

Inclusive Learning Environments for Infants and Toddlers

Treshawn Anderson: Hi, everyone, and welcome to “Teacher Time.” I’m Treshawn Anderson.

Gail Joseph: And I’m Gail Joseph, and we are from the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning, and we are so excited to have you with us here today to talk about learning environments for all infants and toddlers.

Treshawn: So, before we begin, Gail, can you give us a quick overview of our webinar series this season?

Gail: Sure, Treshawn, and hello, everyone. I’m so excited to be back with you hosting “Teacher Time,” one of my favorite things to do. This season, we are going to explore the concepts of inclusion and belonging. Now, most of you may be familiar with the term “inclusion,” but the idea of belonging and making sure that children and families feel like they are reflected in and a part of the learning environment, that they, well, belong is a big part of inclusion, too. So, we’ll talk about both of these concepts a little more as we go along in this episode.

Each month, we will talk about what inclusion and belonging looks like in the learning environment through learning materials and ways to support families through inclusion. We’ll have three episodes dedicated to infants and toddlers and three for preschoolers, so feel free to join them all or join us just for the episodes that are dedicated to the age of children you want to learn more about.

Treshawn: Yeah, let’s get started. So, when we think about inclusive early learning environments, these really are places in which children with and without disabilities and their families experience this sense of belonging, positive social relationships, and development to reach their full potential. Education staff like yourselves work together with families to provide children with access to a wide range of learning opportunities and individualized support that allow children to fully participate in play and learning activities. Now, one of the key phrases in this explanation of inclusion is experiencing this sense of belonging. What does that mean? Sometimes, we don’t know what that means. Now, when we think about inclusion, inclusion – it’s an act or it’s a teaching practice, as you see on this slide there. And it’s things we do, like individualizing learning opportunities for infants and toddlers, maybe providing books and materials that represent the children and families in our learning spaces, and making sure that all materials and toys and activities are accessible to all children.

Now, on the other hand, we have belonging. And so, belonging is a feeling. It’s a feeling that you are a part of something, and that you really matter to others. And we create this feeling of belonging through our inclusive practices.

Gail: Now, many of you probably have learning environments that demonstrate inclusion and belonging for the infants and toddlers in your program, and that is terrific. That is great. So, please give yourselves a “Teacher Time” pat on the back because it is with the tremendous help

of our program, curricula, collaboration with education staff, and attending trainings, like these, that we have so many resources and tools that help us with our work today. But there was a time when there were not as many supports for teachers, families, and children with disabilities or suspected delays. And so, we think it's important to know just how far we have come. So, we have a video that we'd love for you to watch on the brief history of the laws that promote inclusive practices in early learning settings. There will be some acronyms, a little bit of alphabet soup in there, to look out for in this video. So, to help you, we've put these on that viewer's guide that you can download, so make sure you download that so that you can follow along. So, let's watch.

[Video begins] Woman: Educators need to address the strengths and needs of every child in their program. For children with disabilities, this often means both expanding and individualizing your teaching strategy. There are laws in place that are meant to help support and protect the rights of people with disabilities. When you know what the laws are and what they entail, you will be better equipped to serve and support young children and their families.

In the early 1970s, millions of children with disabilities were denied access to public schools or placed in segregated classrooms. This violated the rights of people with disabilities and put them under conditions that did not allow them to thrive. While the Education for Handicapped Children Act in 1975 did much to dismantle the segregated school system, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, was much more comprehensive. IDEA, enacted in 1990, granted children with disabilities a free and appropriate public education. That meant that children with disabilities not only had a right to an education, but one that was also individualized to their needs. It allowed them free access to specialized supports, therapies, and equipment.

IDEA has many parts, but the parts most relevant to early childhood are Part B, Section 619, and Part C. Part B, Section 619 addresses special education for preschool children and their families, whereas Part C addresses early intervention services for children 3 years and younger. Part B, Section 619 includes categories in order to help define disability. A child must qualify under these categories as well as show an educational impact in order to receive services. The assessment is carried out by a public school district who will also help to develop a written legal document that describes the services needed to support the child. This document is called an individualized education program, or IEP. Families, early childhood special education teachers, therapists, and the child's educator are invited to attend IEP meetings and collaborate on how to best meet the child's needs in the least restrictive environment.

