

Preparing for Challenging Conversations with Families

Brandi Black Thacker: Hello, everyone, and welcome. Come on in and get settled. We have a wonderful set of topics and ideas to share with you today. And we're so excited that we get to spend any moments with you and your super busy schedules. But this is one where we've been really excited to prepare and one that's getting a lot of attention. So, come on in, get settled, and what I'd like you to do as you get settled is look at this slide that we have in front of you, this lobby icebreaker. And what you're going to find, as you get acclimated to this virtual environment, it is off to the left, you're going to find a Q and A pod toward the bottom of your screen. You can communicate with us throughout the entire webinar there. So, even if you don't have a Q, or if you have an A or a comment, you can communicate in any way you'd like there with us. And we'll be tracking along. So, if you have things to offer or have questions you hope to have answered, we'll be looking at that all throughout our time together.

If you could, we'd love for you to stop for a moment and think with us about a time that you have successfully navigated through a challenging conversation. Now, with everything that's happened in the world today, we cannot have this conversation without acknowledging what's happening in our community. What's happening in our advocacy efforts, for and with each other. What's happening with the feelings that we are all holding in this conversation. So, we want to acknowledge that upfront. When we built this interaction, it was prior to some of the most current events that are happening.

What we're going to do together today is integrate the dialogue and really follow your lead. As a place to start, what our hope and dream is also is to be able to have this conversation, in a bigger way, that has a very specific focus as well. So, we want to acknowledge that coming into this conversation and all of the ways that you might be thinking about challenging interactions. We want to just acknowledge that in this space.

Let's take a few comments. I'm going to go over to the question-and-answer pod and see what kinds of things you're offering in the way of strategies. What types of things have helped you guys as you really step into a space of a challenging conversation? So, let's go over to see a few. Oh, Sonia, look at this, ask clarifying questions. So, really match up your understanding and your connection to who you're with to make sure that you're both in the same place. April mentioned how she validated the parents' feelings. They're really be confirmed in that place, like, "I hear you. I see you understand, where you're coming from." Oh, gosh, Pam, make sure to listen, listen, listen. We could all learn a lesson from that. I hear Ms. Jayne. That feels intriguing to you, too.

Dr. Jayne Singer: Mm-hmm.

Brandi: Think it couldn't be underscored here, enough. Antoinette, me and you are the same this way. She mentioned that she brings notes for talking points. For me, that's actually a really helpful prompt. And sometimes I even offer to who I'm with. This conversation is so important to me that I really want to track and make sure that, as we go and think together, that I have

the ideas that I have to offer if that feels OK to you. But just letting this family know that that's the process for me, if it's a family I'm with. Sometimes I try these tricks on my husband, though. Don't tell. But sometimes having that opposite side is helpful. And often I will acknowledge it, too, though, just in case it brings worry. You know how sometimes when you have papers that can be worrisome for folks. I often just acknowledge that, too. I don't know if you guys do the same thing.

Oh, I love this, Susan. Susan says, "Chad would be open-minded and consider the other person's perspective." So, staying in a space of connectivity, and we'd love to say, you guys know who we are in Head Start. We love to be in any conversation with no judgment, no stigma, complete openness, and willingness to stand in a space that might be uncomfortable. But that leans into the relationship, which I really feel is, what we do better than anybody else.

Other folks are saying, "I count to 10 before answering." I see active listening. I see planning. Oh, Alaina, maybe we should just hand you the mic. Alaina, you're touching a lot of where we hope to go today, as well. Planning ahead, thinking about goals, practicing with a supervisor, anticipating responses, and potential roadblocks.

Yes, yes, and yes! Exclamation point. These are some of the ideas that we're going to offer to you today to consider. And what I love about this dialogue is that so much of this, I really feel like it's going to be confirming of who we are organically and how we believe in the reverence of each other. But also, I love this because every time we get with you guys, we learn something new and exciting or a time-tested strategy that we have that we can think about in a new way, together. So, we'll keep trying to pepper these throughout, as we go. We might come back to these, so that we can offer a few more pieces of your voice. And one of the things that we've been able to do in the past, and let's see what we could do with this, is take some of these ideas that you have and lift them up in a way that may culminate in a tip sheet. So you'd have something to pull from or add to or co-construct or edit for your own behalf with your colleagues and your families.

Gosh, thank you, guys, for all of that. There's so much coming in, but it's hard to keep up with it all. But let me give one more, before I transition back over here. Becky offers, "I stayed calm. I kept eye contact and I was honest, even though it was the hardest thing I've ever done." Well, Becky, may we all follow your lead, in standing in that space and service of each other.

All right, well, let me introduce, there's just so many things to share with you guys. I want to get started straight away. We've gathered together today for a conversation on preparing for challenging conversations with families. But as I've alluded, these strategies really work with anyone that you have the honor to be sharing time with. But today, we're going to be thinking about it specifically within the construct of your work, within your program. And many of you have joined us over time. So, I think that you might be familiar with the platform. But just in case you need a refresher or somebody new is with us today, off to the left-hand side of your screen, you're going to see a couple of things.

The place that I mentioned about where you can go to ask questions, that you can put comments in there, too. And right under that, there's a place for event resources. And we have a few things there for you today. And I like to say this up front because I know who we are in Head Start. We love to have the handout. And, specifically, you all love to have PowerPoint. So, in that advanced resources section, you have two of our most brand new, hot off the press, hip-hop-happening documents, one of which we'll review in a lot of detail today. And another one that kind of takes you through a process of how to prepare, sort of the before, during, and after the conversation, as alluded already in the chat. So, there are a couple of things for you guys to check out over there in addition to the PowerPoint. So, in case you're intrigued by anything you see, it's going to be there for you to refer back to.

I would feel remiss if we didn't take a moment to think and stand together in a space of self-compassion. Now, this is a concept that I know that we shared with you guys in a previous Head Start Heals webinar that we had the honor to think together and present with you all. And if you remember, this whole notion of self-compassion is really being able to treat yourself the way you would treat a friend who is having a hard time. Now, this comes from the work of doctors, Kristin Neff and Chris Germer. And I've been finding, I tease and say, "I've been nerding out just a little bit." Because I love thinking together about, not only how we can take care of each other, but take care of ourselves along the way, too. So, in the moments that we have been sharing together, out in the world, around the pandemic, around being allies and in the anti-racist movement, we've all been thinking together about how we hold each other and how we hold ourselves.

And one of the things that I'm going to push us and sort of challenge us to do today comes from an article that one of my friends and colleagues shared with me just this week. And I don't know if she's on the line today, but Dr. Ernestine Brown shared this with our PFCE deepening practice group, that's on MyPeers. And there was this really wonderful article from an app, but I don't know if you guys have checked this out. There's an app called Calm, and it's really one that helps with mindfulness and meditation and sort of inward kind of introspection. And they recently released an article called "How to Use Mindfulness to Stand in Solidarity with the Black Community." And as part of that, one of the pieces that they shared was summoning courage and really doing that in a way that shows up in solidarity, that challenges ourself, challenges our workplace, pushes us into the space of being more inclusive, and even confronting our own self with our own issues.

And the best part of this, I want to be honest about this, I mean, I really see this as a growth opportunity as a person. That if we couldn't stand in the space that feels scary, if we couldn't stand in this space where we really need each other, growth can be hindered and even can cease. So, speaking up to use our voices in service of each other, being able to stand in a space of a world where everybody is treated with dignity and respect, is a place that I want to be. And it's a place that we've been able to create for a long time. And in service of our Head Start community across this country, I don't think there's a better place and a better set of people who can lead us, the royal us, all of us, we have been in these spaces before. And I'm ever

grateful to be part of this larger community, where we can mobilize and we'll continue to mobilize in ways that hold each other.

I'd like to take just about 30 seconds of silence for folks to just have a moment. And then I'm going to come back and introduce you to one of my most favorite folks. So, let's have just a few seconds. OK. I'm not sure how close I was to 30 seconds, but my son, who's seven, tells me I'm terrible at that. So, you guys would have to help me be the judge. He may be right. I hope that gave you at least a second to have a moment of reflection. And with that, oh, my goodness. You guys have heard her voice on this line before. She is, of course, one of our most favorite folks and the leader of our work at the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. So, let me call to give a big hearty, full-of-gratitude welcome to Kiersten Beigel.

