality

will be observed, so come prepared to talk about your family without using identifying language! **Attendance is required at both meetings.** Group meetings will be held in the LEND office:

Monday, January 29, 4:00-5:30 p.m.

Monday, April 30, 5:00-7:00 p.m. (includes light supper)

- 8. Participation in Blackboard (web-based) discussions on specific FME-related topics/questions 2 times during the year.** You will be using the Discussion Board component of Blackboard to share, in a structured way, your experiences of and with your mentoring family. You will also be asked each time to respond to at least one other trainee's remarks. Blackboard provides an opportunity for a more focused and in-depth sharing on a particular topic than may occur in a group meeting. As in group discussions, confidentiality will be observed, so please do not use any language that could identify your mentoring family.

Each Blackboard activity will be posted about 3 weeks before the due date and you will be notified by email that it has been posted. The deadlines for contributing your comments/observations/reflections to the FME Blackboard discussions are:

Practice Activity – Monday, October 2

Activity #1 -- Monday, November 6

Activity #2 -- Monday, March 5

A quick reference guide for the use of Blackboard is included at the end of this orientation manual, and a more detailed reference guide is enclosed separately in your FME orientation packet. **NOTE: Blackboard can only be accessed using your vcu.edu email address and password.** Contact Elaine Ogburn or the LEND office folks if you run into any questions with Blackboard.

- 9. Written evaluation of FME:** You will be asked to turn in a written evaluation form by Monday, April 23. You have the option of turning this form in anonymously if you prefer, in case there is something you wish to bring up in that way. **Since there is no way for Elaine to know who has or hasn't turned it in, we count on every trainee to turn it in. (Thanks in advance!)**

Roles of Family and Trainee

In the Family Mentorship Experience, **the mentor is the family**; your role is as learner. You are there to listen, observe, ask questions, experience. You may also choose to serve the family's needs from time to time as a sounding board, a resource, or an extra pair of hands. Always listen well, and recognize that you are not responsible for offering advice and suggestions unless asked.

For your information, families have been visited and screened in advance by Elaine. They have received a Family Orientation Manual similar to the trainee manual but much shorter and geared toward mentoring families. The families are eager to participate in the FME and look forward to meeting you and sharing their lives and experiences with you.

As some previous trainees have found in the FME, there may well be times when the line is unclear between your role as learner and your experience as a professional. Your family may seem to you to need resources or advocacy that is beyond the scope of what you can offer in your learner's role with them. If any such concerns surface, or if you find you are uncomfortable with any aspect of your mentoring relationship, you need to contact me to discuss the situation and how to best deal with it. Sometimes in the past this type of situation has become a learning experience not only for the trainee involved but also for the other trainees and the LEND faculty as well.

Note: If you attend an IEP or other meeting with your family, be very careful not to offer comments during the meeting unless you have cleared them with the family previously.

We try to select our mentoring families with the goal of giving the trainees, as a group, a broad exposure to a diversity of families. In addition to differing ages and disabilities of the children, we seek diversity in the areas of race, culture, family structure, and home settings. Keep in mind that you personally represent VA-LEND to your mentoring family. Always be courteous, respectful, a good listener, and non-judgmental in your relationship with them.

You may, in the course of getting to know your mentoring family, be confronted with values, child-rearing practices, or other practices that are different from those with which you are comfortable. Keep in mind that you are a guest in the family's home and life, and you are there to learn from the wealth of their experience. Your role is to be a learner, and to do so you may at times need to be nonjudgmental.

For liability reasons, babysitting or providing childcare for your family for pay is NOT permitted during the period of your FME relationship. You may not transport members of your mentoring family or other people in conjunction with your FME activities.

You are welcome to make additional visits after the required ones, if that is OK with your mentoring family. If both you and your family want to continue a relationship after the school year ends, be clear about what your changed role will be (friend? or what?). And be sure that you do not make any promises about staying in touch with them unless you have already determined that this will be a true priority for you and that you will definitely keep your promise.

