LADders

LADders is a publication by LAD representatives for LAD representatives, designed to offer LAD representatives a place to share information and experiences.

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Development of Communication Skills
Jo-Anne Elder Gomes, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada

One of the ways Leaders identify potential Leader Applicants is by noticing the warmth and sensitivity in their interactions with others at a Series Meeting. Whether they are caring for their baby, guiding their toddler, listening to a worried mother, or sharing their experience with a breastfeeding challenge, these potential Applicants listen attentively, show interest and empathy in their words and nonverbal communication and have a positive and nonjudgmental attitude towards their children and the other participants.

An Applicant has met prerequisites in the areas of personal experience, organizational experience, and personal skills. The Personal Skills Prerequisites describe the attitude and approach Leaders model when helping and communicating with others. The potential Applicant:

- has communication skills in the potential Applicant’s preferred language necessary to begin the application and preparation for accreditation,
- demonstrates an accepting and respectful attitude towards others,
- provides information and support without judgment, and
- is willing to develop further communication skills as needed to fulfill the responsibilities of leadership.

Applicants develop their own listening, helping, and meeting facilitation skills during their application. Some potential Applicants seem to have a natural ability for making others feel comfortable. Others have acquired these skills before they start attending Series Meetings. Still others pick up on the way Leaders express themselves and decide to use these communication skills with their families. Many Applicants I’ve supported asked a lot of questions about their own baby when they started attending meetings and then, as they developed knowledge and confidence, shifted their focus to other participants. At this point, they are ready and often eager to offer encouragement or options. This is part of the transition that takes place as an Applicant prepares for accreditation.

Most of us develop communication skills organically. Even before our babies are born, aided by complex physiological and emotional processes, we tune into their cues. We learn our newborn’s unique nonverbal language and how to respond: how our little human likes to be held, which music is soothing or stimulating, when they prefer to sleep, nurse, or interact with others. This is the best training in communication skills! The compassion and rapport we develop by interacting nonverbally and verbally with our children is the foundation of communication skills.

Applicants also develop communication skills intentionally. For example, an Applicant’s understanding of empathetic communication is enriched by observing a Leader’s comments and responses at Series Meetings. Chapter 1, “Helping One-to-One,” in the LLLI Leader’s Handbook explains and gives examples of the basic communication skills, how to give empathetic responses, use active listening, ask questions to gather more information, share information, recognize each parent as an expert on their baby, respect different choices, and understand the priorities and needs of each parent. Learning these skills may require a shift in attitude as well as integrating new ways of listening and speaking.

Both supporting Leaders and LAD representatives can offer resources to help Applicants learn and practise communication skills. They can refer Applicants in the LLLI database to the Leader Applicant Resources page. The Listening Exercise is an excellent tool for helping an Applicant observe and take note of the way a Leader communicates. Acceptance and Bias Exercises are useful in working with strong opinions or unconscious judgments. I find it helpful to encourage Applicants to identify their own feelings, to uncover and name their deeper feelings and the underlying needs and reasons for them. Then they can practise with their partners, close friends and family members, and children.

The power of simply stating a child’s feeling out loud is often a revelation to parents: when they say, “You’re feeling angry,” with empathy and without judgment, it validates and normalizes the child’s feelings, supports emotional regulation, and reduces defensiveness and tension. Parents learn that changing the behaviour or fixing the problem is sometimes less important—and almost always a later step—than listening and showing compassion. Similarly, Leaders can give examples of times when they were tempted to “jump in and fix” a breastfeeding issue and, instead, realized a mother needed to “vent” and have someone acknowledge that she felt helpless, disappointed, frustrated.

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As a LAD representative, you model respectful, encouraging, supportive language in every response to an Applicant. Suggestions for responding to Applicants’ comments can be found in Dialoguing about LLL Philosophy. While dialoguing on the ten concepts describing LLL philosophy, use and draw attention to empathetic communication. Explain the qualities we are looking for in interactions between Leaders and parents and give an example or two. Try to include a follow-up question that invites the Applicant to think about feelings and empathetic responses, such as “When mothers talk about childbirth at a Series Meetings, what feelings do they express?” “Have you attended a meeting on the topic of weaning / challenges / critical comments? What did participants struggle with? How did the Leader give them emotional as well as practical support?” “How might you respond to someone who is worried about returning to work / leaving a toddler overnight with the other parent / breastfeeding a new baby after a difficult experience with the first?”

Communication skills workshops are intensive programs offered in different formats and under different names throughout the world. The emphasis is on naming and sharing feelings, identifying reasons for the feelings, and working through conversations that might arise in a Series Meeting, a helping call, or a family situation. The basic series of Communication Skills Development or CSD (three parts, approximately ten hours of interactive group learning and practise) can be offered over an intensive weekend, in weekly evening sessions, or two hours each month for five months. Cost to participants varies by Area. CSD workshops are often provided online, especially since 2020. This is an effective way of reducing the cost to Areas and participants. It also enables isolated Applicants and those in small Groups without adequate funds to take part in CSD. In some Direct Connect Entities (DCEs), such as La Leche League Canada, orientation for prospective CSD Facilitators is also entirely online.

If the basic Communication Skills Development series is not available, a member of the Communication Skills Department may offer a workshop at a conference, Chapter Meeting, or Leader / Leader Applicant Day. Many offer workshops on topics such as “Communicating with Your Child” for LLL members, or “Harmonious Co-Leading” for Groups. Ask what communication skills activities and resources are available in your Area or DCE for Leader Applicants.

Jo-Anne Elder-Gomes (she, elle) is the Coordinator of Leader Accreditation (CLA) and the Communication Skills Development Facilitator (CSDF) for the Atlantic Canada Area of La Leche League Canada.
Updates from LAD Council

Natasha Kapsali, CLA for LLL Greece, has dubbed into Greek, the six short videos about application work available on the LLLI Become a Leader page. A big THANK YOU to Natasha. 😊

There is a new revision of *LAD Manual* (Sept 2022). You can find the English version on the [LAD Representative Resources](#) page. We hope to have translations in German, Spanish and French available within a month. Please review this new version as there have been many changes.

- We now define LAD as the entire department and LAD International (LADI) as only LAD Council and the DLAD.
- The revised LAD graphic includes only the ALAs and the DLAD. We no longer have LAD Council Advisors. Cindy Garrison will continue to respond to the LLLI Inquiry Forms about leadership, and Toshi Jolliffe will continue to coordinate the Karin Gausman Leader Accreditation Fund and the LAD directories.
- A new section has been added related to applications received from outside the candidate’s Area/DCE.
- We now ask LAD representatives to keep withdrawn files for two years, rather than one year.
- Documentation of LAD communication with an Applicant or Leader may include saving a recorded online video call with each participant’s permission.
- Information on confidentiality and LAD work has been expanded to make it clear that if we communicate outside of our LAD Support Network, we need the Applicant or Leaders’s permission.
- A sample ACLA Orientation Checklist has been added.
- Information on reviewing applications has been moved to Chapter 3: CLA Responsibilities since it is either the CLA for the Area or the ALA for a DCE who receives applications and decides whether the application can proceed or whether more information is needed.
- Specific information about the RALA role has been added.
- In Chapter 5-LAD international, there are two new sections: 5.3 Appeals to LLLI if an Application Is Denied and 5.4 Stopping an Application

*Thinking About LLL Leadership?* or *¿Te gustaría convertirte en Líder/Monitora de la Liga de La Leche?* has been translated into Spanish and is available on the [Become a Leader](#) page of the LLLI website and the LAD Español page, [Paquete de Pre-Aplicación del Líder](#).

The LLLI Translation Committee has been busy translating LLL policies:
• Applying for Leadership (PSR) is now available in Spanish: PyRP: Solicitud de liderazgo.
• Accreditation Appeals Procedures (PSR) is now available in French: PRP: Procédures d’appel en matière d’accréditation.
• These policy translations can also be assessed from the LAD Français and LAD Español pages

Written translations in the six languages of LLL (English, French, Spanish, simplified Chinese, Japanese and German) have been added to the LAD webinars on the Articles and Webinars page for Leader Applicants.

The following Leader accreditation resources have been revised to include the updated definition of an LLL Leader, the updated Statement of Commitment, and links to the new Leader Applicant Resources page. They are available on the LLLI website: Application Resources page for LAD representatives and Leader Applicant Resources page for Applicants and Leaders. We are working on revisions in other languages.

• Leader Applicant’s Resource Kit (LARK) - September 2022
• LARK Leader’s Guide - September 2022
• Checklist of Topics to Discuss in Preparation for LLL Leadership - September 2022

The revision of Childbirth and Breastfeeding is in the final stages of review. We hope to have it available for the December issue of LADders.
Dear Christina CLA,

I am working with an Applicant who has not responded within the past six months and has not sent any application work for over a year. I have emailed her twice within the last four months asking if she wants to continue but have had no response. What should I do?

Sincerely,
Agnes ACLA

Dear Agnes,

It is challenging to have Applicants who have not responded or started working on their application. You’ve done what you needed to do - sent touch base notes! Have you also checked in with the supporting Leader or cc’d her with your touch base notes? Sometimes the Leader has insight into what is going on. At other times the Leader can let you know if the Applicant has stopped attending meetings or communicating with her. You can adjust the wording in your email depending on what the Leader says.

Either way, in the situation you noted, it’s helpful to send an email to see if the Applicant wants to continue working on leadership preparation. You’ll note below in my sample email that there is a date to reply by and if they don’t, you can withdraw the application. Then send another email saying you have withdrawn the application and she is no longer an Applicant. The application is considered withdrawn by the Applicant since she chose not to reply. Also let the Applicant know that she can reactivate her application by contacting you within the next two years. If there is a reply to continue, you’ll see that there is a one month deadline for sending some completed application work.
Since the Applicant is inactive, you don’t need to offer a leave of absence. Although, you can give her more time if there is a reason to do so. Sometimes the Applicant has found that leadership isn’t for her and struggles to tell the Leader (or you). This letter gives a graceful way to stop.

Christina, CLA

Dear Applicant,

It’s been almost a year since your application started and 6 months since I last heard from you. It’s now time to inquire about the status of your application for leadership.

Sometimes the changing needs of our families can affect our other commitments, and one of the plans that can change is our work towards LLL leadership. If you have decided that leadership isn’t the right avenue for you to take at this time, there are other ways you can contribute to LLL, such as participating in your local Group and supporting the parents and Leaders.

On the other hand, if you wish to continue your application, I need to know that too. To help provide an easy response to this, please check the most appropriate section below and return it to me by date two weeks from when you send email. If I haven’t heard from you by that time, your application will be considered withdrawn.

_____ I am actively working on the leadership preparation with Leader and active in the Group. I will have the next portion of my personal history to you by date one month from when you send the email to keep my application active.

**What are your plans to start writing and working on leadership preparation?** Let me know if you need a summary of the application work you need to do.

_____ I wish to withdraw my application, as I am no longer interested in LLL leadership.

Whatever you decide, I wish you the best for the future and thank you for taking the time to provide this information.

Warmly, Agnes

Lori Bryan
California, USA

Dear Agnes,

I understand you are working with an Applicant who has not responded in six months and has not sent any application work for over a year. You have emailed her twice within the last four months asking if she wants to continue but she has not responded. Thank you for following up with this Applicant. Unfortunately, Applicants occasionally stop or forget to respond.

If it has been six months since you heard from the Applicant and you have emailed her numerous times during that time, then you can give the Applicant a two-week deadline to respond about her intentions. If she wishes to continue with leadership preparation, ask her to complete something within one month - the next portion of the Personal History, reading requirement, etc. If you do not receive a response within two weeks, you can officially withdraw
the application and let the Applicant and supporting Leader know. If the Applicant contacts you to discuss the situation, you can explain that it is possible for the application to be reactivated.

In some situations when an Applicant is non-responsive there are more significant concerns about whether they meet the prerequisites for leadership.

As LAD representatives we answer correspondence within a few days and at the latest within two weeks. We set this example to encourage Applicants to put time aside for application work, because as accredited Leaders in the future, Applicants will need a similar amount of time to respond to parents. Time is an important element in dialogue. Prompt acknowledgement conveys "you are important" - a message that future Leaders will give a mother/parent who calls for information or help.

What are your thoughts, Agnes? Please let me know if you have any questions or need assistance drafting an email to the Applicant.

Sincerely,
Christina CLA
Jolie Scott
Maryland, USA

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Dear Agnes ACLA,

It can be very frustrating to have no response to an email, can't it? As members of the LAD we can allow for a few weeks delay because we know for ourselves that life at home can cause a delay in an Applicant's response. However, what you have described is much more than that, and I can hear your concern for the Applicant.

After such a long silence, it is appropriate to write and a) ask how she and her family are doing, b) say you are concerned by her lack of communication, and c) ask if she still sees becoming a Leader as a priority for her. You can suggest that the Applicant break the last task she was working on into even smaller pieces, making it easier to reply more quickly. You could even give an example, like breaking the personal history into smaller bits to go along with her discussion of one concept.

It will also be important to include something like "Perhaps your family life and focus has changed in this past year, making becoming a Leader less important in the big picture of your life. La Leche League has always focused on "family first" and that can mean that other things, like becoming a Leader need to be set aside for a time, to be re-evaluated later."

You could end with something positive, such as "I suggest you think about what has been discussed in this post. If you decide that it is important to you to complete your application, then I will expect your response by [date two-three weeks from the time the post is sent]. If you feel you need to take a break, that's fine. Just let me know [by the above date] and we can put things on hold for the next [number] of months and revisit this discussion. If I do not hear from you at all by [above date], I will assume that this is not the right time for you to continue your application. I have enjoyed our conversations and support whatever decision you make, knowing it is absolutely the right decision at this time for both you and your family."

Warmly,
Christina CLA
Dear Agnes,

Thank you for reaching out regarding this Applicant who has not responded in the last six months nor done any application work within a year. This happens and there are many ways to approach this. One reason Applicants do not answer is that they are overwhelmed with a serious family situation. Putting “family first” can interrupt the most motivated Applicant for a long time. Would you feel comfortable writing the supporting Leader to see if she sees the Applicant at monthly meetings or if she has met her to support her with parts of her application? Many supporting Leaders are aware of what is going on with the Applicant they support and therefore they are able to inform you about it while respecting the Applicant’s confidentiality at all times.

Another reason Applicants do not answer is that they are unsure if they want to pursue their goal of becoming a Leader and are not sure how to write us about this as they do not want to disappoint us. Again, the supporting Leader is the best person to let you know whether the Applicant is questioning if she still wants to become a Leader.

One more reason an Applicant is “silent” is that she cannot count on a reliable supporting Leader and feels alone and lost in her application. This could be mentioned when you write her again and, if needed, you could be her supporting Leader.

In my personal experience I’ve found that sometimes a simple phone call (when possible) or a virtual meeting can clarify the situation. A conversation usually resolves most situations.

Please let me know if these suggestions help. I will be happy to hear from you again.

Sincerely,

Christina, CLA

Linda King-Gaboriaud
Montreal, Canada
Dear Catherine CLA,
I’m in contact with a mother who breastfed her first child for two years. The second child was born premature and the mother became quite ill. Initially her family helped her to pump regularly but her milk supply diminished and even after she was well she was unable to build it back up. Does she meet the Personal Experience Prerequisite?
Yours,
Leah Leader

How would you respond? Send your ideas for a reply or an extract you would like to share with other LAD representatives to Vicky Reynell at vickyreynell@gmail.com.
Hi, I am so excited to introduce myself today. I was appointed co-ALA for the European Area Network in June this year. My Name is Kergi and I am from Austria.

With my first child Kaja, I felt quite lonely at home and decided to visit an LLL meeting, just to meet other mothers. We had just moved to another town before birth, due to the work of my husband. Initially, I became a member of LLL and visited the Group meetings because of the nice and supporting atmosphere. When I went to my first meeting in March 2002 in Villach, I did not know yet, that LLL would become a family to me and breastfeeding support and advocacy my passion. That’s how I fell in love with LLL.

I was accredited in 2007 and soon started my first group in Klagenfurt, where I still hold monthly meetings. I started to work in LAD in 2012 as an ACLA and became 2016 CLA for Austria. There were a few things I wanted to accomplish during my term, like translating the new resources and implementing up to date application dialogue. I also started to orient new ACLAs, so from five we are now nine. I very much enjoyed the EMS (European Management Symposium) Meetings, so I got interested in the international part of LLL. When Laura Brown Laubach finished her term in spring 2022, I applied for the co-ALA position.