Similar to Part B, Section 619, IDEA Part C also specifies the creation of a learning plan. Here, it is called an individualized family service plan, or IFSP. According to Part C, if a toddler or infant under 3 years qualifies for an IFSP, then one must be developed for them. An IFSP includes an outline for early intervention services, measurable outcomes for each child and family, and calls for a service coordinator to oversee the plan's implementation. Furthermore, IFSPs require that services are delivered in natural environments, where children with disabilities spend time already, including the child's home, in a child care program, or other community settings.

In addition to IDEA, there are other laws pertaining to disability that are important for educators to know about. The Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities. It includes guidelines for providing things like accessible parking spaces, curb ramps, and crosswalks so that people with disabilities have access to things like restaurants and bus stops. For young children, it means ensuring playground equipment is safe and accessible.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act also protects the rights of people with disabilities by prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability in any program receiving federal funds. As a result, in some cases, when a child doesn't qualify for services under IDEA Part B, they may have some protections under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

What does all of this mean for you? What's important for you know is that early intervention agencies and school districts are legally responsible for providing services to children with disabilities. That makes them your partners when you have a child with disabilities enrolled in your program. Being informed means being familiar with the laws and regulations outlined above. It also means continuing to work with others in order to figure out the best way to support children with disabilities and their families in an educational setting.

Produced by Cultivate Learning at the University of Washington and Rooted in Rights. [Video ends]

Gail: I love that video. It's such a great video, and sometimes, we all need a refresher on the different laws, those terms, and those acronyms. So it's just a great video to help out with that, and I love this idea that you could share this with parents. I mean, that would be so very helpful, and we'll be sure to post this video on MyPeers so that you can access it yourself.

Treshawn: Yes, Gail, I absolutely love that video, and I feel like I've learned some things, too, from watching it. So, yes. Go back on MyPeers, join us on MyPeers. We'll talk about that later so that you can see it again for yourself as well.

So, now that we've covered a definition of "inclusion" and "belonging" and gave a brief overview of the laws that regulate inclusive practices, we hope you have a better understanding of the topic. Now that we can discuss what inclusion and belonging looks like in the toddler environment, let's do it. So, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, or NAEYC, as we like to call it, and the Division for Early Childhood, which is DEC, have written a joint position statement on early childhood inclusion and stated that the defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high-quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports. You're gonna hear these words a lot during this webinar and throughout this series as well.

So, first, educators provide access to children. They provide children with access to a wide range of learning opportunities and activities and settings and environments. So, that's what we mean by access. With participation, this is where teachers and family child care providers have individualized supports in place that allow children to participate fully in play and learning

activities with their peers. We want children to be participating. And then lastly is supports, and supports include everyone involved in the child's learning. The teachers and family child care providers partner closely with families and work together within this broader system of community supports and specialized services. You might have some of those people coming in and out of your classroom to support children as well. So, for this episode, we're gonna focus on access, and then we're gonna save participation and supports for the upcoming episodes. So, if you want to see this full joint positions statement, go ahead and check your viewer's guide, because we've left it there for you.

Gail: So, what do we mean by access? That's what we're digging into this episode. Access means that teachers and family child care professionals provide infants and toddlers with access to a wide variety of learning opportunities, activities, settings, and environments. For example, that there is enough space for Julia to move around using her walker, there are blankets for Michaela to sit on when playing outside, and there are low open shelves or materials on the ground for Hector to grab a toy independently.

So, let's watch another video. In this video, we're looking at a high-quality learning environment for toddlers. Now, use your viewer's guide to write down some ideas that you would like to try out. It's such a great way to keep those reminders handy. After this video, we'll take a deeper dive into the key aspects of quality inclusive learning environments in more detail.

