

Discipline and the Influence of Our Upbringing

Nydia Ntouda: Today, for our webinar, we have Ms. Brenda Jones Harden. And I will actually hand it over to her as she will formally introduce herself. Brenda?

Brenda Jones Harden: Hi. Hi, everyone. [Speaking Spanish] Good morning.

This is probably the most important session that I have done for Head Start in a long while. I want to tell you why it is so important to me. One, because I am an adult who was spanked as a kid sometimes with a belt, sometimes with a brush, sometimes with a forked switch as my grandfather would say.

I am also a social worker and a psychologist who has come to believe that the way I was disciplined as a child really was not about discipline, but was about punishment and had its roots in a lot of historical cultural processes that my family still to this day believes are the appropriate ways of child-rearing. We often have major blowouts about this. I'm still being criticized for raising my daughters in the way that I did, even though they came out pretty well I'd say.

I'm going to ask Steve to go ahead to the next. That's all I'm going to say about myself. Let me tell you what I'm going to try to accomplish today in this short time. Honestly, this is a session, to me, that should be going over a three-day period in your program. I'm hopeful that you all will take these handouts, take them back home, and really work with your staff around these issues.

I'm going to try to give a conceptualization of discipline that really does move us away from the way my family thinks about it. I'm going to talk to you all a little bit about what intergenerational transmission of certain kinds of parenting practices, including how you discipline, means for children. Then I'm going to invite you to have a reflective conversation with your peers, with your staff, with your colleagues about these issues. I have some questions that I hope you all can use to get you started.

OK, go ahead, Steve. Let me start. First of all, we always want to ground ourselves in the Head Start Program Performance Standards. And so sorry for this busy slide. I've tried to really cull from the Performance Standards, what are the things that are important for this particular session. I invite you to go to 1302.90C that talks about our standards of conduct. And on that particular segment of the Performance Standards, it encourages us to use positive strategies to support children's well-being and prevent and address challenging behaviors.

Then it lists a lot of must nots, which I won't go through. One of the first things that it mentions is, we must not use corporal punishment. The reason this is important to say is because just because we were raised like I was raised, where spoil the rod – I mean, you have to use the rod to not spoil the child basically. It doesn't mean that we can do those same things with children in Head Start.

We have to always think about disentangling how we were raised. Even if we believe that's how children should be appropriately disciplined, although I hope to disabuse you of that notion before I end today, we really have to understand that this is not behavior that we can use in our Head Start programs.

I also wanted to ring out to you this lovely statement that I use a lot from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. And what it says is, I'm just going to read it verbatim, "Children throughout the world have the right to be raised without violence." And what I'm hoping to convince you of is that spanking is a form of violence against children. OK, next slide.

What I want to start with – and Steve, you can go into the next slide – is a definition of discipline. I love to think about this because it has roots in the Bible. Many of you have heard of the term “disciple” from the Bible and from other religious documents. The root word of discipline is to teach, which is just what we're about in Head Start and child care programs. It's about teaching children, promoting school readiness, promoting positive mental health, all those things that help children develop to be well-functioning adults. We are disciplining every single day. It's about providing instruction and guidance.

On the other hand, when we think about punishment, which some people argue is a form of discipline, I would argue that it's not, because it's not about teaching children. Punishment is about getting rid of behaviors that we don't like. When children throw children down, or fight, or throw the blocks and the block corner, we're trying to get rid of those behaviors. We use punishment to get rid of those behaviors.

I would argue that if you're trying to teach, it's about teaching children what behaviors to exhibit. Not suppressing behaviors that are undesirable. And certainly, in the Head Start community, we don't ever want to use physical force because that is certainly not a way to teach children. Part of the reason that a lot of our families use it, including mine still, is because it does work in the moment. You can – if you're worried about safety and a child is running out into the street, you yank them back and that keeps them safe.

But does it teach them how to be wary of streets with cars? No. You teach them that by getting down on their level and showing them how cars can hurt children, and you really don't want to go outside of that yellow line because that's the yellow line that's going to keep you safe. What happens, and we know this from tons of research, that punishment in the moment does not transfer into lessons learned over time. What works is what Head Start communities do so well, and that is getting down on a child's level and really doing instruction and guidance, and helping them to understand things that really does change behavior in the long term. Next slide, Steve.

Obviously, there are disciplinary practices that are punitive and some that are non-punitive. And the ones that we want to work on in the Head Start community are obviously those on the green side. We want to think about teaching children instruction and guidance. We want to name the preferred behaviors. We want to find – I often say to people I supervise, sometimes it's like finding a needle in a haystack, but you got to look for an opportunity when a child gives

something to another child, or when a child holds themselves really still to keep them from moving around in center time. You could see the kid working.

You're looking for those opportunities to say, like a good early childhood teacher does, "I love the way you are holding your hands in your lap." You're looking for opportunities to say to the child, "This is the behavior I want." Now, that takes a lot more work, and we all know that. If you're around a bunch of kids, it's much more easy to say, "Sit down, stop, go to timeout." That comes out of our mouth quickly. What I want us to do is have the same capacity to have these other things come out of our mouth just as quickly. OK, next slide.

In the United States – and you all know this. It's not just in my – just in my family – there is a lot of use of corporal punishment. Although there is great variability. We do see families more likely to use corporal punishment in the southern parts of the United States. Think about all of our Head Start programs there. You're much more likely to see corporal punishment used in minoritized group. Like I come from an African American family that has roots in the south. They believe in spanking. Let me just tell you. You often see African Americans being more supportive of corporal punishment because it's been historically a part of our culture.

Some anthropologists – African American anthropologists, some African American trauma specialists – argue that one of the reasons it's more prevalent in our culture is because of our historic experience of slavery and Jim Crow, where violence was used against us as a people. We think that that's what you do to keep children in check and in some ways, keeping them safe from the other groups. That's deep, deep, deep seated in our culture.

We have to understand that and respect that. We can't go in saying, "No, no, this is wrong." But what you want to do while you're validating and respecting the cultural piece is trying to have them think of other ways to do it. You also are much more likely to see corporal punishment among families from low income backgrounds which, of course, they are our priorities in Head Start. You often are more likely to see boys get spanked, which has lots of implications for what happens to our boys.

Certainly, we see much more corporal punishment in families that are overwhelmed just by the sheer number of children. As I said, it's much harder to do this kind of teaching as a disciplinary strategy than sit down, shut up, and all that kind of stuff. Think about it. When you got three kids in your house, you're much more likely to say sit down and shut up.

And similarly, when you think about the groups in a Head Start classroom, an early Head Start classroom, you know you're managing so much that it's much easier to do the other thing. What I'm encouraging all of you on this webinar to do is to go back to your sites and really make the other stuff roll off people's tongue. That's what we want to work on. OK, next slide.

One of the things about discipline use in the United States is that it peaks right at the time when we're getting them in Head Start classrooms. If you think about it, we're working primarily with children from low-income families, we're working with a lot of minoritized groups, and we're working for kids in early childhood. We've got this confluence of issues that

really makes it highly likely that the young children that we see are going to experience corporal punishment. But we want to give them a very different experience in Head Start.

Just like Head Start is the way that you learn about your colors, and you learn about your shapes, and you learn about being a good friend, and you learn about how you move through the day, and all those beautiful things that we give children in the Head Start program, we also want to teach them that there's a different way to solve conflict. There's a different way to learn about good behavior, and that is by having adults around you who don't do what's easy, what's expedient, but who really try to teach you something that will last throughout your childhood. OK, next slide.

I also want to say, and this is very, very important, that fortunately, we have seen a slow decline over the last few decades. In the '90s, we were seeing studies that said 90% of American parents were reporting having spanked. This is self-report. Most parents are saying, "I use spank." Look at what's happened in the last few years, that only half of respondents are agreeing with the phrases sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good, hard spanking. And then you see only about 50% of children, young children experiencing spanking.

We know that spanking decreases over time, thank goodness anyway, with bigger kids. But now, we're seeing fewer younger children getting spanked. That is the good news, partially due to some of the advocacy like the kinds of things that have come out from the UN, but also some of the things within our own culture. Like the American Academy of Pediatrics is taking a position against that and really talking to parents in the context of the pediatric visit about alternative ways of discipline. OK, next slide, Steve.

I just want you all to just put in the chat, just share with us for a moment, if you will – I've already shared my experience – what types of discipline did you receive as a child? You could talk about that. You could also tell us a little bit about what types of discipline do you help the families in your programs to use? Maybe some of you might want to share if you had children, what types of discipline did you use with them? Just whatever piece of the question, there are three different ones, whichever one you feel comfortable answering, if you could put that in the chat just for us to know what you all ...

I'm seeing some people were spanked. And yes, picking your own switch. My grandfather would say, "Go out in the yard and get me a good fork and spit – good, fork and switch." Some people were yelled at, some were spanked, some got their face slapped, some who had timeout. A few had positive discipline, but a lot of people here had the same experience that I did and were spanked. And I don't know if you all are having this same experience, but I am having major arguments still with my 80-something-year-old parents about how spanking didn't hurt me.

