

## Early Essentials Webisode 1

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Amanda Perez: Hey. I'm Amanda Perez with the Early Head Start National Resource Center, and welcome to the first of six webisodes in "Early Essentials." We're so glad that you're here.

We'll start our series today with a conversation about quality. What do we mean by "quality" when we're working with expectant families and infants and toddlers and their families? I asked a teacher in an Early Head Start program what was important to her in her work. Let's hear what she says.

Fariba Mujahed: To know better the little kids. To know how they need, what they want. And to know their body language and know their families, and know my job better.

Amanda: So, Fariba tells us that what she knows, what she understands about her work and the individual children and families she serves is important to the quality of the services that she provides; right?

Here we are in Washington, DC, home of the federal government and the Department of Health and Human Services. Now, you might know that the Office of Head Start and the Office of Child Care are parts of the Administration for Children and Families under this department; right? So today, we're going to meet some of the people that work at the Office of Head Start and the Office of Child Care; just a few of them today to talk about how what they do helps you – and Fariba – provide high-quality. Let's go meet them.

So, I want to introduce... Now that we're here, I want to introduce Angie Godfrey and Dawn Ramsburg. Angie is an infant-toddler specialist with the Office of Head Start and Dawn is a child care program specialist with the Office of Child Care. So glad that both of you are here. Thank you for being here.

Dawn Ramsburg: Thank you.

Angie Godfrey: It's nice to be here.

Amanda: So, let's begin, Angie, if we could start by talking a little bit about the Office of Head Start and what it is that you all do and what it is that you provide for programs and staff.

Angie: What we do, as most people know, is we fund programs across the country. I work in the central office at – in Washington, DC, and we also have 12 Regional Offices; and we fund Early Head Start and Head Start programs through the regional offices. And we also work with training and technical assistance networks and national centers to support with policy and regulations, but also with content and – as I said, through the Regional Offices and down to the local levels, where we fund programs.

Amanda: And Dawn?

Dawn: So, the Office of Child Care, we administer the Child Care and Development Fund, which is assistance that low-income working families can access to help them pay for child care while they're at

work or attending training or attending school. The funds, you know, go out to states and territories and Tribes, but then that money goes down to local programs. So it can be child care centers, it can be family child care homes, it could be in the child's own home, after-school programs. And so the money is not only helping the parents and the families, but it's also helping those programs. And the states and territories and Tribes work on creating supports to improve the quality of those programs, because we are looking for those low-income children and families being served to access high-quality services.

Amanda: So, both of you all are working in offices that are really serving the same group of families and children.

Angie: Exactly.

Dawn: That's right.

Amanda: Yeah, and you all have been doing this work together for a while.

Angie: We both, I think, are really looking at how we build on the strengths that exist, not just with the two programs, but with the vulnerable children and families that we serve.

Amanda: So, let's talk about quality. We have had some conversation about how important it is that you all are working together to provide these high-quality services, and I'm wondering what quality looks like. What would quality look like to you? So, I'm wondering if we can watch a couple of videos. The first video that we have is from a center-based program.

[Video begins] Teacher: Now, rinse it. Rinse. Very nice. Good boy, John. Very nice! Good, good. Nice. All done! No more bubbles. All done! [Video ends]

Amanda: So, Dawn, what did you see in terms of quality in that clip?

Dawn: So, I think that there are so many things going on there that speak to quality to me; from the basics, you know – you know, quality building off of basic health and safety; you know? Just the fact of hand washing is an important part of that. You see the routine. You know, again, hand washing is kind of one of those routine activities, but a routine as a learning experience. And it wasn't just about that health and safety regulation, but it was a learning opportunity. So, she's talking to him through that and, to me, that speaks to quality.

Angie: They were both engaged in a learning experience, and it was very warm and nurturing. It wasn't like something that they had to do, and I think that's a sign of quality; when you can work your way through the day, both as a very young child and as an adult, with experiences that support learning and also are supporting that strong relationship that you felt a connection between the two of them.

Amanda: Let's watch the next clip.

[Video begins] Mother: Make noise!

Home Visitor: Does she like to help you in the kitchen?

Mother: Oh, yeah.

Home Visitor: Yeah.

Mother: Especially when I make a dough for something.

Home Visitor: The dough? Yeah.

Mother: Dough. [Laughter]

Home Visitor: That is so fun for the kids. It's like Play-Doh.

Mother: Last time we won Play-Doh, after we came home I let them play, but she messed up. [Laughter]  
And after then, maybe... [Video ends]

Amanda: Angie, what did you see there?

Angie: Well, the first thing I saw was the mother, the very young toddler, and the home visitor all together in a group. It was – it was kind of a common interaction going on, so – and that, of course, is what we expect to see in a home visit. They're talking and they're interacting around learning experiences. So, she really seemed to understand, through her conversation with the home visitor, a lot about her parenting and how to parent the young child, which is, I think, one of the strengths of home visiting, is the ability to support parenting practice.

Dawn: I think the other thing that I saw in there that speaks to quality is they're all on the same level; you know? So they're – it's not, you know, the home visitor talking, you know – you know, adult-to-adult, but all three of them are kind of equal and you see a little bit of coaching going on. You know, instead of the home visitor talking about, "What do you do with her?" it was, "Well, do you –" you know, "how does she help in the kitchen?" Instead of telling her what to do, it was, you know, kind of coaching her along to how those can be learning opportunities.

Amanda: Absolutely. So, we're going to watch a third and a fourth clip together, and we think that there are some important kind of similarities in these clips.

[Video begins] Teacher: Feel [inaudible]. Can you feel it? It's soft! Can you feel this? Like hair. Yeah. Feel this one. [Sound of child babbling] Yeah? Soon we're going to eat corn from our garden; yeah? We're going to eat corn. Look, this is green. It's green. [Video ends]

Amanda: So that, from a family child care center, and then we have another clip from the center-based program.

[Video begins] [Drumming] Miss Liz: Clap. [Laughter] Boo. Boo. Boo. Yay! [Clapping] Can I have a hug? Can we go change your diaper? Are you going to play? You're going to play peekaboo on your own? [Tamia giggling]

Teacher: Say, "You can't see me, Miss Liz."

Miss Liz: I can't!

Teacher: There she is! There's Tamia!

Miss Liz: Yes! We found her! [Drumming] All right. I'm going to go change your friend Jai, then. You're still playing. I'll be back. [Video ends]

Amanda: Dawn, what did you see there?

Dawn: So I think what's really fascinating is, you know, in one you have a home and in one you have a center, but you see a lot of individual attention going on in both places, which, again, is so important for – for kids this age, is to have kind of that continuity and the chance to build relationships with people. And so, even with the home provider who has a few children around the table, she's engaging with each one; you know, letting them feel the corn that, you know, they grew in their garden.

And yet, in this larger group environment – the center – where there's several different kids, you see individual attention going on, both with the little girl and the drum and they're playing peekaboo, so you get a little social-emotional, you know, kind of, develop – you know, support going on. But you see other kids in the background that are – that are getting different kinds of attention and recognition, you know, of kind of the individual needs that – that are needed. And so, again, I think that's so important for quality and so important for children this age, is to have that personalized attention and personalized learning, you know, no matter how many kids are around.

Angie: I agree; and the thing that I noticed in both of them was how language-rich the experiences were. That, in both cases, the teacher and the provider were – there was an ongoing conversation. And it really reminded me of what we know from a large body of research, and that's that children – their brains develop through connections, through those relationships, the ability to have the back-and-forth of a conversation and to listen and to hear. And I just felt, in both the family child care setting with the garden and in the classroom setting with the child sitting on the drum and playing peekaboo, that there were great interactions going on.