Kiersten Beigel: Thank you, Brandi. And thank you for all you do and for holding that space for us, this whole initiative around Head Start Heals. There's a lot of opportunity for all of us, but I think the moment of compassion is important. The moment of reflection is important, and the moment of considering action is also important. So, thank you for encouraging us to do that and knowing that as a community, we're in the right place to think about these things together.

I know many of you have already been with us for the Head Start Heals campaign. My job is very simple. I just need to welcome you and tell you a little bit about this initiative around Head Start Heals. It is an initiative, supported by our efforts at the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness and the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. It's really about addressing adversity and working to integrate a trauma-informed approach in programs. So, more specifically, we want to really support early childhood programs, such as Head Start, of course. As you look to promote resilience and wellness for children and families, we do have a landing page for Head Start Heals on the ECLKC. You can find all of our recordings and webinars and office hours there. This is actually our 11th web activity in this initiative. Some of you have been joining us and we know this is a very hot topic.

So, I want to let you get on with the show, Brandi, but I do also just want to let you know that we've been collecting a lot of your questions in the Head Start Heals initiative and at these events. And we have been cataloging them and we'll be putting out some different FAQs on the Head Start Heals site, as well. So, just wanting to honor a lot of the questions we haven't been able to get to, and some of the ones that have been really on your mind. So, without further ado, over to this illustrious, wonderful team to really get into thinking about how we prepare more challenging conversations.

Brandi: And of course, thank you so much, Kiersten. Ever glad that you're here and we very much appreciate the space that you've given us, from the Office of Head Start, to think together as a community across this country. I've enjoyed these, and I've learned so much from you guys in these. And every time I leave one of the sessions, I feel filled up, and that gives me the strengths and the reserves to go on and keep doing the good stuff. So, guys, listen, I have two friends that I cannot tell you how excited I am to be with today. I am going to give them a little space so that you can hear their voices right away. I'm just so honored to be with those, Dr. Joshua Sparrow and Dr. Jayne Singer. I want to pause here because normally I would say, "Here

they are and we're going to jump right in," but I just can't stand it. I'm so excited to have them both. And I want them to just say a quick hi. And I hear Ms. Jayne's sweet laugh, so let's start with her.

Jayne: Well, thank you so much, Brandi. This is Jayne Singer, and I'm delighted to be here with you and with Kiersten. Thank you both so much for inviting me to participate in this. And I'm very excited to be with all of you from the Early Head Start and Head Start community, who are gathered together today as well. So, welcome, and also, thank you.

Dr. Joshua Sparrow: Hi, everybody. This is Joshua Sparrow. First, I want to thank you, Brandi, for bringing me to that place you go to with you. I think you probably brought a lot of us with you to that place and to thank everybody who's joined us today for showing up and being with us in these really difficult times. And I'd have to say that questions and comments are so inspiring and comforting. You truly are the experts. And I know I really am not going to have very much to tell you that you don't know already. And I'm looking forward to more of your comments and questions.

Brandi: Thank you for that, Josh, thank you for your words. And thank you both for being here. When you come up as a person in the Head Start community, I mean, when I look around, I'm like, "Oh my goodness, we have the gift of each of our voices and we have the gift of yours, too." It's little surreal. I'm excited to share a time with both of you today. Again, with each of you, of course. So, a couple of things I wanted to share with you. When we have these discussions, we can never do as much as we want to in 60 minutes. So, we purposefully scheduled this for 90-minute extravaganza. And we do something, that's my favorite thing in the world, which is have an after chat, which allows you to hang out with us for a little longer. We're tracking your questions over time. So, if you don't hear it come up through the proper course of the conversation, in the content, we hang out for at least 15 minutes after we finished the PowerPoint so that you can continue to offer those, or we can go back to some of those that have come in a while we've been together. And as Kiersten mentioned, we really are listening and watching and the things that you are asking, we're tracking those trends and patterns so that we can thoughtfully plan for things that we can confirm as celebrations, but certainly things that you might need to help you work in this critical time. So, don't forget to hang out with us, if you have a few extra minutes. We love to stay with you.

So, let's check out the learning objectives. Now, this is what we planned before we got to meet you today. And there are three overarching ideas. Well, first and foremost, many of you mentioned this in your comments in the lobby icebreaker, we want to think about what even makes the conversation challenging. Because if we can know and understand what we bring into that space, and how it feels and what might be, as you guys said, I think the exact words were roadblocks. Then we can figure out how to navigate around those, through them, under them. So, knowing what we're coming into and what makes those things challenging is a huge part of the process.

I'm excited to report to you guys. We have six steps to think about together in how to really get into those conversations with families in a preparatory way. Like, how we can think about it

ahead of time, almost in the vein of prevention, really thinking and giving ourselves the space and permission to stand in our own preparations. So, we set ourselves up, and our families up, for success. And then, of course, we have a few strategies that we're going to offer as well to kind of round out our time together.

When we come into these conversations, we always kind of want to give you the end of the story first, so you can kind of see what we have in store. So, thinking about how to address challenging topics with families totally is a way to strengthen your connection to and with them. It also helps to build trust. So, if we can really process that from a space of opportunity and connection, it kind of changes how you even are able to reflect upon it ahead of time. In that reflect upon it, you can prepare for these challenging conversations. And when we get the chance to do this, it benefits everybody. It supports family well-being and isn't that what we spring out of bed to do every day? I mean, you guys know, let me just get over here. You guys know it, you love it, you live it, the PFCE framework. And that in the PFCE framework, we have family well-being as the very first outcome, in that blue column. And we drive toward that for a whole lot of reasons. But when we think about family well-being and the connection to the impact that happens not only for family growth, but for their children's growth and having all the things together around health, safety, well-being, economic mobility, it just makes the difference. So, we can't get to that place around outcomes without beginning here first. It has to start with those positive and goal-oriented relationships. And what you see on the screen is a very lovely synopsis. Standing in that arrow specifically in the positive, goal-oriented relationships piece and, connected to equity, inclusiveness, cultural and linguistic responsiveness, is critical to being able to do anything that you say underneath there.

And in Head Start speak, we would call that systems and services, that yellow and pink column, that leads to growth for both families and their children. We can't get to any of that, though, without those relationships and the honoring of the pieces around equity, inclusiveness, culture, and language. All of these things lean into the growth possibilities. Well, we say, of course, for families and kids, but us, too, right? So, let's look at a couple of quick things because I'm excited for you to get to hear Jayne. I want to just acknowledge a couple of pieces here about this beginning part that leans into that first outcome. What kinds of things might make a conversation challenging? And you can see three ideas that we have here. I'm sure you could add others. But to begin, one of the things that we think about a lot for our families are if there are safety concerns. And, specifically, a lot how children are being cared for. One of the ways that we can step into this topic is through our own self-reflections through our own journey.

And what's also something to think about is challenging conversations, that feel challenging for us, may not feel challenging for a co-worker. So, that's a great sort of, off to the side opportunity as well, to have a partner or to have even a mentor that can help in these preparations as you get ready to think about the ways that you come into that topic. Other things might feel too stigmatizing or personal. Being able to think together about how we step lightly in an honoring space when raw and vulnerable feelings arise. How that we maintain, of course, our professional stance, but also make that connection on the human level, without

families or others feeling judged at all. Just being open in that space, much of what you've already offered in your reflections and your comments, that kicked us off.

And lastly, this notion that topics may be too difficult to bring up based on our own journeys. Things that come up for us, as professionals and people in this work, that can feel heavy or that we might need to address or tend to as we come into a conversation. Having that awareness and not only the awareness, but the strategies to really lean on others when you might need help or support to come through your own things. Or, even if it's most honoring to family to have a connected, warm handoff to a colleague who can really step into that space, in a different way based on their journey.

So, just a couple of quick things there, I think, to ground us as we move into the topic and the conversation today. And with that, I know this next slide is going to be one of my favorites. I can just feel it. Dr. Jayne Singer is going to give us some foundational information that many of you already hold, revere, and use in very sophisticated ways. But we want to start off with this as our foundation, as she'll take us through. Well, how is it that we engage families in the first place?

Jayne: Terrific. Thank you so much, Brandi, for that beautiful shoe-in. And here we are. I think that I would love to just start with an idea around the face that we can have. I'm a former infant-toddler provider, a former specialized preschool provider. The faith that we can have in that space for the idea that from challenge, positive goal-oriented relationships can strengthen and sometimes even begin. I'm imagining that for as many thousands of you who are on this call, listening in, that for each and every one of us, none of us have had a meaningful relationship in our lives that didn't sometimes have some challenges and some challenging conversations. And so, I'm coming into the conversation with a mindset that, I have to admit, I'm adopting on purpose around this idea, that from challenge comes opportunity. And from challenging conversations comes opportunity for us to strengthen our relationships with families and then also in support and strengthen the relationships within the family.

And so, I'm going to be exploring and navigating with you through a process to assist us in preparing for, having more challenging or difficult conversations with families or even with each other. And yet, as Brandi was saying, please know that we're already building upon the skills that you already have, that you've been using for a long time. And even today with the lobby icebreaker, so many of you offered up ideas for how to engage families in these difficult conversations. What has worked for you, where you've found success, and those ideas are going to keep paying forward into additional tip sheets and resources that will keep getting generated from the National Centers. And so, please know, even as I see people populating the Q and A, all of your voices are vital to us moving forward together, with each other's help and in relationship with each other. And so, as I remind us of our foundation and core understanding of family engagement, and as I move through, you'll see the bullet points. Each of these family engagement tools that are represented by the strength-based attitudes and the relationship-based practices.

Many of you will recognize them from your other experiences with the National Center, and for you and as well as for those of you who might be new to...OK, here they come, who might be new to these as tools, please remember that the Early [Childhood] Learning and Knowledge Center holds a whole treasure trove of resources on the ECLKC website for practicing using these strengths-based attitudes, relationship-based practices as tools in your toolkit to build relationships with families and with each other. Now, I know that on this webinar today, we have many different roles represented in terms of how you serve children and families. And no matter what your role is, these strengths-based attitudes and relationship-based practices are available and handy to you. Whether you're with children all day long or if you've never been in the classroom.

So, quickly reviewing what for some of you may be introducing these. We see, for example, in green, the strengths-based attitude, always keeping in mind when interacting with families, treating families with a deep respect for the contributions that they make that are important and valuable. Well, that strengths-based attitude can be applied by any of us. So, too, in the relationship-based practices, just for example, again in green, observing and describing a child behavior to open up a conversation or communication with a family can also be used by any one of us, even if we're not in the classroom. Because the family can tell us about what they observed, what they see, who they see their child as. So, your pathways into the family as a system might vary from each one of you to the other, depending on your role but descriptions and examples of what a child is capable of doing are golden nuggets that can serve us all well to open up engaged conversations with families.

Again, please remember, even as we introduce some new resources, that we're building on what you already do so well and what you already know, and you know so much about the children and the families in your programs. And don't forget that you can always rely upon a simple description or strengths-based comment about a child's behavior or about a family member to open up a conversation or, dare I say, to even regroup when conversations come up that become more challenging, even in the moment. So we're going to be [inaudible] into for the rest of the webinar, kind of a preview and a walk through six steps to prepare for challenging conversations. And in these steps, you have the opportunity to use your strengths-based attitudes and your relationship-based practices at each and every step. The six steps can help you prepare for conversations with family members about challenging topics.

And the more we practice, the more we feel prepared when a challenging conversation comes up in the moment. I noticed in one of the questions already in the question box, folks are wondering about, OK, well, what if you don't have time to prepare? And we're hoping that this process that we walked through together, again, reminds us of the family engagement tools you already have in your toolbox and you practice every day. And if you engage in some formal practice with a supervisor or a trusted staff member, that the more practice that we have under our belts when those challenging conversations come up spontaneously, the more prepared that we feel. And we know that preparing for these conversations is not just the work of you as individual staff members, right? Program leaders, supervisors, managers, we all can emphasize the importance of preparing for these conversations.

And leadership can prioritize the support, the time, the space that staff need in order to prepare in order to get support, because you all deserve support from your team when preparing and when having these difficult conversations, as well as afterwards. All right. So, get ready because I'm going to share the next slide. Some of you might think, "Oh, my goodness, we just got a review of all those other tools. And now there's another tool." Well, as you lay your eyes upon this ladder of steps to prepare for having challenging conversations, remember that this is not a tool to use instead of your existing family engagement, strengths-based attitudes, relationship-based practices. It's just a model of suggested steps, and you can apply your strategies with any step. It's not instead of what you already do, just helps us to organize a process by which you can practice.

So, for example, we start with the first step: reflect before talking with a family on your own with a trusted staff member. Reflect and think on what you think and feel. That's a foundational step. And then we move up the ladder. By the time we get to step three, for example, preparing questions to learn about a family's perspective on a challenging topic, by the time you get there, it's a good time to stop and think of an example or two of something you've seen or something you've heard about that the family's child has done, that you've seen, that you've heard described, that you could then describe in a strengths-based way to open up the conversation. So, please bear in mind, again, this is not an instead of, this is a way to deepen your existing practice. So, our first step in this ladder, reflect before talking with the family on your own, or with a supervisor or staff you trust, and reflect on what you think and feel because for now, we're just going to take each step of the ladder at a time.

I'll be focusing on step one. And Dr. Sparrow will take us through the rest of the steps. Taking the time and the courage to reflect is really essential to creating and maintaining positive, goal-oriented relationships with families, understanding how our own experiences, our own beliefs, our cultures, our identities influence our emotions, influence our ideas, and then therefore our work and our interactions. Taking that time to reflect really allows us to acknowledge our strengths as well as to be open, to discovering the strengths in others. That reflective process with a trusted other person really helps us to recognize our own personal reactions as they arise in our professional roles and reflecting on our possible reactions to what topic, and then help us prepare for and understand the strong feelings, the strong attitudes, the opinions we may have, whether they're positive or negative, comfortable or uncomfortable. So, for example, you might find it challenging to focus on the strengths of a family when you're worried about their or their child's safety, maybe because of substance use or substance exposure or domestic violence.

Sometimes we have to keep reminding ourselves to intentionally adopt a mindset or an attitude that all families have strengths, even for... I would really encourage us to think, especially when there are challenges to address, that helps us to stay engaged in a positive way on keep open to discovering the strengths in a family, even when we struggle to see strengths because of our own worry, maybe even our own anxiety because of the topic. We're much more likely to have a productive conversation with a family when we behave towards them with a mindset that is filled with these strengths-based attitudes, and those positive

interactions promote respectful partnerships with families. And, of course, those partnerships are the foundations for facing challenges together.

You can reflect on your own and with a supervisor or staff. Being aware of our thoughts and reactions and emotions is that critical step, that first step, so that we don't behave, or we're less likely to behave, in ways that we don't know intend to. Oh, my goodness, even within step one, there are many separate pieces and areas for reflection. So, here we are just in the foundational step of that ladder: reflect before talking with a family on our own, or with someone we trust, reflect on what we think and feel. Each of these areas then offers us a whole bunch of ideas, like flowers that we can then pick from when moving on to the next steps. So, for example, hmm, here we are or maybe we're thinking and feeling, we are reflecting on our thoughts and feeling about a challenging topic, we're thinking about our relationship with our family, we're thinking about our knowledge about a family.

Hmm, at a time we get to thinking and reflecting about our knowledge about a family, that helps us to remind ourselves, but also to join and remind the family of other challenges that they have already come through. So, considering each of these areas of reflection, our thoughts and feelings about the topic, our current relationship with their family, our knowledge about the family, our feelings about the family or parents, our ideas about working towards an understanding with the family. And then even our ideas about managing our time and the environment in which to have the challenging conversation and how we're going to follow up. And considering these areas really helps us to figure out what to say, how to say what we intend with families about challenging topics to think about that before even beginning to have the conversation.