They continue to say that "You turned out all right, didn't you?" That's what they say to me when I push back about it. Because I had to tell them, "You may not touch my children." That started a whole, oh, my gosh! I cannot tell you how many arguments. OK, thank you. Somebody got their butt whipped. I do understand that. Let's go on.

What do we know about the consequences? Yes, we can say to our parents who whipped our butts, we did come out OK. But what I continue to say to my parents is, I was not unscathed. Yes, I listen to you. I did a whole lot when you weren't looking. That's the part you don't know about. But the other part is, I was not unscathed. What we know, and I've mentioned this, that yes, corporal punishment is effective in the short run. It works when the caregiver is looking at you, when you're not worried about doing something when they're not there.

However, it's ineffective over time. I've been saying to my parents, don't want to know the stuff that I did when you left the house. And thank goodness, you left the house because then I could do all the stuff that I was too scared to do when you were there.

It looks like, particularly for young children, that the outcomes are not so good. Particularly for the little children that we work with in Head Start. Again, if they're getting their butts whipped in their homes, we want Head Start to be a very different experience. We want Head Start to be a place where children don't have to worry about being treated in a way that's physically punishing.

We do know that it leads to externalizing behavior problems like aggression. We want to ask, why is this child so aggressive? Have they learned it from home, et cetera? But it also leads to internalizing problems. Kids who show depressive symptoms, or anxiety, symptoms or even traumatic stress symptoms. We don't want this to be a sequelae of our children's experience of discipline, which is supposed to be to teach them the right behaviors. Next slide, Steve.

We do know that parenting is not something that's static. It changes depending on what's going on. We know that spanking corporal punishment is more likely to be used in certain contexts, like when parents are really upset. We need to think about that for our teachers in Head Start, because being in a group classroom can make anybody crazy. We have to think about when our teachers even are aroused, because that's when you're much more likely to use that as a disciplinary strategy, when there's instability and risk, but also in certain kinds of child behavior.

Obviously, when we are worried about kid's safety, we act. And we often act without thinking because our desire is to keep that child safe. Unfortunately, we use something that helps the child to feel unsafe to keep them safe. We have to think about, what are we going to do – I mean, practice it. What are we going to do when the kid runs out the classroom? We call them runners in some of the Head Start programs that I work with. What do we going to do when a child harms another kid?

Because our first option is to say, "Stop that," and pull the kid when he punches another child but in effect, we're doing exactly what that child has done to another child. Or when the behavior– misbehavior is intentional. We want to take this because we know that that's going to make us aroused, and think about – make it like riding a bike. What are our strategies going to be when this kind of thing comes up?

Now, I do just want to raise some interesting research that looks at low-income minoritized children. There is some research that suggests that corporal punishment in the context of

warmth might get you better outcomes. Think about what this research is about. It's about older kids, number one. Not our little preschoolers. It's about keeping children safe in very dangerous environment. Places where there's a lot of community violence, for example, and you've got an adolescent who is home without you and going out to the streets to get involved in who knows what.

In some of that research, it says that you can get better outcomes for those older children. But again, I want to just make sure you all understand that is for safety reasons for older children. Little kids are not having those experiences.

Yes, they might be raised in communities where there's violence, but somebody is walking down the street with them. Some adult, mother, father, grandmother, uncle, sister, older sister, somebody. It's a very different context that we're talking about. For any of you who know this research, I just wanted to make sure that you understood that. Next slide, Steve.

There are lots of theories – I'm not going to go through all of them – about how we can think about how our upbringing affects our disciplinary practices. But we can think about attachment theory and our internalized working model of what caregiving should be. That's there. We've got social learning theory, which is about what we see, what we model. If our parents spanked us, that's what we're going to use with our own children. Go ahead, Steve.

We also have anthropological theory that says it's a part of a cultural process. If your religion teaches you to spare the rod, you spoil the child, or even racially cultural processes like in my own family that comes out of the African American community. We've got that.

And then we've got this other set of theories that really is about trauma begets trauma. In other words, if we were traumatized ourselves by corporal punishment, whipping our butt, the fork and switch, whatever, there's belt, and the belt buckle, and all those kinds of things that many of us experienced as you all shared in the chat, that we're much more likely to do the same thing with our own children.

Unless we get in touch with that trauma – whether it's historical or intergenerational – we get in touch with it, we think about what that trauma meant for us, we face it squarely, and then we make a decision, as I had, a very intentional decision not to use those same practices with my own children. Go on to the next slide, Steve.