Checklist for First Visit/Call

It is very helpful to think ahead of time about possible topics you may wish to explore with your mentoring family and some questions that you may want to ask them initially about their life and experiences. In addition, at the picnic or during your first post-picnic visit, be sure to cover all of the following points:

- Have your schedule book with you. (Families will be asked to bring their calendars to the picnic, too).
- Find out who your primary contact will be (it's usually Mom).
- Set a verbal “contract” with your mentoring family. Review with the parent(s) your understanding of your respective roles in the FME, your commitment to calls and visits, your practice of confidentiality, etc. so they know what you expect and intend.
- Exchange home phone numbers and any alternate contacts the family may prefer you to use (work phone number, cell phone, email, pager, etc.). Find out the best ways to reach each other. Sometimes email works best for very busy families, which FME families tend to be.
- Share good and bad times to call. For example, it might be fine to call the parent at work -- or it might not be. The family may have certain bedtime or other routines during which they would prefer you not call. You may also have some better and worse times to be contacted by your family, also. Let them know.
- Ask your family if it would be helpful to them to establish a set day of the month and/or time of the day for your monthly phone conversation. If so, write it in your schedule book and suggest that your family do the same.
- Ask your family to share any "house rules" or cultural issues of which you need to be aware.
- Ask your family about any parking or safety issues that you should know about for future visits.
- Share a little about yourself and your own family, as you feel it is appropriate.
- Set the date, time, and place for your next call or in-person visit.

Notes: Previous trainee experience indicates that it may help to go ahead and line up some or all of the other visits, in general terms -- for example, come to child’s birthday party, attend IEP meeting, go to playground in early spring, visit family when grandparents will be in town, etc. You may not be able to set exact dates but can have a skeleton plan to work from this way. It is also a very good idea to line up more than 5 visits, because it’s very likely that either the family or you will end up having a conflict, dealing with illness, or otherwise being unavailable for at least one planned visit.

Confidentiality and Person-First Language in the Family Mentorship Experience

We begin the FME year by inviting all the families and all the trainees to the FME picnic in September, to "break the ice." Faculty members are also invited, and both trainees and faculty are welcome to bring their own family members. Not every mentoring family will be able to come, due to schedule conflicts, but all the mentoring families are very receptive to the idea of an initial social event to start off the year. At the picnic we do not observe confidentiality, since everyone wears a nametag and has a chance to meet everyone else. However, after the FME picnic, confidentiality is paramount and must be respected at all times. **You are expected to practice full confidentiality when speaking or writing about your mentoring family and your experiences with them, whether in your journal, in group discussions, on Blackboard, or whenever you may informally mention your mentoring family to your fellow trainees or others.**

When you write in your journal or share with the LEND group, do not use last names or any identifying specifics (such as "Mr. _____ works at _____"). Just use first names and/or "Mom," "brother," etc. Be careful not to mention something that could be identifying of the family ("the boys are twins ___ years old and one of them has (rare diagnosis)"). Keep your journal private from the eyes of others.

After the initial informality of the picnic, please do not share your family mentorship experiences with your own family members, UNLESS you have been invited to do so by your mentoring family. In the past, for example, a trainee has occasionally been invited by the mentoring family to bring his/her spouse to dinner with the mentoring family, or bring his/her children to a play date with them. Trainees have found that this experience may be beneficial because their spouses and/or kids may not have had much personal exposure to children with disabilities or their families, and it may help the spouse/kids better understand some of what the trainee is doing in LEND and why. (It's also fun for all). In such a situation, be very clear in advance to your own family about the requirements of confidentiality. Be sure that you do not share the content of other visits and FME conversations with your spouse or your children. And definitely do not share your family mentorship experiences with anyone else!

In other words, be careful to write and speak about your mentoring family the way you would want a trainee to write and speak about you if YOU were the parent of a child with a disability and were opening your family's life to a trainee.