So, just this first step within step one, reflection. How am I feeling about this topic, about having this conversation? What are my thoughts? What are my feelings? What am I hoping will happen? Let's see what would be the best outcome. What am I afraid of or most worried about? What's the worst thing that could happen? And then, who is it that could help me prepare for the conversation? All really helpful sub-steps to help us get to that place where we feel more prepared. Then the next subset, reflecting. What's the current status of your relationship with the family and a parent? Huh? How do I feel about my relationship with this family? Have I already built a positive, goal-oriented relationship? If yes, what are the strengths in the relationship? What have we already come through together? Have there been past challenges that you've been faced with, with this family feeling that you and the family have not repaired or resolved?

Well, that can sometimes fill us with dread. And yet being able to revisit a challenge, even if it's a new challenge, with a family gives us another opportunity for repair, another opportunity to come in with our strengths-based attitudes and our relationship-based practices. Is the relationship breaking down? Is it feeling strong enough to have a productive conversation about a challenging topic? What do I do if the family doesn't even want to meet again? All things that we benefit from thinking through with someone else before we approach the family. Next subset, a reflection. What do I know about this family, about this parent? What do

I know about the family's cultures, their home languages? What communication strategies might be most respectful? Does this family trust other staff and leaders at the program? How was this challenging conversation? How could it change that? How could it build on trust? Have I had challenging conversations with this family before?

Oh, my goodness. So many little pieces that are helpful to think about ahead of time. If I've had strong, challenging conversations with the family before, have there been strong feelings? How did the family perceive the conversation? Did they see it as my effort to work together or to offer help? Did they seem to experience it in a threatening way? What did I learn the last time about what might work best? Am I the right person, even, to talk about this topic with the family? Are there other staff that might be better suited to address this particular topic with me, with the family, or maybe on their own? How is the family doing right now? What stresses might they be experiencing that might affect how they react to the idea of having a challenging conversation? What changes in the family's reality are we asking them to face? Are we going to be introducing new information that might be difficult to hear? For example, if we're worried about a child not developing typically or who has been hurt, or we might even fear we might be in danger. And what might the conversation mean for the family?

What can we say to gently prepare the family for information that might be difficult for them to hear? Is it the right time to have a conversation? And if it's not a good time now, what would be lost or gained by waiting? And if we decide to wait, how do I know when the time is right or the time is better? Next subset, still within step one, reflecting. How do I feel about this family? Do I like them? Do I respect them? Do I trust this family? What assumptions have I already made about this family? Have I made any judgments or biases that I kind of need to recognize in order to be able to set aside? Am I ready to discover that may be some of the things I've been assuming might be wrong? Can I open myself up for that possibility by adopting a strengths-based attitude on purpose?

How do I think that the family feels about me, about the other staff, about the program? Does the family like us, respect us, trust me, trust other staff across the program? What have we heard? What have we seen? Really giving ourselves the opportunity to walk through the sub-steps that help us feel prepared. Then how can I work towards shared understanding with the family, huh? How can I begin the conversation? How can I try and create shared meaning? Can I describe behaviors that I've noticed? Will you share your opinion with the family? Will you ask the parent if they're open to hearing your opinion? And what questions can you ask the family and when? How am I going to know that the family has understood what I intended to say? Should we ask the family to repeat what they've heard? How will I know I've accurately understood what the family has said? Will I restate it for them to check my understanding?

So again, notice how the relationship-based practices are woven into all of these reflective practice steps. So, let's see for me personally, if I'm thinking about preparing for a conversation with a family, let's say about their child's behavior or development, I might anticipate it being challenging because of the passionate feelings parents have about their hopes and dreams for their child. This could be a perfect opportunity, then, to start a conversation by first describing

something that their child did or does, does know how to do, something that we've seen their child do, that highlights a strong relationship between the child and the family as a positive, strengths-based way to enter the conversation. Not starting with the concern, but starting with an appreciation of the whole child. And that helps us and the family remember that we're all here thinking about the whole child and the whole family, not only about the issues that might be challenging.

So lastly, still on the foundational step of our ladder, reflecting, how am I going to manage my time and plan for follow-up? How much time will I have? What do we do if we need more time? What's the follow-up plan so that we can reconnect and check in, in person? In extreme circumstances, such as when there might be safety concerns, there might be the need to decide that there's not another follow-up conversation right away. And talking with our co-workers or manager about this, if it's the case, and being sure to discuss whether you need backup and other staff people to try to have the follow-up conversation as support.

So, in summary, just in step one, reflecting before talking with the family on our own and then also with a supervisor or staff we trust, reflecting on what we think and feel has multiple sub-steps. The strengths-based attitudes, the relationship-based practices help us move through each of the sub-steps and all the way through the reflective practice of step one. And all of this, though it seems like a lot to think about right now, the more we practice, the more we feel comfortable having genuine, real, authentic interactions with families in preparation for challenge, during challenge, and follow-up of challenge. And it helps us feel more comfortable, even revealing our own vulnerability as we enter into conversations, to be able to reveal with respect and honesty, that this might be a challenging conversation and might bring up uncomfortable feelings in all of us. And that is why we are there together in a relationship. To come through the conversation together and be together in a positive, goal-oriented relationship. And I'm going to pass it along now to Brandi, who's going to survey some of our thoughts and ideas about this before we move into our next steps.

Brandi: Dr. Singer, thank you so much. Couldn't you guys just listen to Jayne all day long? Literally. Just being wooed into the screen of my laptop. Not only the way, Jayne, that you delivered the messages, I'm so grateful for the connectivity that you gifted us with. Just one confirmation about how we do what we do and the way that we already do it so well. And even reminding ourselves sometimes that we've already been through those preparations because, mostly, we are in a time of just a whole lot of outweighs. When you grow up in Head Start, you know that there are lots of competing priorities, lots of incredible things to do, a whole lot to hold. As I got the program where I was a director, we called it having lots of hats and flashes in our job. But what I took comfort, Jayne, was hearing your words about, it's really the core of who we are and the way that we interact with folks.

And if we get in that place where we're having our own [inaudible] reactions, or even our body is telling us that we're having physiological shifts and coming into a conversation that feels challenging, how did they call that? Our muscle memory [inaudible]. We've done this a lot, and it's really encouraging to know that we've already done a lot of prep work before we ever come

into those conversations, especially in times like now, where there might not be a moment to get our mind right. It might be an emergency conversation. It might be something that comes up unexpectedly. And just knowing that we've had the space to do that is comforting. And let's be honest, many of us are trying to do things today, like, schedule five minutes in our calendar to really stand in gratitude or have a minute in the morning with your coffee to look outside and maybe appreciate outdoors. I mean, all of us have found ways to really come into a place that is more calming. And, gosh, what if we can do that for each other, too, even just making an intentional choice to schedule that kind of space, to think about how today I'm going to be prepared, just in case, just in case?

Jayne: And, Miss Brandy, and I say also being kind and forgiving of ourselves that we're not striving for perfection, we're striving for relationships. And we know relationships will have some disruptions sometimes and challenges, and we're striving towards repair, not for perfection.

Brandi: Oh, my goodness. I think I needed that message today, Miss Jayne, because that gives us the flexibilities that we need to, then, not only lean into a space with another person and have the readiness to forgive ourselves, but it also allows us that space to be in that same mindset for others. I don't know about you guys, but normally I can do things for others very easily, and I can usually do those before I can do them for myself. Jayne, I'm holding those words today and will take them with me.

Jayne: Our struggles are our strengths, right?

