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LEADER'S GUIDE:

Breaking the Chain by Evelyn Salazar
Building a calm, safe home for my son.

DISCUSSION FOCUS:
Connecting through play.

ACTIVITY GOAL:
Participants will recognize the activities and games that they enjoy doing with their children.

STORY SUMMARY

Evelyn's son, Dylan, has a strong personality, like his mother. Sometimes he delights Evelyn with his thoughtfulness and curiosity. Other times he overwhelms her with his demands and temper tantrums.

Evelyn shows how playing with her son has brought them closer and helped Dylan to grow. She also shows how she tries to be firm when he has tantrums, encouraging him to use words to express how he feels instead of actions.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

GROUP INTRODUCTION: 10 minutes

Today we're going to talk about the importance of playing. It's important that your child has plenty of time to play with friends, play alone, and play with you. Play helps children learn how to get along with others and negotiate. It improves their ability to use words (instead of negative behavior) to express themselves. Playing with your child can also help you have a closer relationship with your child – good times that balance out the times when you make demands on your child or you must be apart.

- How do you feel about this topic?
- Do you have experiences related to this topic that you'd like to share before we get started?



READ AND DISCUSS STORY: 15 + 30 minutes

Read the story out loud as a group. Help participants recognize the writer's emotions and coping mechanisms and their own. Go back over important moments in the story and ask the participants about how they've handled similar experiences:

STORY MOMENT	DISCUSSION QUESTION
Evelyn describes different ways of playing and interacting with her son: Answering his questions, playing pretend, reading stories.	What games or activities do your children like to play with you?
Dylan learns to express his thoughts and feelings with words by playing at having a conversation.	What do you think your children learn by playing?
Playing together is helping Dylan learn to better tolerate frustration, like the frustration he feels when he loses a game.	How do you think play can help your children learn to handle frustration?
At times, Evelyn feels open to playing and at other times she is tired, busy or does not want to play.	How do you respond most times that your children want to play?
Evelyn says that playing together has brought her and Dylan closer: "I pay more attention to him and he does the same to me."	How do you see your relationship with your child being affected when you and your child play together, or when you don't have time to play as much?

JOURNAL TIME: 15-30 minutes

By writing in their journals, participants can more deeply reflect on their experiences and the steps they can take to strengthen themselves and their families. Hand out the "Journal Reflections" worksheet and give participants 15-30 minutes to write. They can share their responses with the group or in pairs, or after the workshop with a counselor, therapist, or peer.

NAME:

DATE:

JOURNAL REFLECTIONS: Breaking the Chain by Evelyn Salazar

Evelyn sees that the games she plays with her son are helping him use words to express his feelings, handle negative feelings like frustration, and express his thoughts through imaginary play.

Take some time to reflect on what your children can learn and express through play and how you can bring more playtime into your lives. Use the questions below to guide your reflections.

1. What games and activities do you enjoy playing with your child—or might you enjoy?

2. How do you feel when you're playing together?

3. What concerns do you have about the way your child plays?

4. What gets in the way of enjoying playtime with your children?

ACTION STEPS

Setting aside time to play with your child and creating an area at home where your child can play freely can help your child handle stress and develop and grow. Write 2-3 steps you could take to bring more playtime into your lives.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

A SUPPORTIVE CONNECTION

I plan to get support and encouragement by talking about my reflections and action steps with:
