

**Title of Training:** Choice Language

**Board Present:** Jennifer Bowman – President, Natasha Kile – Treasurer, Michelle Weise – VP Communications, Emma Tempest – Secretary, Nicole Bedard – Benton County Member-at-Large, Anna Cannon – Washington County Member-at-Large, Terri Teters - Ex-Officio, Susan Edwards – Advisor

**Participants Present:** 27

The meeting was called to order at 7.00pm by Michelle Weise. Michelle welcomed the participants to the NWAECA meeting. She thanked Nicole Bedard and the Sunshine School & Development Center in Rogers for hosting the meeting and allowing the tour of their program.

**Business:**

1. Michelle announced that the by-laws have been revised, voted upon and accepted. You can find them on our affiliate page on the AECA website.
2. Michelle shared that a survey will be going out to ask participants of meetings how they like to be updated about all things NWAECA e.g. Facebook, email etc. We want to best serve you! If you have any comments or feedback please let us know.
3. Nicole Bedard announced that a viewing of No Small Matter will be held at NWACC on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> April at 6.30pm for our Benton County special event. See our affiliate page on the AECA website for more details.
4. Natasha Kile, NWAECA Treasurer, reported that we have \$530.71 as our current balance.

**Speaker:** Gipsye Robinson

**Host:** Sunshine School & Development Center

Gipsye began by talking about the purpose of Choice Language. It provides safety, creates positive cycles, teaches and develops skills and improves the adult-child relationship. When we talk about providing safety, giving choices can enable a child to take a breath rather than hit out at another child. The more we practice something, the more it gets reinforced in our brain pathways creating positive cycles of learning. Critical thinking skills and the ability to take responsibility for decisions and actions can all be developed using choice language. We don't want to engage in power struggles with children, so empowering children with choice making allows them to retain the power without feeling overwhelmed.

When thinking about choices, it is important to distinguish between types of choices.

Simple Choices	Choices with a Consequence
<p>"You can choose____or you can choose____."</p> <p>Use this when you are providing structure and/or avoiding power struggles.</p> <p>Example: It's time to sit at the table. You can choose to sit next to Jim or you can choose to sit next to Pam.</p>	<p>"If you choose____then you choose____."</p> <p>Use this when you need to set a limit or when a limit has not been accepted.</p> <p>Example: Markers are for coloring. If you choose to throw them then you choose to put them away. If you choose to color with them you choose to keep them out.</p>

Here are some top tips for using choice language:

**PLAN AHEAD:** Use options around you in your immediate environment, identify common problem areas and anticipate issues, identify appropriate alternatives that are appealing options – what might the child actually want?

**BE CONSISTENT:** Inconsistency can lead to emotional distress and/or power struggles.

**COMMUNICATE WELL:** Be firm, assertive and matter of fact; keep it simple!

**DEVELOPMENTAL AGE:** Big Choices for Big Kids and Little Choices for Little Kids.

Gipsye then shared [this video](#) from Garry Landreth – Choices, Cookies & Kids. Garry explained how he realized that what's important in his interactions with his daughter wasn't necessarily the actions he took; it was what he did afterward. Being able to admit when you made a mistake and use this opportunity to rewire that connection, to build relationships through being present with children and help them to make their own decisions are all strategies Garry uses with choices.

The Oreo cookie theory that Garry created came from finding his three-year-old daughter sneaking some Oreos from the cookie jar. He realized that he had spent all her life telling her what to do and not giving her any choices or experiences that would help teach her some responsibility. In that moment, he said to his daughter that she could have one cookie now and put the rest away or put them all away. His daughter pondered for a moment, and then chose the one cookie. He added that if she had refused his choices and asked for two cookies, he would have reverted to the two choices he had stated – one cookie or zero, simply repeating the statement again.

When setting limits, we can follow the A.C.T. model:

Acknowledge feelings, desires and wishes – “you seem sad, you really wanted...”

Communicate the limit, calmly – “this is for that/this is not for that”

Target an acceptable alternative – point and direct children visually, always consider their developmental age when communicating with them

Gipsye then shared some practical application tips for how to use choice language in real life:

Scenario: It's snack time in your classroom. Kelly says, “I want chocolate!” In the past you've told Kelly, “No, that's not for snack.” Kelly will usually say, “I don't like you!” and continue to say that she wants ‘chocolate’ until you give in.