Brandi: Well, I need a moment to write that down. Our struggles are our strength. It really is about perspective, taking it in that. Wow, well, as Ms. Jayne promised, I'm going to put up with the help of my friend Daniel a survey for you guys because in review we want to look at this survey that actually outlines for you. And you guys are already on it. Look, I don't need to give anybody instructions [inaudible] this. We want you to click. These six pieces are the sub-sets that Miss Jayne just talked through in step one. And so, what we want to know is, if you click more than one, which one of these you found to be most useful when you do have those moments to prepare yourself for challenging conversations? And let me kind of give you a little play-by-play here, right now the one that's in the lead, which is not surprising with this set of communities, Head Start is your current relationship with the family or parents.

Now, I need to pause here for one hot second because don't we say this a lot, like it really is all about the relationship, like it really does make a huge difference in how we do what we do. And that's not just lip service. I mean, you are standing in a space here where you're confirming in all of the ways that relationship is critical. But, specifically, when we step into that challenging conversation, over 57% of you are saying that's your go-to, your connection through relationship with the family or parents. A close second is your knowledge about the family or parent. I mean, when you can really lift up that you genuinely know and understand their feelings, position, or their situations, and you can offer that in ways that are honoring to what's happening, I mean, don't we all feel valued when somebody for instance asks about a pet by name? And, Jayne, you kicked us off with this, those strength-based attitudes in relationship-

based practices are absolutely magical. Being able to connect through the behavior of a child. Just observing. With my 7-year-old son, I tell a story today of an interaction I had with one of my friends when he was 6 months old. This has been nearly 7 years ago by now, and it was so impactful for me. She just observed that when he walked into the room, I was speaking in the front of the room, when he heard me over the microphone that he turned his little head. She just told me that, and, you guys, you would've thought I hit the lottery. I mean, that's all it took. It was less than 10 seconds. And I really needed it in that moment as a new mama who had no idea what she was doing. So, just your knowledge and the way that you connect it to that relationship. Daniel, let's show the results so everybody can see how it sort of fell out here.

Also interested in this notion, guys, I mean we're all always drawn to the things that get the sort of highest numbers, but it strikes me, too, that one of the things that we haven't started to unearth with ourselves yet is our own feelings about the family or the parent. I mean, isn't that an opportunity to be aware of? Being able to stand in that arena of our own self-improvement in ways that we can continually grow up on our own accord. So, maybe that's some good data for us. Listen, I know you're getting ready for... Some of you have chosen to do summer programming. You are probably hot and heavy in your preservice planning. So, in case that's useful to you, you could certainly have that data if it could inform what you're going to do back in your program.

All right. Well, thank you, Daniel, for the survey. We are going to transition back over to the PowerPoint so that I can turn over the mic to... Guys, I have the honor to work with Dr. Sparrow a whole lot on our team at the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, and I get so tickled every time he gets to come out with us. He's been doing incredible work in really serving in communities all across this country for years and years. But in recent times, when we've all needed a whole lot of extra support and encouragement, he's really been there for us. So, I know he looked to start off his part of this conversation with some questions that you guys have been posing that we really want to lift up here that are important. So, Josh, take it away.

Joshua: Thank you, Brandi. Such great questions, and I know we won't be able to do them justice in the time that we have, but here are a couple. One is, how do I respond when there isn't time to prepare, as in an emergency situation? And my response to that is you have to take care of the emergency. And you may not be able to have a conversation, and you may not be able to get into the challenges. So, these questions are hard to answer because I don't know what the person who asked had in mind in terms of the emergency. But if it's an emergency, that's what you've got to focus on. And to do that, you look for the help you need, you focus on beginning safety, you focus on stabilization. And that may not be the moment to be able to have the tough conversation.

Someone else said much earlier on this afternoon that you have to gauge the mood and the time. I think that applies here. The other thing in emergency, which I think applies to all of the challenging conversations is, so much of this work is about noticing what kind of state we've gotten into in the situation and then talking ourselves back down. And when we've been able to

settle ourselves, to look at how to be, how to be with, to help settle those who we're with, whether it's in an emergency or whether it's moving through a challenging conversation. So, in an emergency, you look for help, you regain safety first and foremost, you acknowledge honestly what had happened and its impact on everyone who's been affected. And, honestly, sometimes this may sound hard to understand, but it helps to actually overstate how serious the impact is because then people feel like you get it and you're telling the truth, and you're not trying to shove things under the rug.

And then to be clear about your intent and what you can do without promising things that you can't. I will do everything in my power. Doesn't mean you can fix everything. I will stay by your side. I'll be right there with you. It doesn't mean you can fix everything, but those are things that you can do. Someone else asks about, what do you do if a parent has bipolar disorder? And, of course, there's so much more to say, but I guess I just want to say, I think sometimes we get spooked by these diagnoses. And yet I don't really know anybody who doesn't have a member of their family with some kind of mood disorder or substance use disorder or psychiatric condition in their family. So, it's really... it's all of us and not far from the experience of any of us.

And so, I think, yeah, there's the diagnosis, but who's the person? Because we're not just our diagnoses. Who's the person? And then what's going on with that person right now because someone might have that diagnosis and they might be very depressed or very high or kind of somewhere closer to settled and in the middle. And so I think what you have to figure out is what's going on with this person right now, which is similar to anybody else where you may need to have a challenging conversation, which is what kind of state are they in, or are they going to be able to be in this conversation with me or are they too depressed, or for some of the bipolars who are too manic where the conversation can't be about the hard thing that just happened, but again about stabilizing and settling and going towards safety.

Then someone asked about newer families and what do you do when you don't have much information. I think you have to make the relationship first in order to hold the challenging conversations, but to reiterate what Jayne Singer said, it is the challenging conversations, these rough spots in our interactions that actually help build our relationships. So, to understand that when you have to talk about something where there's conflict or tension, that your goal can be to get through that with a stronger, closer relationship. Then someone asks about how to deal with families that are not open to conversations about challenging topics. And there I would just say, assume they have a good reason for it. Rather than heading into it straight on, assume they have a good reason for it. And that is I think, consistent with a trauma-informed approach where you ask yourself what happened to this person, what experience did they have that is showing up in their behavior in a way that's affecting me. Assume they have a good reason for not being open and respect it, be curious about it.

So many more great questions, but I'm going to move on to our step two, and we will spend less time on these last steps, but they are all in the two guides that we have. One is preparing for challenging conversations with families, which is on ECLKC. And the other is engaging with

families in conversations about sensitive topics, also on ECLKC. So, preparing your question about the challenging topics is also a way of kind of grounding yourself, centering yourself, and asking yourself, what do I think I want to ask? What do I think I want to know? And is that really it? And then what do I not know? And I think maybe most importantly, what might I not even know that I don't know? And then when you go to these guides, you'll see there are a host of other questions for you to prepare yourself with understanding that you, if you try to control the direction of the conversation, you won't be really listening and you won't be really there and you won't be really present, which so many of you said is really critical. But preparing your questions helps you enter the conversation feeling like you can be ready for what you otherwise might not have expected.

So, the next step is prepare your questions to learn about the family's perspective on the challenging topic. And at least one of you in the chat talked about, think about the family's culture and what you might not know about the family's culture and what you might not even know you don't know. And to remember that culture not only affects what we say and how we hear what others say, but also our nonverbal communications. Eye contact, whether or not we interrupt, in some cultures that's considered extremely aggressive. So, understand in challenging conversations that the experience of the back and forth you have can very much be influenced by what you do and don't understand about what you bring from your culture and what the other person brings.

And then, many of you talked about this in your questions and comments, how can you stand where the family stands and look from where they look and see what they see? And that's really when you prepare your questions, what you're trying to get to. And the act of doing that, asking those questions, I think really helps build trust with families. That's what you want to do if you want to try to get with where they're at. And it's not about saying that...If you say, I really want to understand you, that's just talking the talk. But walking the walk is when you have these questions that really help you get to look at the world from where they stand and what they see.