I'm going to – I'm a researcher and a practitioner, so I have to tell you all a little bit about the research. Some of it suggests that, yes, how we parent comes across generations. For us who are working with children in the classroom, there's even research on our own experience of parenting, how that affects our well-being and how that affects how we engage with children in the classroom.

I just want to throw out some of those. I'm not going to go over these slides in detail but just to say to you that our mental health matters. Our relationship with others matter. Our education matters. I really know that a lot of these ideas about discipline were provided to me because I

went to college. If I hadn't gone to college, I would have remained in my community and not been exposed to these other kinds of ways of being. Early adversity, gender, all these kinds of things really affect how we decide to engage children, particularly in this area of corporal punishment. Next slide.

Let's talk about harsh parenting though and physical punishment, and what that means for later parenting. We know that there is this relationship – doesn't mean that it always exists but there is this relationship between, “If I experience harsh parenting and physical punishment, I'm more likely to do that with my own children.” We got that relationship in a lot of research.

However, there are certain things that make a difference. For example, if we know about non-physical approaches to discipline. Knowledge makes a difference. Our attitudes about punitive discipline, whether you get support from others about it, for example, who are saying to you, that's a good way to do it. My parents would be so happy if I whip my kids, but I don't get that positive feedback from them. But I'm OK about it.

The research does suggest that what kind of approval you get around your choices of discipline matters. What does that mean for us in Head Start? We need to be giving teachers so much validation – so much validation about how they are making an intentional decision to do things with children differently from the way they were raised. Of course, if we come from other kinds of risk factors in our background – mental health, substance use problems, many of us, including myself, have that added on. We know that does make a difference. In terms of teachers, the wonderful things that Head Start now is doing around teacher well-being, I think, will certainly make a difference in this regard.

There's some other buffers that we're thinking about. Are we problem solvers? Are we good copers? Are we people who can work on regulating our emotions and our behaviors? Do we have supportive relationships, and do we have educational attainment? My argument is, we know a lot about this from families. We could take these very things and think about what they mean for our families in terms of our family support programs, our family engagement programs, but also in terms of our teachers who are in direct contact with children in the context of the Head Start classroom. Next slide, Steve.

Just a little bit about teacher well-being. This is something that I'm so grateful that Head Start is really, really working hard on. And even in the Head Start Child Care Partnerships, I'm seeing some work around this in our own jurisdiction, for example. The research is limited in this area, but you all know from some of the work that's going on right now in Head Start programs that teacher well-being is related to a lot of things, including the behavior of children in the classroom.

We know that, yes, it's related to all these things like intentions to stay in the workforce, quality of teaching, and benefit from professional development. Most importantly, for the purposes of this session today, teacher well-being is related to child behavior. That's something we really have to work hard on.

We also know that teachers who've experienced ACEs, their own physical abuse, their own emotional abuse, that that can lead to lower quality social-emotional classroom climate. And it is in the context of these lower quality classroom climates from a social-emotional perspective that we see a lot of corporal punishment and other kinds of inappropriate disciplinary practices rear they're heads.

An important piece that I want to reiterate is that all the work that Head Start is now doing on teacher well-being needs to filter down to every single program. We need – particularly, as you all know, in these days of the great resignation where we're losing so many teachers and we're having them doing all manner of things to try and compensate for the fact that we don't have teachers in the early childhood space. This becomes a critical – critical component of our efforts to not have children experience this. Next slide.

We also know that if teachers have experienced ACEs and they experience depression, as a result, they're less likely to engage their children in learning support. Again, just suggesting to us that this focus on teacher well-being matters in terms of the kids' behavior and the quality of the care, including disciplinary practices, social-emotional climate that teachers provide for our young children in Head Start programs. Steve, next slide.

I just had to do this. This is really about schools, K-12. This is not about pre-K. This is not about Head Start. But I just had to put this up here because there has been a lot of work on schools and corporal punishment. You all know very well, I won't get political here, but we are regressing in terms of many of our strides in this country. And I'm really worried about this particular one, given what we know about what this means. We still have 19 states that allow corporal punishment in schools. That is a scary thought to me.

When Liz Gershoff – who's a person who's a psychologist, who's just taken this issue on, I mean, to her detriment sometimes by certain groups. But she is just bound and determined to have American children experience spanking less. When she and some colleagues did a study of young adults in states that allow corporal punishment in schools, 16% of them said that they experienced corporal punishment in schools. I'm not talking about at home. I'm saying in their schools.