[Video begins] Woman: [Gasps] Did you cook it? Hot! Hot. What do we do when something's too hot? Blow on it? Oh, you want to put it in the fridge? You can put it in a fridge. That's a really good idea. Good scooping. Look at Joy. Say, "Good job, Joy. Good job, Joy." Nathan. Nathan. He's so curious. All done. Yum-yum-yum-yum-yum. Yum-yum-yum. Hot. Hot. You got to be careful. Hot. Yeah. I know that is hot. It's not hot. You're filling your cup. Look. Oh, you're dumping it. Good job. Good job. Here. Whoa. Good scooping. It's all done. Did you want to make some soup out of the water? Do you want to help us? Why don't we find a bowl that doesn't have a crack? See how this one's broken? Do you see? It's broken? Why don't you find a bowl that's not broken? And then we can make some soup. Yeah. Can you find a different bowl? And then come back and we'll make soup with Joy. Do you see any more in there? Did you want to make some soup with Landon? Yum. Yum. That one's broken. We're gonna get a new one.

Joy: Hot.

Woman: Hot. Hot. Did he make hot food? Did you see us blowing on it?

Joy: Hot.

Woman: Hot. Hot. Ooh! Did you cook it? Is it hot? There we go. OK, you ready to make soup? Come here. Oops. This one's not broken, so we can put water in it. We can hold water. Ready? Oh, Joy wants to do it. Joy, do you want to put some water in here? [Video ends]

Gail: OK. That was such a fun video. How many bowls of water soup have we made? But that was just such a fun learning environment, and some things I saw – the children were able to move about freely and play with whatever they were interested in. Children have access to all of the materials, which is great, and the teacher made – you saw that small bucket of water and toys so that that girl at the table could participate in water play in a way that worked for her. And those teachers were so engaging, playing with the children, following their lead, and supporting whenever necessary. So, let's take that deeper dive into the key aspects of quality inclusive learning environments.

Treshawn: Yeah, I would love to be a child in that classroom. I would just have so much fun all day and feel so included and belonged in that. I really owned that space. So, love that video. So, ensuring that learning environments are inclusive for all children can be a lot to think about and remember. I mean, she was doing so many things, so many subtle movements that helped children and supported them when they needed them.

Luckily, there are five key aspects of quality inclusive learning environments that you can use as a checklist for your own practices to get you started, or you could check them off for your own environments. So, the first key aspect is having a safe and supportive physical environment, then having inviting materials, then following a predictable schedule and consistent routines, and then making sure to connect and communicate with all children. She did a fantastic job in that video of doing that. And then finally, having engaging interactions and meaningful learning experiences. Check the viewer's guide for our reflection activity on these five key aspects to checklist your own environment to see how your environment offers each of these key steps. So, look at your viewer's guide for that.

For this episode, though, we are going to focus on inclusive learning environments for infants and toddlers, but we'll specifically focus on the safe and supportive physical environment, predictable schedule and consistent routines, and engaging interactions and meaningful learning experiences. We are gonna talk about inviting materials in our learning materials for infants and toddlers episode, and then we'll be sure to touch on connecting and communicating with all children in our final episode, where we'll talk about supporting children and families through inclusion. So, make sure you register for those as they come up. You don't want to miss them.

So, now we're gonna highlight some strategies for each of these key aspects, and we've included these in your viewer's guide. So, again, be sure to download that to follow along.

Gail: All right. Let's focus on the safe, supportive physical environment. It's important for teachers and family child care professionals to arrange their learning environments in ways that offer all children equitable opportunities to learn. For children with an IFSP, as we remember, that's individualized family service plan. Working with service providers like a PT or a physical therapist is key to gathering information on children that will help you make decisions about making changes to the learning environment. For instance, the inclusive learning environment may have some protected spaces for play, independent play that is safe. Tummy time – very

important activity for young babies in order to build those muscles used for sitting up, crawling, walking.

Now, children with identified disabilities or suspected delays may need some additional tummy time to build those muscles. So, making sure the area is comfortable, padded, and away from lines of traffic will help infants explore independently. If the child has a physical therapist working with them on the IFSP goals, talk with that physical therapist about making changes to the physical environment. They're such a great resource to ensure that there are adequate supports for the child to address their specific needs. Now, social emotional support is also included in the learning environment set up, so be sure to include those quiet, more intimate, soft spaces with soft, comfortable, and comforting materials. I love the idea of even dimming the lights or playing some soothing music to help calm babies who show signs of distress.

Treshawn: Yes, that's so important. And so, when we think about toddlers, of course, we want to think active exploration. They are busy and on the move. So, we want to arrange the furniture so that you can see and easily support toddlers as they move about this learning environment. And then we want to create space for adaptive devices, like bean bag chairs for positioning those children with low muscle tone or space for a child to move throughout the classroom in their walker. And if a child has difficulty moving independently, why not take them to where they want to go? Or maybe chat with their service provider, like an occupational therapist, to figure out ways to help the child move around.

This also means taking care of yourself and making sure that there is comfortable furniture for you to sit down in with the children and to help you move around, too. That's so important. We tend to forget about ourselves in this environment, but we're included in the learning environment as well. Remember to position yourself within the learning environment in a place that promotes active supervision. That means making sure you can monitor children's activities and see clearly all the areas in the classroom.

Gail: That is so important, that seeing clearly. So, now we have a special segment here, where we're gonna talk about making modifications, and we think about modifications as small changes to the environment that can have a big impact.

So, let's think about one way that teachers and family child care professionals can adapt their learning environments to support infants and toddlers. So, let's use tummy time as an example. Let's go forward there. OK. So, here is Teddy, and he is a 9-month-old and has a motor delay. So, Teddy has an IFSP and works with a physical therapist twice a week in the classroom, which is so great. When teacher Monica puts him down for tummy time, oftentimes, Teddy has a hard time keeping his head up. You can see the head goes right back down. So, teacher Monica knows how much Teddy loves to play independently, especially when all of the other babies are down on the floor. Plus, she has put out some of his favorite materials that he loves to play with, but what else could she do to support Teddy so that he feels included in this tummy time activity? Who can teacher Monica ask for suggestions to support Teddy? So, write down some of your ideas in the viewer's guide. I'm sure our audience has so many great ideas that they're writing down.

Treshawn: Yeah.

Gail: So, let's think about what happens here. So, one thing that teacher Monica can do is to use a pillow or even just roll up a towel, like, roll up the towel and place it under Teddy's arms as he lies down on his tummy, of course, always supervised. This will help prop him up and make it easier for Teddy to hold his head steady while engaging in tummy time, and teacher Monica can also share this tip and these tips that she learns from a physical therapist with Teddy's family so they can also practice that at home for some good tummy time at home. And also, teacher Monica can consult with his physical therapist every time he comes to the classroom and ask questions about even more materials or ways that she can alter the environment to really support Teddy's physical development. And I love that Teddy is looking at a picture of himself. How engaging is Teddy? So engaging. So, we hope you take this small change that can make a big impact or a modification and use it with the infants and toddlers in your learning environment, too.

Treshawn: That's so awesome, Gail. And when we think about supporting families while they're at home, you're like, "Well, what do families have at home that they can help support?" Well, I just got in the mail my nursing pillow because I'll need it eventually for a new "Teacher Time" baby we have coming that we've got baking in the oven now. So, hopefully, you guys will stay the entire episode and you will get to see the progression of our new "Teacher Time" baby, a real baby, though, coming soon.

Gail: That looks so exciting.

Treshawn: Thanks! And we got Auntie Gail here. So, when we think about a predictable schedule and routines, the learning environment not only includes the furniture, the artwork, and materials that fill up the space, but it also includes the caregiving routines, daily transitions, and fun activities planned throughout the day. So, let's talk about that a little more.

[Cough] While it's important to have a consistent routine so that children know what to expect each day, it's also best practice to allow for some individualization and flexibility in this routine for infants and toddlers. So, talk with families about routines and schedules at home so that you can kind of weave them into your day, or maybe adapt your routines and schedules in your learning environments to promote continuity of care between home and school and to meet children's needs.

Now, the infant's day is full of caregiving routines, and I'm sure I'm gonna have a lot of routines coming up pretty soon, like napping and eating and diaper changes, along with some activities and engagement with learning materials in the environment. So, be prepared to adjust your activities to fit individual infants' rhythms and caregiving needs, like if they're ready to take a nap and go to sleep and they're not ready to engage in a musical activity. Totally fine. We want to follow what they need at the time.

Another example is we may need to give infants a few minutes after they've had their bottle before putting them down on their tummy, you know, to avoid some of those stomach or

digestion issues. Or if an infant's having trouble adjusting to a routine, maybe introduce a favorite object or a song as a part of their routine as well. And Gail, I think you're gonna talk about toddlers for us.

Gail: Excellent. Toddlers need flexibility, too, just like we were flexible there. Some toddlers may need more time to get to the table for a snack or may need more assistance with their clothing during potty time. So, be sure to add some additional time in the routines for children who would benefit from this extra time. Also, be flexible with the timing of activities and follow the children's interest. You may have introduced a very fun art activity, but according to the schedule, it's time to go outside. Maybe bring the art supplies outside and continue the fun. Because infants and toddlers develop so rapidly, their needs also change. It's important to continually check in with families to see if there are schedules or routines that have changed at home. Try to integrate some of these new ideas into your learning environments. When there is consistency between home and school, this promotes children's learning as well as their sense of security and, as we've been talking about, belonging.

Treshawn: Yeah. So, remember, routines and schedules are not just something that we do to make the day go by. They're also learning experiences for infants and toddlers. So, we're gonna watch another video on how this teacher uses a daily routine to promote learning with this infant. You're gonna love it. Trust me. I love this video. So, as you watch, use your viewer's guide to write down some things that she says or something that she does that you really want to try. Let's watch.

[Video begins] Teacher: Diaper change. You want to help me? You want to hold the diaper? Hold the diaper. Hold the diaper. I'm gonna have to put gloves on. Yeah. You're gonna be my helper. You're gonna hold the diaper. Mm-hmm. That's a bottom. Tap, tap, tap. One foot. Two feet. Unsnap. Unsnap. Are you chewing on the diaper? Ha-ha. I see you. Uh-oh. Peek-a-boo. Peek-a-boo. OK. You're just wet. Clean up. You gonna be all clean. All dry. You're gonna be all clean. All dry. Can I have the diaper back? Thank you. I need to put it on. Yeah. So, we won't have any accidents. Diaper's in. See? Almost done. One, two snaps. Onesie's on. And your outfit. One foot in. Another foot in. See? We're done. That was quick. One, two. Another snap. Three. Another snap. Four. Another snap. Five. And one more. Six. And one more. Seven. All done! We're gonna clean up your hands. It's gonna be a little bit cold. Hands. Clean up, clean up, clean up. Another hand. Clean up, clean up, clean up. Did I tickle you? [Laughing] Uh-huh? Clean, clean, clean, clean, clean. Done. All done. You want to go up? Let's go up. Let's go up. Up, up, up. Ooh, that's hard work. That's hard work. Yay. We're done. Let's go on the floor and play, and then I'll come back. [Video ends]

Treshawn: I can't stop smiling when I watch that video. I mean, what a fun time in a diaper change, and you might say, like, you know, "We've got to get things done in our classroom to move on to the next routine." Well, can you believe that diaper change only took two minutes? I mean, two minutes out of her day, and the little giggle at the end from the child was, like, the most gratifying thing ever. So, if you just think, "If I take two minutes out of my day, look how much interaction and things that this child can learn by just a diaper change." How about it?

So, did you notice that this teacher narrated each and every step that she was doing. This really helps the child with vocabulary and knowing what comes next. I mean, she counted, she labeled the items. She was fully engaged and present with that child, and it just makes the child feel more cared for and that they belong in this classroom. Lastly, she prepared the child for what was coming next, telling them that she was going to set him down to play before she went back to clean up the changing table, and doing stuff like this makes children feel safe and secure in their environment because they know exactly what's coming next.

Gail: I love that video. It's so great. Snap, snap, snap. All right. So, let's talk about the last key aspect of quality inclusive learning environments, and that is having engaging interactions and providing meaningful learning experiences, and this is the same for home environments, too.

Children learn best from responsive, social environments and interactions. So, remind parents that they're their child's first and best teacher, and that spending quality time at home in engaging interactions provides opportunities for learning and bonding. Being sensitive and responsive in your engagements with young children, just as we saw, helps to promote this sense of security and belonging. Being sensitive and responsive means that you pay close attention to and respond to children's cues appropriately. Research shows that when children feel safe in their learning environments, they are more likely to explore. And when they're more likely to explore, they're more likely to be learning things. So, the resource section in your viewer's guide highlights a handout that's focused on responsive interactions with young children, so please be sure to take a look.

Treshawn: Because if you haven't realized it before, you should have the viewer's guide downloaded by now. [Laughter] So, for infants, when we think about engaging interactions and meaningful experiences, this means that you observe them play and find out what they're interested in and then join in. You know, of course following their cues, if they want you to join in, of course, but talk with children about what they're doing and what they're exploring and encourage parents to do the same.

For toddlers, you can build on children's play to expand their understanding of the world around them, and this promotes language skills. You can ask questions, you can even offer new words, even words that you think might be hard or difficult words. Share them with these children. Even children who are nonverbal, and it really helps them learn that way. And if a child is not yet mobile, like we said, bring interesting materials to them so that they can explore or take them to the places that they're interested in exploring.

Gail: OK. I'm so excited about this segment of "Teacher Time," which is called "The Book CASE" because we know that books are a great way to engage with children and provide meaningful learning experiences. There are books on just about every topic, so coupling that book with a specific learning theme or activity is a great way to provide meaningful learning experiences. And also choosing books based on things your infants and toddlers are interested in is another way to help children feel included and that their interest is important and valued. So, this season when we explore "The Book CASE," we're gonna talk about how books can connect to children's early learning goals. So, from the ELOF, and how books can provide advanced

vocabulary, how you can support engagement during book reading, and how can you extend the learning that might come from a book beyond the book. So, this episode, because we are talking about inclusion and belonging, we're gonna feature a few books on that topic. So, we're gonna look at a few of them, I'm gonna turn it over to Treshawn to take us through some of her favorites.

Treshawn: Yeah, so I love these books for lots of different reasons, but first, we've got "Say Hello!" And so, this book, if you just see the cover, all the different words and different languages and the ways to say hello, it introduces infants and toddlers to the sounds of different languages with a glimpse at diverse neighborhoods, full of people speaking Spanish, French, Japanese, so much more, so many languages, and it's such a great way to introduce vocabulary with just one word – "Hello." And it's kind of usually a good word to start with with children.

Then we have "We Are Family," the nice colorful book in the center, and this is an inclusive book for children that showcases families of all different sizes, races, abilities, so much more. You know, all of our families come in different sizes and shapes, so what better way to introduce this concept through a book?

And then lastly, we have "Everywhere Babies," and this is a board book that shows babies of all different origins being cared for in all sorts of ways, but the one thing they have in common is that they're all kissed and fed and rocked to sleep by people who love them. How warm is that? So, I went to my local library and was able to pick up "Everywhere Babies," if you can see. So, this one's a bigger book. It's not quite a board book, but the pictures are just amazing inside. And so, let's explore "The Book CASE" with this book, "Everywhere Babies."

So, for connect, we know that infants and toddlers love to identify babies. Look at all the different babies in the pictures there. They can even pull some toy baby dolls out of the environment so that children have something tangible to hold onto while you explore this book with them. And for advanced vocabulary, there's so much vocabulary in this book, from labeling body parts like their cheeks, their ears, their fingers, their nose, to everyday objects like diapers and T-shirts. You can say these words to infants and encourage toddlers to maybe point. You know, "Can you find the baby in the onesie or in the diaper or in the onesie? You have on a onesie, too. Look how awesome that is." You can even ask family members to translate some of the words in this book because it's so simple and use children's home language to build that continuity between home and the learning environment. And then to support engagement, teachers, infants, and toddlers can explore the repeating sentence. On every book, it says – On every page, it says, "Every day, everywhere, babies are ..." And then this one says "dressed." "Every day, everywhere, babies are fed." So, children love to repeat words, especially as you're going along in the book. When it's the same on every page, it really builds their confidence that way. And then to extend children's learning, teachers can ask children questions about what the babies are doing in the book, like, "Do you like to play games? Do you like to be held? I heard that you like to play bounce with Daddy while he – like the babies in this book, too." So, you know, kind of making that connection between their life at home and the lives of the

babies in this book. And you can narrate responses to these questions for those nonverbal infants and toddlers, but just building that vocabulary through these books is gonna be so, so, so useful.

Gail: All right. I love that book, and I love “The Book CASE.” And now, though, it’s “All About You,” up to all of our heroes out there that are watching. It’s really all about you, and we know that we do our best caregiving and teaching when we can feel our best, when we can feel calm and well ourselves. So, engaging in self-care practices really can help you build, read, or social or emotional capacity to deal with difficult times, and I know that we’re all in difficult times and experiencing difficult times. So here’s one very quick strategy that you can use to get back into that calm space. So, when you’re noticing you’re starting to feel a little bit anxious, your stomach is tightening, your jaw is tightening, all those signs that you might pick up on that you’re feeling a little bit stressed in the moment, just open your hands, like you’re giving a high five, take the pointer finger of your other hand, and trace the hand going up and then down, and while you’re doing that – this is the key – you’re taking deep breaths and concentrating just on that breath as you’re going up. [Inhales deeply, exhales deeply, inhales deeply, exhales deeply] And you can keep going, and this – just that deep breath in and that long exhale can really bring your heart rate down, help you feel more centered, grounded, bringing you back to that moment so that you can be your best teaching and caregiving self.

Treshawn: That’s awesome, Gail. I think you can even share that with parents, too, because we might need a breathing moment when we’re at home, you know, with children, too. So, creating those –

Gail: So true.

Treshawn: Yeah. Creating this inclusive environment for infants and toddlers is easiest when you breathe, of course, and then when teachers and family child care providers can collaborate and communicate with other program staff and service providers, too. For example, you can seek advice from nutritionists and mental health consultants or different therapists – we talked about occupational therapist and physical therapists – in order to provide adequate supports for infants and toddlers. Because remember, we are all in this together. You don’t have to figure out things all by yourself. There’s a network of people out there ready to help. So, with all the supports and resources available, creating this inclusive environment for infants and toddlers can become a team approach.

Gail: Mm-hmm. OK. I cannot believe that we are at the end. So, thank you so much for joining us today. It’s been great to be with you, and before we go, though, we’re gonna leave you with just a few resources that will support you as you create quality, inclusive learning environments for all infants and toddlers you work with.

Treshawn: Yes, that’s right. So, first, we have MyPeers, and we talked about that a little bit in this episode, but MyPeers is a virtual, informal social community for exchanging ideas and sharing resources and even lending support to the early childhood community. So, if you haven’t joined MyPeers already, you can join via the ECLKC, and you’ll find us there in our

“Teacher Time” community. Say, “Hi.” We’ll be posting some more of these videos and sharing some strategies related to inclusion and belonging in your learning environments.

Now, when we talk about apps on our phones, ‘cause we’re always on our phones and our devices, we have a couple of programs that are useful for your professional development. First is the Text4Teachers, and this program sends you two free text messages a month with information and tips and research and resources, all that, to help strengthen and support your teaching practices. Then we have that ELOF2GO. So, we’ve got the ELOF book, but now you have an app for it, and it gives you this on-the-go access to the ELOF goals for children and effective teaching practices. And then lastly is our Ready DLL app. I actually have this on our phone because I teach my kids some Spanish words. But if you work with children who are dual language learners, in this app, you can access resources. You can even learn some key words and phrases. That’s what I use. And discover some implementation strategies as well for children who are dual language learners.

Gail: OK. Love all of those. Love all those apps. And so, I would love to invite all of you to our next “Teacher Time” episode, which will be next week, Treshawn, March 16th. And that will be focused on learning environments for all preschoolers. So, in April, we will talk about learning materials for infants and toddlers, so be sure to register for that as well.