So, step four, prepare the family for the conversation, is really about being sure that together we all know what to expect, what the purpose is. Often families come to us with a sense that there's an imbalance in power or authority and are frightened or scared or assume that there's something we know that they don't. So, being able to find out what their expectations are and to be clear about why you're talking together and what you will be talking about together. And in a recent webinar that we did for you all on families involved, which I loved, where we talked about, for example, in a first meeting with a family that's been referred by a child welfare agency, to be really clear about welcoming them with the understanding that they were referred by the child welfare agency. And so, surfacing some at the beginning is really critical so you don't have an elephant in the room or secrets that you're all struggling with. And then, in preparing the family, you can find out to what extent they're expecting or not that things that are fairly personal for them might come up. You can find out if they would be more comfortable having another member of the family in the conversation. You can find out should there be an

interpreter to attend or if there's someone who actually would be important to not have present.

So, in step five, prepare the physical and emotional environment for talking to the family. We know we don't all have control over what the physical environment is, but we can look at the space that we're going to be in. And again, try to get into step into those families' shoes and imagine, what does it feel like to be in that space? Is this foreign territory for me, where I don't have power, where I don't have control? Am I comfortable until I have what I need? One of you said, and I just loved this, I always sit side by side with a parent. I was actually taught that in my training as a psychiatrist. I think that's why I love that. Because when you sit straight on, face to face, it can feel kind of confrontational, and you've got all of that nonverbal information kind of going right at each other. But when you sit side by side, you're actually giving the other person some control over, do I turn my head to look at you or do I look straight forward? And so they have some control over looking to you for the nonverbal information or being able to take a break. And you also, when you're sitting side by side, are looking together out at your world from the same perspective in a physical way. And food and something to drink is really important in creating the sense that we are here to create comfort and to nurture. One other important consideration for the physical environment is, does it feel private enough and protected from interruptions for the topic that you will be discussing together?

And then, step six is practicing. So, certainly, and some of you talked about this, the common talking with a colleague or a supervisor before the conversation sometimes to try out what you might say or to say, this is what I don't want to say, but that I don't know how to say it in a different way, but I know it's not going to work if I say that, or this is what this thing is making me feel like and I know I can't say that. So, to be able to sort of talk through the feelings and the initial ideas you have to get to what you might say, that you have a better sense. You could say authentically in your own words, but that the family can hear and hear your positive intent. There were a number of other suggestions in this guide for practicing, and they include things like role plays. I know a lot of people are uncomfortable with role-plays, but they certainly can help when you're preparing for a conversation that you may be anticipating will be even more uncomfortable.

So, in summary, you can see the six steps, and we have these all laid out for you in this resource on engaging families in challenging conversation on ECLKC. And again it's, Jayne Singer said, this is not to change what you already do. And certainly in the comments, so many of you already have so much expertise and such passion about the respect and the caring that goes into your work and that drives your commitment to having productive conversations and moving through challenges to even stronger, deeper relationships. So, these steps are not meant to change what you do or what you know, but more just to be some guide posts or reference points when you are feeling uncertain or unsure, or that you're facing a conversation that you're worried about or that you're anxious about. So, I will stop there and turn the microphone, as Brandi would say, back to Brandi.

Brandi: Thank you, Josh. Well, I don't even know where to start with my own reflections. As I told Josh and Jayne, I'm over here taking notes. There are so many pieces that I want to come back to here and really put into work. Because I heard Josh saying things like, and many of you noticed in the chat notions of, like, this side-by-side connection. And I don't think there's any way to illustrate that concept is what we see here now. Where I'm from, we use this phrase a lot, walk a mile in my shoes as a way to make a connection, tell a story, illustrate where we are on our own journey. And I have to give a little shoutout here to one of my dear friends and colleagues, Jackie [inaudible], who is our director of communications. And she creates this incredible environment where we get to really experience, both visually and with these words, the sentiment you see before you. Walk a mile in my shoes, see what I see, hear what I hear, feel what I feel. And then maybe you will understand.

And I just feel like, Josh, that's exactly where you took us. I mean, you used words like who is the individual, and I loved what you said about the diagnoses, like not being scared or worried about folks that might come to us with certain labels or certain connections that they have to who they are and what they represent or how they identify. Who are they as a person? We're so multifaceted and wonderfully complicated that each of us brings such a set of uniqueness. Now, I didn't go, I'm unique. Let's just put that out there. But it's the funnest part to get to explore what that means for each of us. And not only is it fun, I don't want to give it short shrift here, I want to say that it's critical. And to really understand who a human being is allows us to do exactly what you see here. And, Josh, the sentiment that you gifted us in the rest of those steps.

So, I just wonder, in our work always, isn't it this moment of understanding where these concepts or ideas, or these notions that we've carried even in our own family in our own way of doing things, when you really start to apply them, they are powerful. So, I want to just offer that here. And the other piece I want to do is, gosh, we have so many great questions coming in. So, I know it's about 4:15/18 now, at least on the East Coast. And what we're going to do, I want to show you guys a few more things, a little bit as a team to support what Josh offered with our two new documents. We've been really standing in that space of how to do what to do before, or in preparation for the conversations that might feel sensitive or challenging for us or for families. And what we really want to pivot our attention to at this point is what to do during, when you're in the midst, and you are having that interaction in a moment.

So, what we have in the second document, now, the second document that you'll see over to the side is called "Engaging with Families in Conversations About Sensitive Topics." And we have a few things here for you to think about, and I just want to give you a little tiny sneak peek-slash-tease. So, you'll go find this, check it out because the cool thing about that document is it sets out for you the before, the during, and the after. So not... Obviously, we're all about a holistic family approach in Head Start. We're all about being able to be with the family as they're ready in a way that is longitudinal in nature. I mean, right, we're following the development or...Oh, my mercy, maybe I do need meds. We're following the developmental trajectory of their littlest one, but it isn't lost on us. But as grown-ups, we have our own growth pattern, right?

When we really get to think about what that looks like over time with a family, it just emphasizes that notion of side by side, as partners, as co-constructors, as true colleagues in service of this littlest one and each other. So, here are a few things, you guys can see these. During the conversation, there's so many things. And, Josh, you said something about really taking note of what's happening from you, focusing on your own self-regulation, managing our thoughts, thinking about how you're feeling, really wondering about what might be influencing our own relationships, our own cultures, all the pieces that really step into who we are and how we operate in self. Certainly, a focus on the family, making sure that we're paying super close attention in an – and, Josh, another word you said was – in an authentic, very genuine way, choosing statements that very much keep your focus on the family rather than yourself. Because isn't it tempting? Guys, isn't it tempting? To go, mm-hmm, I've been there before. I'm going to just let them know everything that worked for me or the roadblocks to avoid. I mean, it's so easy to get ourselves in that space of then, in a place of serving from our heart with the best of intentions, but sometimes when you're on the receiving end of that, it feels like the focus has been shifted, where it really needs to remain on, with, and for the family. And takes practice, it does, it takes real practice to get to that place so we can concentrate on really, really having that laser-like focus there.

Working through your own feelings, being aware of, first and foremost, what comes up for you, how it feels, how it looks, the way that you come into the conversations based on your own cultures, your own experiences, really thinking about how, when you hit one of your own sort of roadblocks or opportunities for growth, the ways that you want to work through that, whether it's through a professional development capacity at your job. I don't know about you guys, but I've been doing a whole lot of studying on my own lately to make sure that I have the knowledge that I need to really stand in service of not only how I hope to mobilize as a human being, but also how I hope to be a better person for myself and pray for others. With that, guys, this is one that we're so bad at. I just hope I'm not overstepping here, but I don't think we're very good at taking time for ourselves. I mean, those of us who are called to this work who really do have such a heart, a deep heart for service, we often do put everybody else ahead of what we need. And I just think that it's necessary. I mean, you know, folks say about the oxygen mask in the airplane. To me, this is the one that might feel hardest to create this space for yourself, your reflections, your emotions. And just to understand that you're not alone in making sort of those, I guess, idea bubbles about your own circles of support and where, and how to reach out. And that's that last bullet, right? If you need it, take support, get encouragement, don't be worried to say, hey, I'm having a rough time here. I'm in a moment where I need to just speak or I need to just be quiet or I need to share a soothing song with...There's so many ways that we find solace and calm for each other, but don't be afraid to do it with somebody else. I mean, it really is the only thing that can help us be forward mobile.