Most of them who talked about it said that the school professionals use objects and that it was painful. Now, this is in schools. This is not even in home. Again, we've got to think about, what kind of kids are we trying to put out in this world to hopefully make it a better place? Next slide.

Just quickly, just to let you know one of the other reasons that this research stresses me out, to be quite honest, that boys are more likely to be the victims of this corporal punishment. African American kids, the kids who are the kids that I work with mostly, are more likely to be victims of corporal punishment. And children with disabilities.

Although they did not articulate this in this study, one of the things that I worried about are whether these are children with behavior problems. Again, they are being characterized as children with disabilities because of their behavioral problems. And then they're being treated

with disciplinary practices that are just going to increase – elevate their level of behavior problems. That's a worry of mine.

What Liz Gershoff and her colleagues say that that is a violation of civil rights rules. I completely agree. If boys, African American children, and children with disabilities are more likely to experience corporal punishment in the schools, we are invalidating their civil rights. That's something for us to think about.

And clearly, when you look at this data, school corporal punishment was related to lower GPA, lower sense of school belonging, higher rates of depression – there's those internalizing symptoms – and more favorable attitudes about corporal punishment despite the fact that it had these negative sequelae. Again, here are things for us to think about. We've got many Head Start programs in those states where corporal punishment is allowed in schools. One of the tricky things for us to do is disabuse our staff of the notion that what happens in their public schools should not happen in Head Start. Next slide, Steve.

There are some interventions that have been tried. I will tell you a lot of them that I'm going to talk about are not in this country partly because of our country's real ambivalence about whether we should support or not support corporal punishment. You all just saw my slide about all those states that still allow corporal punishment in schools.

We are really ambivalent as a nation – that's another reason why we're not signing on to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We are really ambivalent about who gets to make these decisions. However, that said, it is clear in Head Start right now that this is not something that we do. That we're trying to give children a very – very different experience.

One of the things we want to think about is the beautiful work that's coming out of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, where they are helping us to think about having trauma-informed approaches in all child-serving systems: home visiting, child care, Head Start, child welfare, every single child-serving system, mental health, that we want to approach it from a trauma-informed way, which means that we don't want to retraumatize children.

My argument to you all is that corporal punishment in the context of Head Start – and I know I'm preaching to the choir, but I want you to take this back and work with people who may not be a part of the choir – that we are retraumatizing children. Particularly children who are growing up in environments where there is community violence, where there is intimate partner violence. We don't want to add to those children's experiences by using corporal punishment and other punitive disciplinary practices in the context of Head Start.

The other thing that I want to say – and again, you all know I'm a Head Start groupie. I can't help it. I am so happy that we now have mental health consultation that's part of the Head Start approach. We can use folks like that who are assigned to our programs, whom we hire, who might be employees of our programs if we're lucky, to really help parents rethink their approach. Just as importantly, to help our staff to understand why they can't knock a kid upside

the head when the kid knocks another kid upside the head. Why? That's not bad. And making it automatic for them to use these nonpunitive disciplinary practices.

That takes work, that takes support, that takes nurturing of the staff from the teacher, to the bus driver, to the lady who prepares the lunches. Everybody has to have this notion that what we're about in Head Start is helping children to be the best that they can be so the experiences they have with us, all of us, are the best experiences that we can have children have. I wanted to start out with that.

I want to also talk about quickly just some of the interventions. I'm not going to describe them in detail. I'm just going to tell you some of the things that we know really work in these interventions. First of all, helping people with knowledge to understand the adverse outcomes that comes from corporal punishment.

And yes, you start with what – just like my parents said to me, “You came out OK.” Yes, some of us did. But a lot of us didn't. You can get people to talk about members of their family who were beaten too much, or too often, or too hard. We can also talk about people who got spanking just like us who didn't really turn out so well. Yes, we might be the exceptions to the rule, but we can also get in touch with ourselves and know, like I say to my parents, “I was not unscathed by that. Believe me, I was not unscathed.”

We also want to make sure that we put this on the table in pre-service education, and that's been certainly something that's come out of the research. I would also argue during in-service education.

We are great in the early childhood field for making people go through professional development. This needs to be a part of our professional development, not just in terms of our professional development days, but in terms of the supports that teachers give during – our coaches give to teachers, our infant mental health people, early childhood mental health people give to family support staff. This needs to be an integral part of everything that we do as we help parents, and families, and teachers, and bus drivers, and the food service people to think about giving children the best context we can. Go on to the next slide.