And also, through the language, just so much learning and so much information; you know, talking about all the different – you know, what the corn feels like, what it looks like. They grew it in their garden. They're going to eat the corn. Just – there was a narrative that was ongoing. And also true with the child on the drum; you know? The – the teacher was playing with her. She was trying to encourage her to get her diaper changed, but she, in observing the child, knew she wasn't ready and so she very kindly moved on. She said, "I'm going to go change your friend's diaper and I will be back." So, I just felt that both of those were just excellent examples of quality in an environment.

Amanda: So, we asked for some questions from the field from folks that might have been interested in talking with you and getting your expertise, and here's our first question that came in, from Rebecca in Oklahoma. Here she is. Let's hear what she has to say.

[Video begins/ends] Rebecca Schreuer: Why are there so many regulations?

Amanda: So, we know that that's a really common question, and a really honest question. So, Dawn, what is the purpose of all of these regulations?

Dawn: So, that's a really great question, and it is a very common question. And I think that, for us, the regulations are not there to be barriers or restrictions, but they're really there to be guidelines and to

help set a basic foundation about expectations; you know, what we know about good practice and what we know that is good for kids.

Angie: I think that's so true. And I know one of the challenges working with infants and toddlers are there are Head Start regulations, you know, for Early Head Start programs, there are state licensing regulations, there are local code enforcement and licensing regulations. So, you can feel overwhelmed, when you're working with babies and you just want to play with babies, about the various regulations that are out there.

But I've always said, working with Early Head Start programs and Head Start programs, that we really should embrace the regulations, because they're exactly what you said: they're a tool to help you navigate. And if – if you understand the regulations and what they do and how they support your work, then you can spend more time focused on the work that you're actually doing. And so, I think that that can be the greatest challenge, is to really look at regulations not as something that restricts you, but as something that is a foundation that supports the work that you do and the quality of the work that you do with children and families.

Amanda: So, we asked some veteran caregivers – or veteran staff to talk with us about some of their tips that they might have for some new providers. And when we asked Shannon, who's a veteran caregiver from Ohio, about all of those regulations, this is what she said.

[Video begins] Shannon Bryers: The federal, state, and local regulations exist to support children ages 0 through 5, their growth and development, socially, emotionally, and cognitively. They also provide unified guidelines for the quality of care and services to clients. [Video ends]

Amanda: Wow. So, her message really echoes yours there, Dawn, and both of yours, in terms of, you know, why those regulations are so important. Well, and there's another piece that I know you both have described, which has to do with, you know, how do we support staff in really building the skills that we hope will serve them in this way? Do you all want to talk a little bit about that?

Angie: One of the important things that both Early Head Start and the state systems are doing: developing professional development systems. They're called "lattices," "pathways," in the states. And how do we come together around those so that we're really supporting an infant-toddler workforce in a reasonable way? You know, what are the resources in your community? Both Child Care and Head Start have national centers, such as the Early Head Start National Resource Center, that really do work to support the broader field and do training out in communities that includes a broader field. So, I think that's our goal: to make sure, as – as we move forward, we're really thinking about what early care and education looks like and what a workforce that supports looks like. So, it's even broader than our two agencies. Don't you think?

Dawn: I think that's right. And I think, just as we're talking about how it's important for maybe parents to have a little bit of coaching, you know, or mentoring to know what to do, it's important for that workforce working with infants and toddlers to get the opportunities for some of that mentoring and that coaching. States are working on developing specialized credentials that are focused on infants and toddlers because, again, while we may know some of the things for broader early care and education, what makes sense when you're dealing with a 5-month-old? How do you make sure that staff have the training and the supports? You know, someone who can model for them, you know, about how to engage.

Amanda: So, I think what we're hearing is that it's not just learning for the kids, that all of us in the system are learning. We have another question from the field for you all.

[Video begins/ends] Erica Quezada Selman: How can I get all this paperwork done?