OK. So are you intrigued? Are you going to go download? I mean, there's so much good stuff in there, guys, and I'm so excited about this because many of you have asked us to, and I just want to give this a little sideways nod. How to do this, for instance, for those of you that might be preparing for preservice in a virtual kind of fashion, these are all awesome things to pick right on up. And not only do you have the documents over there, off to the side, and the

PowerPoint, but you can find these on the ECLKC as well. Everything that we ever create for you, that's really driven by you. We listen to your word so deeply. And what we bring back to you is really inspired by what you've taught us and what you feel like could be useful if we'd put it right up on the ECLKC for you to go visit and to pull down anytime that you can use these for whatever purposes that might be useful.

Let me review a couple of things and then we're going to go back into the Q&A, so keep your questions coming please. We want to hear more. There's so many that you've already offered, and we have a queue happening so we can prioritize those when it's time for our after chat. But before we do that, let's look at a couple of things in summary here, some key takeaways. As you practice some steps and strategies, you remember the six steps, and then I gave a few strategies there at the end for the during part. Your confidence is going to grow and then those conversations become easier. Have you guys ever experienced this, when you come into that place where you're like, oh, my goodness, my knees are knocking, my teeth are chattering, my whole body's shaking, and then you make it through it and you're deeper in relationship? And the next time you go at it, you can go back to that place of, wait a second, I did this and I was OK. I was OK at the end. This is just powerful because when you have that sense of calm and confidence, it tends to inspire how families mirror back at us. So, if we can stay in that space, it really does make a difference. Finding your own voice in the words that feel right for you. I have to tell you guys, honestly, that one of the major questions we get all across this country is how do you say that? How do you say that? If I have this [inaudible] situation, what would I say? That's important. It's certainly part of the preparation that we've been talking about. But I would say, if you let me say it like I want to, I would say put your own flavor on it. You have to find the way into these conversations, [inaudible], voice, delivery, that has meaning for you, that conveys that authenticity that we're talking about. And for me, it's just being as country as all outdoors, that's just part of the package. And I was nervous and a bit insecure about that for the longest time, but I couldn't be my own true self unless I honor that part of who I was. And people notice. Yeah, they notice. It makes the difference.

And then this last bullet, working through these difficult conversations together with families will make your relationships stronger and even more rewarding than they already are. Because once you come through that with a family, they see that you're a trusted partner. They see that you really are vested in them. They see that you really do see them as the individual that they are. And then as you go forward together, that dynamic changes in a super-positive way, as well. So, oh, my goodness. That's a whole lot of something, guys. But I want to tell you the ways, also, before we go into the Q&A, that we can keep in touch with each other and we're so excited. So many of you have come to visit us. If you're not on MyPeers yet, please come over. Now I mentioned Dr. Ernestine Brown at the beginning of this conversation, and one of the articles that she just posted over in our MyPeers Community, which is the PFCE Deepening Practice. If you're interested in that article, please go visit. She uploaded, I think, maybe either today or yesterday, it was really new. And you can go over there and get it. And my favorite part is you get to be in conversation with each other. So, you can ask questions like, "Hey, who has a form for this? Can I look at a policy about that? What are you doing to enroll during times of social distancing? What kinds of things are you doing alongside families?" It's so cool to see

all that community support happening in a virtual environment in MyPeers. Now, there are, obviously, lots of options there. Mental health. We have one on opioid misuse, substance use disorder, staff wellness. There are all kinds of open communities for folks to join in. And so, if you haven't yet, go over and check it out.

One of my other most favorite things is this Text4FamilyServices. Okay, so let's do the commercial. You get two texts a month, so we won't inundate you, we promise. But you get a free text message if you go to 22660 to sign up. You just type the word PFCE. Parents, the letters P F C E, stands for Parent, Family, Community Engagement, and you'll get a little nudge about all things family service, about all things relationship. I love these messages. They come regularly, but it seems that I get them right when I need them. I signed up, too, to just to be part of the listening and the learning. And I just really appreciate these. Every time I feel like I need an encouraging nudge, these tend to come along. So, if you haven't checked them out, please do. I think you'll enjoy them. And gosh, the Head Start Heals campaign that the Office of Head Start has gifted us is not over. Now, we have one upcoming webinar here and I know the folks who are going to be delivering this, so you guys are in for a treat. "Understanding Meaning in Behaviors That Challenge Us," it's going to be happening later this month on June 30th, it looks like from 3-4 p.m. Eastern. And we put the little hyperlink there, so you can go over to the events page on the ECLKC and register for that. But side note, you heard it here first. Guess what, guys? We're working on a couple more for the Head Start Heals campaign, too. So, we're planning to bring you a few more in this series. So, stay tuned to the ECLKC and be watching for the things that you can expect from our National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement next.

The other thing that I wanted to offer here, as well, is...I can't tell you guys how honored I am to be connected, to learn from, and led by the folks at the Office of Head Start. They've been taking such good care of us all of the time. But specifically, really being there for all of us across the country as we've really needed help, support, guidance, idea bubblers. And there are a couple of ways you can reach out to them, too. Kiersten, at the top, mentioned how they've been collecting questions. And for the Head Start Heals campaign, in particular, you can email the address you see there in front of you and ask questions and interact right there with the Office of Head Start. The one other thing that I want to offer, and you will have these in the PowerPoint, so I want to put them up here. Every time we get to have a conversation in the Head Start Heals campaign, we also put up any hotlines that might be useful for folks today or any day. So, these are actually captured in the PowerPoint. So, if you see these and you find them useful, you will have them to go back to. And there are actually two pages of those. One of the ones that I've really loved lifting up is this one. On the top of this slide is the 24-Hour Parent Support line. And it's confidential. It's available in many, many languages. If a parent is in a place where they really just need help and support, they can call 24 hours a day and say, "Hey, I'm in a moment of stress, frustration, anger. For whatever reason, I need help." And it's available for them. So, I know who we are. And I know that we mobilize in that way, too, but unfortunately we're not open 24 hours a day. So, one of the things that we always offer when we try out a new resource, if you haven't tried this one before, is for you guys to give it a call first, see how it works, so that if you do offer it to a family that they'll have a little bit of

guidance about what it'll look like, what it'll sound like. And then if they need it in that emergent situation, in that moment, then they'll have it.

So, last but not least, we want to get on over to the Q&A. I know that a few questions have come in as I have been talking, so I'm going to come over here and check in with my colleagues and see which one we want to lift up first. So I know, Jayne and Josh, you guys were both holding a couple, who would like to go first?

Joshua: I can start with the one about...Actually, there were two that were related. There was one about what if there was damage in the conversation, how do you undo the damage? And then there was another about what do you do after you've failed in a conversation? And those are both really powerful words. And I think it's important to start by asking what do we mean by fail? And what do we mean by damage? The challenging conversation is not necessarily going to get you to both be in the same place. It's not going to necessarily get you to be in agreement. And as Jayne said, and we see this in the research on the earliest interactions between parents and very young infants, it's the coming apart in the connection that is what strengthens the relationship. So, what do we mean by failed or damaged? I think they're really important questions because there are ways of sending out a lifeline when you're in a conversation that you can tell is not going to end with some kind of resolution of the conflict. And it may be, it sounds like we're going to have to agree to disagree. And most importantly, I'm hoping that we can come together again to keep thinking about this together. And, critically, I think, if you keep the door open for another conversation, then you can keep on working on making the repair. If by damage or by failing, you feel that you've said something or behaved in some way that was hurtful, apologies are really effective, and people really appreciate them. Especially if, when you apologize, you honor that that may not feel like enough or it may take some time for the other person to accept the apology. [inaudible] want to add to that, or you would like to move on to another question? There's so many important ones.