I do want to say that there's some lovely, lovely interventions that have been tried in Sub-Saharan Africa. I just want to bring some of those up, because as you all can imagine, caning, and beating, and spanking is even – maybe even more prevalent in some of these countries. They have some beautiful interventions that have been done by people on the ground in these countries that have been found to increase staff's use of non-violent disciplinary methods and decrease staff's use of violent disciplinary practices, like corporal punishment. Go on to the next slide.

I also want to just bring up this particular one that really has to do with things like gender equity in some countries. And you all know that gender equity is interesting in Sub-Saharan Africa. Girls are more likely to be victims in the American culture, which might again have to do with how we see minoritized boy children. I'll just put that out there for what it's worth. That

they're more likely to experience corporal punishment in our culture. But the point I'm making is there are ways to help teachers – even if this is an integral part of their culture – ways to help teachers learn not to do it. Next slide.

Just quickly about that one. The percentage of student and teachers who thought teachers should not whip students increased. Again, teachers thinking, “Oh, maybe this is not what I want to do.” The percentage of girls experiencing corporal punishment decreased. This is one of my favorite outcomes, that you saw a decrease in dropouts among both boys and girls. I love that because it's not about necessarily [Inaudible] about children feeling more engaged in their school environment. Go ahead to the next one.

Quickly, if you all again go to your chat box. We are just beginning to do research in this arena. I think we've got a lot about the intergenerational transmission of corporal punishment in families. We don't have a lot about what teachers do, what people in center-based based programs.

If you could in the chat – and this would be helpful to me, to think about what questions do you want researchers to ask, particularly in the context of Head Start? You could give me that. But also, what other ways do you think Head Start teachers and staff's upbringing affects their work with children and families? I've just tried to convince you of things like ACEs and all that kind of stuff, but what other kinds of things would you say really come out in how children are treated in Head Start classroom?

Mental health issues, absolutely. Retraumatizing. Teachers might model the behavior. Teacher beliefs, absolutely. Particularly, if they believe things about trauma. Staff wellness. The authoritative versus authoritarian approach, excellent. Family dynamics, cultural. Disability specific research. Somebody is interested in having us think about that and what that means for children. Communication, listening behaviors. Gun violence, absolutely.

My position is children who've experienced all those kinds of violent encounters outside, we should just be loving them up all day long to try and compensate for that. Teaching staff share information. Positive discipline, good. All staff – self-images of children. Excellent point. That's ...Poor attachments. Excellent, excellent stuff that's coming up. And Tasha, of course, is saying, of course, we need to be more trauma informed. Thank you all for sharing that. Hopefully, somebody will save the chat. Foster care, yeah. Racism, absolutely. I hope somebody is saving this chat, because it's stuff that I could probably use to come up with other research questions.

The last part of what I want to do today – and then I'll go to really some questions and answers. I want us to be good, reflective practitioners. I know you all have heard that term a lot. It is something that we use in the early care and education space a lot now, where we want to have the opportunity to really look deep at ourselves.

I started my work as a clinical social worker many, many moons ago. I remember really not quite understanding why that is so important. I will tell you, well, the capacity to reflect in

myself, to think about how my early experiences of being cared for affect not only how I care for my children, but how I relate to the rest of the world has been life-transforming.

I am encouraging all of you on this webinar to do that for yourselves, but also try and create the spaces for that to happen in your programs, where you're constantly thinking about how who I am, how I was raised, how I experienced things as a child really are alive in what I do with the children in the context of Head Start, but also in my relationship with my peers, my co-teachers, my bosses, everything.

I'm going to put a plug in for reflective supervision in whatever way it can happen. Whether it's by peers, whether it's monthly, whether it's once in a while, give people an opportunity to – as my sister says, put the pen down, or put the toy down, or just take a moment to breathe, to really think about that.

You can do this in the context of learning communities. We're big about communities of practice in the Head Start landscape. Let's do a community of practice around this very issue. How our upbringing is affecting who we are in these programs. But also giving people an opportunity to have some quiet moments. In one program I visited, they had a space where teachers could come who have gotten really dysregulated from being in the classroom, and just go in with quiet music, and nice smells, and places where they can write in a little journal just to calm themselves down a little bit, but to also reflect on how it was that they got where they were.

I also want to say, please, please, please use your mental health consultants in this way. They should not just be brought in to address children with behavior problems. They are there, really that's the spirit of the Performance Standards, to help a program with [Inaudible] think about creating the best social-emotional climate it can.

If you go to the next slide, Steve, what I've done is just given you some questions that you might want to – just to start you out with about culture. Asking people to just – in a community of practice if they're willing, to talk about their cultural background, to talk about the goals of parenting, like is it to be a good person or is it to be a person who lives past 21.

I mean, these are clearly different goals, but goals that help us understand why there are certain practices in a certain culture. Like in my own culture, we are worried about boys living to be age 21. That is a big worry. You ask any mama of a boy child in this country, African American boy child, and that's what she's going to say. Some of the spanking that we see is about keeping their kids safe, so they aren't killed by a policeman.

Understanding that, and validating, and getting it is the first way you start engaging with teachers who might have little boys at home whom they're worried about. You start there, and you have them think about how their cultural norms around child-rearing, around discipline really do impact who they are, but also what they do with children. I've got a bunch of those there, but you all can come up with a million more. Go on to the next slide, Steve.

The other thing I encourage you to do is to have a community of practice or reflective supervision, whatever you want to call it, that helps people to think about their own upbringing. Like when I looked at your responses in the chat, the majority of you talked about being spanked. There were some of you who had magic one, two, three. There were some of you who had positive discipline. The majority of you, as one of you said, got your butt whipped.

What does that mean for us? I mean, again, fortunately, we're seeing the decline over time. But we are the ones who are in the classrooms, who are in the Head Start programs, who are working with families. We got to get in touch with that stuff, reflect on how our own upbringing has affected who we are.

Now, clearly, for me, as I've said to you all, I have made an intentional decision to be different from – to raise my children different from how I was raised. I've had to get my support for that outside of my family. I'm not going to get it from my sisters. I'm not going to get it from my parents. I certainly didn't get it from my grandparents when they were alive. I got to find another community that validates what I'm doing and says, "This is a good thing." I'm suggesting that we can create that space for our Head Start providers.

Here are just some questions to start with. Again, you all can come up with many more. How has the way you were parented affected how you work with children and families? What were the specific disciplinary strategies used by your parents? What did you think was effective, when, and how? Getting in touch with that – having those moments when we can do that will make a big difference for what we do with the children.

Finally, go on to the next one, Steve, to really have questions about discipline. Get deep with the discipline stuff. We're worried about this in Head Start, which is why we're doing these sessions. What types of disciplinary strategies were used with us? When? Did the practices change as you got older? Can you remember how you felt in the moment? That's when I started saying, "Wait a minute, I was not unscathed by this." Was it effective and when? When did you do this secret stuff to get away from your parent's way of thinking and being, and what they wanted you to do?

All these kinds of questions. You all can come up with many more. I've just given you some examples to get the reflective conversation started to really think about. I see people are giving very nice other ways to think about it in the chat that we can also use. Go ahead, Steve, to the next slide.

You all have already done it, but any other questions that you might pose, please put that in the chat box – about culture, about upbringing, about discipline, any of those things that you all can think about. Go on to the next slide.

I'm just going to conclude really quickly. And hopefully, if anybody has any questions that you put in the Q&A, I can answer them. I hope you all are ready to go back and champion this issue that discipline is different from punishment and that discipline is about the teaching that all

good Head Start programs are trying to do. Very different from punitive punishment, those kinds of things.

I hope you all have a sense of the intergenerational transmission of parenting and how that really can affect even our caregiving of children in the Head Start classroom. We're just at the beginning of a learning about that. We know a lot about parenting quality. We're just starting to learn a little bit about ACEs, for example, and what that means for teacher mental health, and what that means for teacher practice. We've got some stuff going on, and I think this research is going to burgeon in the next few years.

And then finally, the importance of reflection. Really digging deep in ourselves, thinking about our own culture, our own upbringing, and our own beliefs and experiences about discipline and how that impacts what we do with kids in the Head Start context. We have a few minutes left if there are any questions.

Amy Hunter: Brenda, I've got some questions for you. Hi, everybody. You are getting wonderful kudos in the chat. It's blowing up. They're all just singing your praises, which is wonderful. I wonder if you have time for a couple of questions in the Q&A?

One of the questions mentions that sometimes teachers dismiss – it sounds like maybe this is from a mental health consultant – dismiss help with behaviors in the classroom even though that's this person's job. She's wondering how to facilitate trust to engage with teachers who might not see these other ways of intervening.

Brenda: Absolutely. We find this a lot in the early childhood mental health consultant world. Because teachers often say, here they come with their psychological ideas. They do not know what it's like to be in this classroom.

One of the things I would strongly argue is, before we open our mouths at all to help teachers to think about something different is to develop relationships with them that are built on validating their experience. When we go in the classroom, we're like, "Wow, I can't even imagine what you're doing. This is a lot. You're trying to deal with a million kids, with a million problems. Boy, this is too much. I don't know if I could manage it." All that validation, validation.