Simple Choice: “You can choose a banana or you can choose an apple.”

Scenario: It's time for free play in your classroom. Your sand tray is open and you have communicated the limits to the children such as, ‘sand stays in the sand tray’. Ryan is the first to play and immediately starts dumping the sand on the ground. You remind Ryan that ‘sand stays in the sand tray’ but he continues to dump it out.

Choices with a Consequence: “If you choose to dump the sand on the ground, then you choose to not play with the sand anymore.”

Scenario: It's the end of the day and it is time to walk your class to their bus group. Michael is sitting in his cubby and says, “I want to stay at school. I want to keep playing.”

A: “You were hoping to stay here longer.”

C: “It is time to go home.”

T: “You can hold your backpack, or you can put it on your back. Which is best for you?”

Gipsye shared some great tips about how to make progress if you feel like you are doing all these things but it's just not working! Here are four things you can do:

**PRACTICE SELF-REFLECTION:** Are you responding to the child's needs or your own? What was your childhood experience with limits and choices? How do you view behavior?

**TEACHING OR PUNISHING:** What is the child learning? Are they being punished or is this a teachable moment? Will the child be thinking ‘This adult is manipulating me’, ‘Everything I do is wrong’?

**NOTICE & BE CURIOUS:** What is the child's behavior trying to tell you? All behavior communicates an unmet need. Think HALT: are they Hungry, Angry, Lonely and/or Tired?

**RESPONDING OR REACTING:** Think about the triggers for the children and yourself – plan for the stressful moments and for how you are going to react based on your own triggers. Share your triggers with co-workers so you can work together to deal with different behaviors. Remember the three brain states – executive, emotional and survival – which one are you in and which one is the child in? Use that guidance to work out how to interact with them in a way that builds success. Watch [this video](#) from Dr Becky Bailey showing how to coach kids through their big feelings using Conscious Discipline.

Survival State	Emotional State	Executive State
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical Aggression: hitting, kicking, pushing, biting etc.</li> <li>Tantrums: screaming, head banging, kicking etc.</li> <li>Withdrawing: hiding, shutting down, running away, daydreaming etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connection seeking behaviors</li> <li>Refusing/rejecting the relationship – “I hate you!”</li> <li>Clinginess: perfectionism, obsessive behaviors, name calling etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Willingness to learn, talk and engage</li> <li>Caring about others, practicing conflict resolution skills – “I want to do this instead.”</li> <li>Setting goals, managing emotions, solving problems etc.</li> </ul>

Gipsye shared a tool to put all of this together. When you have a scenario with a child, or when you are discussing an incident later on that you want to reflect upon, you can use this table and plug in each of the things that happened and use it to improve your interactions next time.

Adult's Brain State	Child's Brain State
Simple Choices	ACT Model

Here is an example of what that might look like:

Scenario: You communicate to the class that circle time starts in 1 minute and it is time to clean up. Everyone in the class starts cleaning, except for Dwight. Dwight is fully and calmly engaged in the block area and does not want to stop playing. When you remind Dwight it is time to clean up, he says, "I hate circle time! I want to keep playing!"

Adult's Brain State	Child's Brain State
Hopefully you would be in the executive state, although you might feel triggered into the emotional state if this reaction from Dwight is something that personally pushes your buttons.	Emotional – Dwight is verbally communicating with you, wanting to express himself and explain his opinion to connect with you.
Simple Choices	ACT Model
"You can choose to put away the red blocks or the blue blocks. Which is best for you?"	A: "You were hoping to play for longer." C: "It is time to clean up." T: "You can put away the red blocks or the blue blocks. Which is best for you?"

Remember that if the child is in the Survival state, the role of the adult is to breathe and co-regulate with the child first so they can begin to calmly communicate with you. Once you re-build that connection, you can begin to offer choices.

**Meeting was adjourned by Jennifer Bowman**

**Next Meeting:** April 7, 2020 6.30pm-8.00pm Course ID: 21604

**Host:** Springdale Early Childhood Center, 409 N Thompson St, Springdale, AR, 72764

**Topic:** Rethinking Science **Presenter:** Marcy White *Minutes shared by Emma Tempest*