Jayne: I'd love to add to that a little bit, actually. And I can tie it into a couple of the other ones. Thank you. I'm struck by the earnestness of the questions. It's not just clear from today. It's clear, for decades, how devoted the Head Start community is doing right by families. And I, too, was really struck by the use of the word failed. And I think this is one of the reasons why earlier in today's webinar, when...I apologize, Brandi. I inserted, while you were talking. Let's not forget that we're not striving for perfection and that we're striving for relationship...because we can be very hard on ourselves. So, I really appreciate that Josh is asking, what is it that we mean by failed? Because if the first attempt at the conversation doesn't go as we would have hoped, in an idealized way, then what are our opportunities to revisit? Just like there are some children in the classroom who it might take a month, two months, half a year to build the trust, there are families where it takes much more effort, much more intention, to build that trust. And we made a little bit of...We gave voice a little bit to this today, to this idea that conversations can, of course, be most challenging with families who we don't feel like we have built as much of a trusting relationship with. Of course. Because it's easy when it's easy.

And if we can hold in our minds, again, that kindness and forgiveness to ourselves that I was mentioning before, and the same kind of kindness and forgiveness towards the family, that if there is a parent, a family, whether this is because of a mental health issue or not, who is having a harder time trusting, and therefore engaging these more uncomfortable conversations, we can very reasonably operate from the notion that there is a good reason for that family in terms of what they have lived with their own life experience. That it's not necessarily about us and something that we're doing or not doing, that we're doing wrong, or that we failed at doing.

And so I'd love to come back again to this notion of genuine, authentic self. And, Brandi, you said it so beautifully. It's about finding our own voice, the strengths-based attitudes, the relationship-based practices. They're guides, but they're not scripts to tell us exactly what to say. And besides, that would feel really artificial anyway. So, when I said before that our struggles are our strengths, I think, in part, what I was referring to was, how do we stay authentic with families? And if things feel like they're not going well, let's say in a conversation, to be able to say, "I'm really struggling because I feel like the conversation is not going so well. Tell me, what do you think? Am I not understanding what it is that you're trying to tell me? Because I'm worried and I'm struggling with that worry." It's OK to reveal a vulnerability. It's real. It's not that it's unprofessional. It is a way of connecting. And even if we say, together with a family, "That felt really, really hard. Can we both give it some more thought and come back together again? I need to really, really think about this some more." To be transparent with some of what we're struggling with because that also models for families, not only how they can be with us, but how they can be with their child. Because there's no such thing as perfection in parenting, either. We're scaffolding families, not to strive for perfection, but to strive for relationship that keeps repairing over and over and over again with their child in response to some of these challenges, whether it's conversations with us, the program, conversations between parents and each other, because there can be very different views even within the family or interactions with their child.

And lastly, I'll just tie in that little piece, too. There was a question about the use of motivational interviewing, which can be a very powerful technique. And it's, again, just a reminder that today's conversation, the tools, the PowerPoint, the handouts, the conversations are in service of honoring the tools you already are feeling you're using and are effective. And then are there some additional helpful hints that can move the process along? And maybe for some of you that is the use of motivational interviewing, not incompatible with what we're talking about. I would venture to say, however, that motivational interviewing itself is not built upon the understanding of children's development the way that the National Center's materials are. And the reason that we're in relationship with families is because we're sharing in the care of their child. And that shared caregiving, even though it can rise into some challenges sometimes, gives us a different reservoir to dip into and pull out from than motivational interviewing by itself can offer us.

And so, you heard me even start off the afternoon thinking, talking about being able to describe a child. That is one of the most motivating strategies that we can use with families is to describe

what we've seen in a way that opens up the conversation, so that we can follow the parents' lead, families' lead, which, of course, is part of the principles of motivational interviewing. But I think I'm cautioning us a little bit because if in our mind we have the idea, "Oh, I need, I want to get to this certain place in this conversation, and anything short of that is going to feel like a failure," then we've already set ourselves up to be disappointed. But if we go in with the mindset that we're going to be co-constructing this from the beginning in honor and respect for the family's contribution to understanding the child, and understanding the challenging topic, the family will help to co-construct the challenging conversation with us. They really are our partners in building towards a relationship that cannot just tolerate, but embrace the discomfort that comes from sharing in the intimate lives of children and families.

Brandi: Wow, Jayne, goodness. The word that is in my brain right now is "embraced." Just this notion of embracing each other and the way that we can do that regularly. And with all these tips, tricks, and strategies, but just as we think about who we are and how that can make connections to others in that most genuine, authentic way. I don't know about you guys, but I'm feeling all kinds of excited and inspired and motivated and, just truly again, as I mentioned earlier, filled up by this conversation. Because one, it makes me feel not alone. It's hard to have a difficult and challenging conversation. And just to know that you're not dealing with that part by yourself is a big deal because we all come through it. We all come to it and through it. So, when we continue to do that, it heightens our own sense of growth, but it also just gives such gifts to those around us. I want to do one more question. I'm going to leave it to Josh and Jayne to see where they're being pulled because I'm realizing that they've both brought forth such incredible richness to this dialogue. I, truly, could just sit at their feet all day long. I want to see where they're being pulled as they've been reviewing the questions and what they might want to offer up as a final nudge into what you've asked or even as a closing thought.

Jayne: Well, I'll just add my gratitude for being in the conversation because my excitement, honestly, Brandi, is thinking about the thousands of people in this conversation. And again, I use the word "devotion." The devotion to doing right by families. And I think that devotion probably goes a lot farther than people are giving themselves credit for when having to have these difficult conversations. And my last thought has to do with anticipatory guidance and how can we all in our programs set up the pathway way before challenging conversations. To anticipate with families during enrollment, during the relationship building, that we will be able to anticipate that things will come up that will probably be uncomfortable to talk about. Parents might say, "What kinds of things?" Well, there's children, there's children in groups. There is going to be things that are going to happen. Maybe if a challenging behavior on the part of your child, or on the part of another child, these are the things that come up in the world of early care and education. And let's think about it ahead of time. How do you want me to share information with you? Do you want to be called during the day? Do you want to not have a conversation until later? Do you want me to ask you...As we're building the relationships to really anticipate with families that not everything is going to be smooth and easy in the relationship between the program and the family. Just like we embrace the idea that, of course, not everything is going to be easy between the parent and the child. And if we're setting ourselves up for ideal, we also want to be there to help families not set themselves up for

having an idealized notion, and so that they can be kind and forgive themselves when things do not match up with their child and they need to repair. And we can all learn from the discomfort of those challenges.

Brandi: Thank you, Dr. Singer. I realized that time flies when you having fun, and we're already at the end of our Q&A period. However, I do want to allow Dr. Sparrow a quick second to offer some closing thoughts. And then I'll bring us together to offer some final gratitude. And we'll go from there.

Joshua: Thank you, Brandi, and thank you everybody for joining us this afternoon and for your really deeply moving comments and thoughtful questions. They've certainly inspired me and given me an entry to move ahead with challenging work that we all do. There is one question about lots of trauma and hard to trust, and that seems like an important one to address in ending our conversation today. Yeah, there's lots of trauma and some of it is in the moment or yesterday or in our childhood. And some of it is trauma in generations before, for ancestors. And I think it's really important to honor that, yeah, it's hard to trust and to not expect that the trust is going to be there and to honor that it won't. Don't demand that it's going to be there and to accept that and to not take it personally. And to accept that, I think, trust is something that we have to earn with each other every day. It's not something that we can ever take for granted or feel like we've gotten there and we're done, especially, when we're dealing with trauma related to racism or trauma related to the history of discrimination. Trust is something that we have to make together every day. So again, thank you for your really important questions and deeply thoughtful comments and for all that you do for children and families everywhere.

Brandi: Oh, Josh, thank you so much. Goodness. Thank you to Dr. Singer and Dr. Sparrow for spending your time with all of us today. Thank you to our leaders at the Office of Head Start for creating space. And most importantly, thanks to each of you for spending all this dedicated time with us on this really important topic. I want to leave you with a quote that, actually, one of you posted as our gratitude. I love this. This is such a good illustration of where we've been together today. "Change the way you look at things, and the things you look at will change." It's a quote from Dr. Wayne Dyer, D-Y-E-R. "Change the way you look at things, and things you look at will change." May we all stand in that space of holding each other, our children, our families, and may we all walk together forward. Thank you guys, so much. We'll see you next time.