The Importance of Using Person-First Language

Throughout the LEND Program, including the Family Mentorship Experience, it is important that you think about the language you use when talking about persons who have disabilities. Our language shapes not only our thinking and our everyday actions as individuals, but the policies, priorities, and activities of every grouping of people, be they families, neighborhoods, nations, faith communities, transnational corporations, civil rights organizations, or groups of friends. We show respect for people with disabilities by using language that acknowledges that disability is just one aspect of a person, by using, for example, “people with disabilities” instead of “the disabled” or (even worse) “the handicapped.” As you get to know your mentoring family you will come to appreciate more deeply that their child is not, for example, a “Downs kid” but rather a precious and talented child who happens to have, among his many other attributes, Down Syndrome. Or perhaps you will get to know a child who uses a wheelchair to get where she wants to go, who, far from being wheelchair-bound, is freed and enabled by using her chair. These children are not “special needs children,” either – they have all the **same** basic needs as everyone else for belonging, learning, developing independence, and becoming a self-directed, contributing member of society. Please read carefully the materials on Person-First Language included in the Appendix of this manual, and incorporate them in your language, thinking, and actions!

Background Checks/ Information

The Family Mentorship Experience is a valuable learning opportunity for Va-LEND trainees which is provided by families of children with disabilities. The families voluntarily agree to participate in the FME. While working with a VA-LEND trainee, the role of the parent(s) or guardian(s) is to mentor the trainee. This family-trainee interaction does not involve therapeutic interventions or treatment.

Since the FME is a voluntary experience, Va-LEND does not require background checks on trainees or families prior to their participating in the Family Mentorship Experience. If, however, a trainee has background information that is relevant to or would interfere with his/her ability to work with children and families in a professional manner, it is important that the trainee share this information with a Va-LEND faculty member (Elaine Ogburn, faculty advisor, Janet Willis, or

Dr. Joann Bodurtha) prior to contacting his/her assigned mentoring family. Please keep in mind that many agencies will require a background check before confirming a field placement or a job, so it is important for all individuals planning to work in health care, education or related fields to inquire about these policies.

Evaluation of the Family Mentorship Experience

The FME is a graded component of the VA-LEND curriculum, counting as part of your Spring Practicum grade and accounting for 30% of one of your three practicum hours. Keep in mind that your visits and calls, which are the foundation of your FME, count heavily toward your grade. **You will lose points if you miss visits or calls, FME meetings or deadlines, so please keep up with your FME commitments!**

For your grade, you yourself and the way you handle your Family Mentorship Experience will be evaluated. In addition, the process you go through in journaling or preparing for journal discussions can provide a form of ongoing self-evaluation. The two group FME discussions, as well as the journal discussions if you choose to attend them, can be used by you to get helpful feedback from both trainees and faculty and to learn from your fellow trainees' experiences with their mentoring families. Elaine will be keeping in touch with the mentoring families from time to time throughout the year and may have some feedback from them for you. At year's end, your mentoring family will fill out a questionnaire eliciting their evaluation of you in your role as FME trainee and also their evaluation of the Family Mentorship Experience structure, purpose, effectiveness, etc. In order to keep your faculty advisor updated on your FME situation, Elaine will send to your advisor a copy of any substantive FME-related email that she sends to you during the year. Your faculty advisor may also have FME feedback for you from time to time apart from journal/discussion feedback.

You will be asked in the spring, via a written evaluation form, to evaluate the Family Mentorship Experience. Trainees, mentoring families, and LEND faculty all give feedback on the FME informally throughout the year and trainees and families do so formally as the year ends. This feedback is used every year to modify and improve the FME for the following year, and major changes have been made in the FME over the years based on feedback received.

A Note About the Importance of Checking Your Email

Communication between trainees and faculty about the Family Mentorship Experience – and the entire LEND Program – is heavily dependent on email, so be sure to check your email at least every other day. If you are experiencing computer problems, be sure to inform Elaine Ogburn (and other appropriate LEND faculty), and let us know the best alternate ways to reach you in the meantime.

When Elaine sends you email, she will assume you have received it and are aware of its contents, and you will be held responsible for responding appropriately. Informing her later that you did not receive the email due to having computer problems will not constitute an excuse. Keep in mind that any significant FME email that she sends to you will also be copied to your faculty mentor, to keep them in the FME loop.