But also what we do is lend an extra set of hands. I'm going to tell you that goes a long way. When teachers are experiencing kids throwing blocks and kids having meltdowns, we say, "Can we help you? What can we do?" And that really goes a long way in terms of what we're able to give. We also do a lot of work at the teacher level. Again, not going in just about what they do with the kids, but about their own well-being. That goes a long way.

What I'm arguing is for take – it's that parallel process. Take care of them first. I do think, one, that they'll do better with the children if you take care of them first. Particularly given that we're not paying them even though hopefully, they'll all be getting these recognition checks

soon. We also are just putting an enormous amount of pressure on them. Take care of them first. Then I think they'll feel better about hearing us.

What I often say to them is, "This is a journey on which you and I are together." I actually put my arm out there and say, "We got to be in lockstep. Help me to understand what is most stressful to you. Help me to understand how I can be helpful to you." It comes across differently than when we come in and say, "Well, here's a behavior plan that I think you might want to use with X child." Do you see? I think it's, again, the process that's so important.

Amy, I'm seeing this thing about guilt and embarrassment. I really feel like it's important to address that. It just popped up. I had it as a nonpunitive approach to – a non-physical approach to discipline. That does not mean guilt and embarrassment is OK. I had separated it out from physical to non-physical. And that was one of them. The reason I didn't bring it up was it is not something that I think we should be promoting. I just had to throw that out there.

Amy: Perfect. Well, I wonder if we have a couple more minutes and maybe one more question for you.

Brenda: Sure.

Amy: And it's about – there's a couple of questions around this vein really, around helping parents maybe think about positive discipline or other ways of disciplining. I wonder if you have – I know you have a lot of experience with that.

Brenda: I used to try and teach parents in parent education groups about positive discipline. I do what I did with you all, have my slide – or back then, I wasn't even using slides. Sometimes I had big pieces of paper, where I'd have different approaches to discipline. I've moved off of that completely. I don't try to be a parent educator, if you will.

I think it's – in that vein, I think it's fine at your Parent Policy Council meetings, at your parent meetings at your site to provide this as a foundation. But I would beg all of you who are working with families directly, either in home-based or if you are a family engagement person assigned to families in the context of Head Start, that you take the families who you know are not exhibiting the kind of nonpunitive, supportive disciplinary practices that we want and coach them.

I just cannot tell you how much behavior change I have seen once we started to use that model instead of a didactic model. You can do coaching in a small group context. You just don't have to just do it in a home-based. I mean, home-base is the perfect opportunity to do that coaching, where you're doing exactly what we're talking about, you're looking for opportunities to say to the parent, "I saw you wanted to knock that child's teeth out of his mouth. Look what you did. You held it together, and you redirected him. You showed him something else. I can't believe you were able to do that. I'm so proud. I just am so appreciative of what you've been able to do."

In home visiting, it's sort of – I won't say easier to do – but the context is right for that. When we have the many cases that the family engagement staff and Head Start have on their caseloads, I would argue for the majority of them, you can bring them to a parent meeting and talk about it. But there is a group, usually about one third of them, that I know you worry about their parenting practices. That group, I would give something different. Do a different experience.

If you can, if you have the time, do some of these brief home visiting things. They've got beautiful, positive parenting management programs that they have. 10 sessions that you can incorporate in the context of home visiting for those families. Or the ones who aren't so high risk, maybe you can get them in for a dinner where you all work on how to be responsive to children when they're acting out.

The thing that we have learned about working with families is that you've got to do it in the moment. You've got to do it when the kid is acting out. You've got to make it more experiential. You've got to support what they do. You've got to validate what they do. And you've got to try to scaffold their behavior when they're having this dinner with you and the kid is throwing their food on the floor. That's when it's time to intervene.

Not to say to the parent, “That was bad, what you did,” but to say, “I know it's hard. I know you want to knock that kid out for dropping all the Jell-O and the juice on the floor. Let's think together.” Again, that we're together – “Let's think together about what you might be able to do that's different.”

Amy: So helpful, Brenda. I know we are here at time. And you are getting a lot of thank yous in the chat. And we want to thank you from the center. And I think Nydia has a couple of comments to close us out.

Nydia: Absolutely. One more time, just thank you so much to Dr. Brenda Jones Hardin for today's presentation. All of this important information. If you have more questions, go to MyPeers or right to health@ecetta.info. The evaluation URL will appear when the webinar ends. Do not close the Zoom platform, or you won't see the evaluation pop-up. Remember, after submitting the evaluation, you will see a new URL. And this link will allow you to access, download, save, and print your certificate.

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