Amanda: Oh, the paperwork. So much paperwork! And I know some folks are working on computers; a lot of computer work, as well. So, how would you all respond to this question?

Angie: The paperwork question has been around Head Start since Head Start's been around. I understand, if I'm a classroom teacher or a home visitor or a family child care provider, that there's certain – that there's certain information I have to collect and that, hopefully, there's a system in place so that it's not me just handwriting here and then handwriting there and then trying to pull it together; but there's a system that will help me put it in one place, and there's a support within that system and within the organization to make sure there's time to do paperwork. And I know it's challenging. If you're working with children all day, finding the time to do the paperwork can be challenging, which is why it has to be programmatic and across the program, that there's a system in place to support that.

Amanda: I want to go to some seasoned professionals that we have out there who have some tips for folks. So, the first one is from a home visitor, talking here about that paperwork.

[Video begins] Chana Brecher: Usually, when I make a home visit or talk to my mothers on the phone, I always have paper and pen next to me. And I write down just pointers, just one word on every few sentences that they tell me; and as soon as I get back to my office, I transcribe it all into the contact sheets, and I try to do it as soon as possible. [Video ends]

Amanda: Yeah. So, right away, she's saying, go ahead and do that. And another one that we have – another suggestion that we have, from Pamela, who's a teacher from Alabama.

[Video begins] Pamela Matthews: Time management and teamwork is the key. First and foremost, you must utilize your time wisely. I never wait until the last minute to complete my paperwork. It has become a part of my daily routine. If there is a point in time where paperwork has to be completed before naptime is over, my partner and I simply work together. [Video ends]

Amanda: So, Dawn, what would you add after those messages?

Dawn: So, I think – I think those are really great tips. The other thing that we hear is not just about paperwork, but about how many people are coming in and visiting. So we're looking at not just how can you streamline some of that information collection through the paperwork, but how can you streamline some of those visits? And so, again, talking about continuity and talking about minimizing transitions. We don't want a lot of people coming in and out of those programs all the time, especially if they're kind of looking for the same information. So, I think both of our offices are really trying to tackle how do we kind of minimize those requests across all of these different programs.

Amanda: Very good. We have one last question. This one is from Dena from Oklahoma, and she's up next.

[Video begins] Dena Rodriguez: There's so much information that goes into this work. How do I keep tabs on what's happening on home visits and the baby's medical care, at the same time I have to do all this other stuff? [Video ends]

Amanda: Oh, that comprehensive services piece. And we have an answer from Velendia, who's a primary caregiver. Let's hear what she has to say.

[Video begins] Velendia Battle: I keep all the nutrition, the children's allergies, and special diets, posted in the classroom listed, as well as the medicines and the emergency contacts placed in a lockbox. I keep – also, I keep all the family information and children's information in the first-aid kit, just in case we have a fire drill or a tornado drill, or a rapid dismissal or a field trip. [Video ends]

Amanda: Wow. Very organized system that she's put together there. Angie, what were you going to say?

Angie: Well, I think of information a lot like I think of paperwork. It isn't just what I may have to do as a classroom teacher or a family services worker in a program, or a family child care provider; it's – you know, what does the program need? And making conscious and intentional decisions about what information do we need and what are we going to do with it so that we understand, you know, that there's a purpose for information. And then, how do we do exactly what Dawn said? How do we not duplicate what information we need?

Amanda: Because we want to make sure that the staff that we're working with absolutely know what it is that they have in their hands and that they're trying to collect. Well, I think we're going to let you all get back to work. I want to thank you all so much for being here, Angie and Dawn. Thank you for being here and being a part of this. I also really want to thank the folks that asked questions today and those really helpful people that provided some tips.

[Music] The most important component of quality is you. And the Office of Head Start and the Office of Child Care help you in your work through regulations, through professional development, in a myriad of ways; right? So, know that we are so glad you're here and that you are not alone. Welcome, again.