

# Levels of Learning

In a competency based training system, job related knowledge and skills, also referred to as **competencies**, represent different **levels of learning**. These competencies are grouped according to **skill sets**, or broader abilities. A skill set should always include the four levels of learning represented in the competencies.

## Level I – Awareness

Course content must first show why the subject matter is important to child welfare practice. This awareness will create a “readiness to learn” in training participants.

- Example: Worker *knows the importance* of a shared vision, mission, and values in motivating staff to excel in their work

## Level II – Knowledge and Understanding

These are “the facts” that workers need to know. Course content reflects an understanding of how the facts interrelate. The trainer may present several pieces of knowledge about the subject and then have small groups apply them in exercises to “work the material” toward understanding how the information fits and interrelates.

- Example: Worker *understands* the supervisor’s responsibility to model cultural competence and ethical conduct

## Level III – Application

This refers to the critical application of understanding of the content. Course content should reflect practicable application to realistic work situations – otherwise, what is the point of attending the training? Why take valuable time to attend a workshop if you will not learn strategies and information you can use to apply to issues on the job?

- Example: Worker *knows* engagement and relationship strategies to make a successful transition to role as a casework supervisor

## Level IV – Skill Building

Some courses actually apply and practice content in enough depth to enable participants to gain beginning skill in the strategies trained. For true skill acquisition, however, the skill-building must continue back on the job through coaching, feedback, and other in-house methods.

- Example: Worker *can* plan and implement strategies to promote and monitor safety of caseworkers in the office and in the field

## So What? Why is this important to know?

These levels are developmental – just as the stages of child development. Levels cannot be skipped. You cannot ignore the need for training in levels I and II in order to jump to level IV simply to train a skill in a workshop. This would result in automation – participants could repeat what the trainer did, but they would not fully understand the issues, dynamics or complexities of the material trained.

*Reproduced and adapted, with permission from Judith S. Rycus and Ronald C. Hughes, "Levels of Learning: A Framework for Organizing Competencies and Inservice Training", Institute for Human Services, Columbus Ohio, (2001).*