Please be considerate and respond to any email which requests a response!

You're Busy, and So Is Your Mentoring Family!

Coordinating schedules with your mentoring family is likely to be your biggest problem with the Family Mentorship Experience. You may find yourself playing phone tag with your family as you make your monthly calls and also as you try to reach them to propose or confirm visits. If they do not return your phone call in a day or two, feel free to call them back. They are expecting to hear from you and have you visit with them, and they really do want to fulfill their own commitment to share their experiences with you. But they are busy, just like you, and they may not always return your calls right away.

It is your responsibility to reach them, so keep trying. It is OK to be persistent. Call at two or three different times in the same day, call on successive days, and/or call alternate phone numbers (work number, cell phone, etc.). If your family prefers email, email them to ask for a good time for you to reach them by phone.

Most mentorship relationships go smoothly, but occasionally a family is truly unable to continue due to surgery, family difficulties, extremely full schedules, etc. If you've really tried hard to contact your family and have been unable to get a response over a period of a few weeks, it is definitely time to call Elaine. She will check into the situation and, if necessary, find you a different mentoring family.

Please be sure to log every visit and call on your contacts log (even if you choose to attend the journal discussions rather than turning in a journal). In addition to serving as a good overview of your FME contacts, the log can help you determine if any breakdown in communication is perhaps at least in part your own doing. In the past we have had some trainees get so busy that they did not even attempt to contact their families some months, or just called and left a message and then did not follow up. This is simply not acceptable. **Va-LEND is a leadership training program, and leaders meet their commitments and their deadlines.**

Assuring a Successful Family Mentorship Experience

The FME sounds straightforward enough, and it is; but once you get started, you may run into one of several fairly common problematic situations. To prevent problems, **PLEASE RE-READ THIS MANUAL AFTER FME ORIENTATION, AND REFER TO IT THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.** You will save yourself a lot of time and energy and have a much better learning experience in the Family Mentorship Experience. Following are some hints (really just common sense and courtesy) to help you avoid pitfalls experienced by a few trainees in the past:

1. **Evaluate your FME match early in the relationship.** Situation: You might feel your mentoring family is not a good match for you. Depending on the situation, you might be right, or you might not. If you find early on that you really don't like relating to this family and you find yourself putting off calling them and lining up visits, don't just tough it out. Contact Elaine – right away! Don't wait for her to hear from the family in April that you haven't contacted them since January. Occasionally there is a match that just doesn't work well from the beginning, and it's usually clear to both trainee and family early on. You can be reassigned to a different family if that occurs. (By the way, the families are told this same thing: let Elaine know early on if the trainee just is not working out).
2. **Be a consistent and reliable communicator.** Situation: You can't ever seem to reach your family on the phone to just chat, much less line up a visit. Watch out! Trainees have been known to “not be able to reach the family” between December and April and then want an extension of the FME timeframe. **You can always contact Elaine if you truly can't reach your family, and she will track them down and help you reconnect.**
3. **Use your own good judgment.** Situation: From time to time you may experience a conflict between your FME role as a student and your role as a professional/future professional. If it is a minor conflict, use your judgment and work through it (you are always welcome to use Elaine as a sounding board). However, if it is a major, ongoing conflict, you definitely need to discuss it with Elaine and/or your faculty advisor before calling or visiting your family again.
4. **Listen to your instincts.** Situation: You are having a visit with your family and you begin to feel uneasy and afraid for your own safety. **REMOVE YOURSELF FROM THE SITUATION,** and contact Elaine, Janet Willis, or your faculty advisor as soon as possible. This hasn't yet happened to a trainee, but it conceivably could occur.
5. **Keep your FME commitments** – both to your mentoring family and also to your fellow trainees and LEND faculty. Open, honest, and timely communication between trainees and faculty is essential throughout the LEND program, and the Family Mentorship Experience is no exception. **Please let Elaine know if you are running into problems with your mentorship situation.** If in doubt, contact her – don't wait until a little problem becomes a big problem. And if you find that you cannot meet a specific FME deadline or you can't make a particular meeting, be sure to let her know ahead. Missed visits or calls, work turned in late, and unexcused absences not only count against your grade but also deprive you of getting the most from your FME opportunity.

Ongoing Support ... And Enjoy the Adventure!

Elaine Ogburn is here to assist you and your mentoring family as you enter into the Family Mentorship Experience together. She is always happy to hear from you, whether you have a concern, need a suggestion or a resource lead, or just want to share something great that happened. She'll stay in touch with you and with your family throughout the year. She will also nudge you and/or your mentoring family a bit if that is needed! You can reach her at her home phone (320-4514) or by email (esogburn@vcu.edu).

Onward with the family mentorship experience! You are about to meet some remarkable people who have a great deal to share with you, insights and understandings that you may never get from clients in a clinic or office or school. Be very appreciative of their willingness to open their lives to you in such a profound way!

And ... enjoy the adventure! You may never have another opportunity like this!

* * * * *

*"The more you put into the FME, the more you get out of it."
A former trainee*

FME Contacts Log 2006-2007

Please plan ahead in order to have all visits completed by Monday, April 16, 2007.

Month	Date of Phone Call or Email	Date of Visit	Content/Activity
September 2006			
October 2006			
November 2006			
December 2006			
January 2006			
February 2006			
March 2007			
April 2007			

Quick Reference: Discussion Board 2006-2007

To Answer a Discussion Question

1. On the main Discussion Board page, click the name of the forum topic or FME topic you would like to enter. Conversations are grouped in “forums” which are the general topics or questions for the Discussion Board. Each forum contains “threads.” Threads are related discussion topics. The contents of the forum will be displayed in Forum View.
2. To add a new thread or response, click on **Add New Thread** on the Forum Discussion Board.
3. **Create New Message** box will appear.
4. Type in a subject and your message.
5. Click **Submit** to post your message.
6. Your message will be posted and marked with a “**New**” icon.
7. Click the link of the next message/thread which you would like to read, and continue the process.

To Respond/Reply to a Message

1. On the main forum or Discussion Board page, click the name of the forum topic or FME question you would like to enter.
2. Click the message/thread to which you would like to respond. (This will be the underlined titles listed on the left side of the screen).
3. Click the **Reply** button to post a reply.
4. Type in your reply.
5. Click **Submit** to post your message.
6. Your message will be posted and marked with a “**New**” icon. It will be indented on the list of messages under this thread to indicate that it is a response to the original thread above it.
7. To enter another response, click the **Add New Thread** button to create a new discussion thread, or click the link of the next message/thread to which you would like to respond.

Time-Saving Tips

1. **Do not attach files.** Cut and paste information to save retrieval time.
2. An easy way to read and view the responses:
 - a. Click on the topic you want to review. This will take you to the page with the list of responses.
 - b. Click **Expand All**.
 - c. Select the logs and responses you want to read by checking the boxes to the left. Then click **Collect**.
 - d. All of the responses you selected will be together and you can scroll up and down the page instead of going in, closing out, and going in again!! Try it.

Refer to the Student Manual under the “Tools” button on the left side of your Blackboard screen for additional information.

Language of Us/Them

by Meyer Shevin

We like things. They fixate on objects.

We try to make friends. They display attention-seeking behavior.

We take breaks. They display off-task behaviors.

We stand up for ourselves. They are non-compliant.

We have hobbies. They self-stim.

We choose our friends wisely. They display poor peer socialization.

We persevere. They perseverate.

We love people. They have dependencies on people.

We go for a walk. They run away.

We insist. They tantrum.

We change our minds. They are disoriented and have short attention spans.

We have talents. They have splinter skills.

We are human. They are ?

From : Participant Handouts, Part 1: Handouts for Parents, Educators, Law Enforcement, CPS.
ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES. Copyright Virginia
Institute for Developmental Disabilities, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2000.

Trainees should read:

“People First Language” by Kathie Snow. To access this article, visit the Disability is Natural website: <http://www.disabilityisnatural.com/peoplefirstlanguage.htm>. Go to end of page and click on "Click here to download the PDF hand-out of 'People First Language:.