Thankfully, one of my ACLAs followed me as the new CLA of Austria. Christine is doing a wonderful job and works diligently and enthusiastically.
I live in a small town in the south of Austria, called Klagenfurt am Wörthersee. It is very picturesque, between mountains and lakes. My husband Klemens and I live in a house with a garden on the outskirts. We have three children. Kaja 20 lives in Vienna, Felix 18 still finishes school and Ina, 16, will spend a school year in the US on an AFS (American Field Service) Exchange Program. There are five chickens, one cat and a very old dog living with us.

In my spare time I do some sports like jogging and hiking. I love the theatre and comedy and if the work in the garden is done, there is still a little forest, that we own, which I also look after. For holidays everybody likes to travel abroad, if possible the whole family together.

Misha Laudicina, Trieste, Italy

Left Photo: Misha. Right Photo, top to bottom: her four daughters, Francesca, Sara, Monica and Rachel.

For my introduction, I have decided to use a format we used with our applicants a few months ago: “Introduce yourself using 3 words only.”

Woman: I have been thinking about this for quite some time as the first word that emerged on my mind was actually mother; but I believe that "woman" represents me better. It includes my motherhood but also my girlish years, my being a wife and projects myself into future as well. It's a very important aspect of my identity as I have four daughters and observing them growing up is so interesting and sometimes quite challenging also. Each of them a different person and personality. Each of them imitating me in some aspects and trying to differentiate, according to their age and stage. Every single day is a wonder. And also, talking to mothers and to “coLLLeagues” often makes me discover and admire different aspects and ways of being a woman.

Journey: Becoming a mother and being it day by day is a journey. Becoming a Leader had been a journey. Being and ACLA or a Supporting Leader is a journey every time. A new one, opening new horizons and perspectives. Being a co-CLA and a co-ALA is a journey I am being on with a companion and backed-up by a team. Another aspect I love about travelling is crossing borders and this is happening continuously in my LAD work which has so many international aspects. Crossing borders is also finding new ways of helping others in becoming Leaders, reaching out to mothers and families whoever they are and wherever they live.
Energy: To an observer my LLL work may seem like a real job: sitting in front of the PC, making phone calls or zoom calls, taking notes. Someone might wonder why would I do that in my "free" time. Yesterday I had a call with an interested mother in the morning and then later in the afternoon a call with one of the CLAs I support. And both put me in such a good and relaxed mood, gave me a sense of satisfaction and enrichment, oxytocin was flowing both directions, I believe, and often flows in huge amounts during a meeting with mothers, even if virtual. I love this energy circle which enables me to give because I receive so much at the same time.

So, that's me, Misha, in 3 words :-}
Promenade

Congratulations on your appointment!

Christelle Adam-Fréchette, ALA for Ligue La Leche

Katie Lewis, CLA for LLL New York

Constance Pond, ACLA for LLL New York
Greetings from the Latin American LAD!

I am Gretchen Rivera Rigau, a Leader in Cabo Rojo and ACLA of Puerto Rico. I live in the west of Puerto Rico where the most beautiful beaches of our island are. I love swimming and paddling in my kayak by the beach where I was born, in Boquerón. I have 3 children: Hilton 35, Gretel 32, and Carla 27, whom I successfully breastfed thanks to La Leche League PR and the support of my husband Hilton Cummings Perez. I was so grateful to the Leaders that I became a Leader. Now I have been part of LLL for 35 years and my passion to mentor new Leaders is the same as in the first day.

Hugs from Puerto Rico,
Gretchen Rivera
Hello! My name is Mariana Petersen. I have been an active LLL Leader for 39 years. In this picture, I am with indigenous midwives providing a training on safe birth, always including the importance of skin to skin and breastfeeding.
One of my passions is to help mothers become Leaders so that our mission and philosophy keep spreading.

Mariana Peterson
El Salvador, Guatemala
I am from Guatemala in Central America. They call Guatemala the Land of Eternal Spring, because here you can find nice weather and flowers all year long. This picture was taken during a vacation in June 2022 with my family, my husband and our two daughters in Lake Atitlán in Sololá, Guatemala. We had just returned from a boat ride. In the back you can see Volcano Atitlán, Cerro de Oro and Volcano San Pedro. I really enjoy traveling through my country with my family.

Mónica Tornöe Rosales de Illescas
Liga de la Leche Guatemala
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