Supporting Preschoolers' Peer Relationships

Marley Jarvis: Everybody, welcome to the second Front Porch webinar of the year. If you are new to Front Porch, if you haven't joined us before, it is a series of webinars for teachers, family child care providers, and home visitors. We specifically focus on preschool-aged children in Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, and American Indian and Alaska Native programs.

In general, we kind of bounce around different topics, but our hope is to introduce you to research about different topics relevant to child development, again, for ages about three to five in those preschool years. Today, we are talking about supporting preschoolers' peer relationships. Things like how children learn to understand themselves and others, a lot of developing social skills. This includes emotions and conflict resolution, a lot of really important stuff in there. We're going to talk about strategies to help preschoolers build relationships, as well as supporting them in peer play with children who might be different from each other. A lot to cover in our short hour.

My name is Marley Jarvis, and I'm from the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning. I'm based at the Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences, or ILBS, which is a partner organization, and is based at the University of Washington. ILBS is an interdisciplinary research institute that is dedicated to understanding human learning with a focus on early learning and the brain. Your learning objectives for the day, to describe how children learn to understand themselves and others, as well as come away with some ideas for how to implement strategies to help preschoolers build healthy peer relationships, which, of course, includes adult support from us.

Just sort of to set us up here, you know, why should we care about children's friendships? Relationships are really central to all of our well-being, including young children. The positive, consistent, and nurturing relationships in our lives that fosters trust and emotional purity. It supports engagement in the classroom or at home. It really supports learning and many positive health, as well as academic outcomes, that aren't just in early childhood but continue into adulthood. We know about a lot of these long visits.

They're backed by a very large and growing line of research that's linking social and emotional learning. Peer relationships fit within that, with overall school readiness and academic success. Another way for us to orient is thinking about where peer relationships fit within the ELOF, or the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. Social-emotional development is one of these five social domains. It's right there. If we're looking, we're in the preschool domain. If we zoom in on that section, just for preschoolers, we can see clearly that relationships with other children is a key part that's called out specifically here in the ELOF. Just to give you a little peek, there's a lot that's covered in that in the ELOF, but just a quick peek of some of the indicators for those goals here.

For example, that a child develops friendships with one or two preferred other children, or that a child uses basic strategies for dealing with common conflicts, such as sharing, taking turns, and compromising. There are a ton of great tips and strategies, as well as goals and indicators in the ELOF that we don't really have time to go into today. I'm just going to encourage you can go and check that out. When we look at it, here's the preschool social-emotional development subdomains again, we have relationships with other children. Look at those other subdomains, as well. You have relationships with adults, emotional functioning, and sense of identity and belonging. Those all, of course, are going to impact peer relationships for preschoolers, as well.

I encourage you to explore the ELOF on your own. I've included a link to it in the resources section, and that's at the end of your viewer's guide. If you go and find your viewer's guide, and you scroll to the bottom of it, there's a list of a ton of resources that I've gathered for you, and one of them is going to be the ELOF. I encourage you to check that out. We're thinking about relationships between children. What is the adult's role in supporting peer relationships? You're setting the stage for successful relationships and peer play, and you're doing this through the emotional and physical environment of a program.

In part, you're modeling how to establish friendships, how to create a caring community, how to take turns, how to manage problems creatively and fairly. Adults are also serving as a safety net. They help step in when needed to help keep children safe, and I mean both physically and emotionally safe. Although we're focusing on relationships between children, I just want to mention that your relationship with individual children and in a group setting, if that's the type of program you work with, that really matters as well.

You can help model for children all these various aspects of peer relationships that they might be learning or working on, and modeling is a key part of learning for them, taking turns of conflict resolution, things like that. For you to model and for that to be effective, you have to have a solid foundation in your relationship with that child. For home visitors, you can model aspects of peer relationships for parents at home if other children are present and remember to use those group socialization events.

Some of the key roles of adults in fostering and supporting children's peer relationships include fostering a sense of belonging for all children. You're helping plan activities and environments that are supportive of your relationships for kids to get to play together. Remember for this last one, that's important for kids to get to play together with children who might be different than them. It includes children with disabilities or suspected delays, or for whatever reason, children might be having challenges initiating play, or sustaining play, or even just social interactions with their peers.

There's a lot of reasons that a child might experience this. They might be brand new to the program, or maybe even to the country. Maybe they're from a different background, maybe they speak a different language than the peers that they're trying to interact with, or maybe they just have a shy temperament. We really need to adjust and be responsive, including some children who may have experienced trauma. We have to be responsive to kids there. Part of that is we're helping keep all children safe. Remember, we're that safety net.

Sometimes children are just working through things just fine on their own, and they're having kind of some healthy conflict resolution. Just to note that this is sort of a great place for professional development with staff and for home visitors to work on with families. Adults are also doing a lot of modeling. Initiating play with a new friend, also modeling, and talking about and recognizing emotions, supporting conflict resolution, and problem-solving. This is a really big one. This comes up a lot. Let's talk about this a little bit more.

Learning about, recognizing, understanding emotions, it's a key part of building friendships and peer relationships. However, researchers who do classroom observations in center-based preschools, which includes Head Start programs, report that teaching staff on average spend very little time of the day directly talking about emotions with children. This is an area we can all grow in. One way you can kind of think about it is trying to think about talking about emotions, like in this photo on the right, perhaps something just happened, a big emotion came up.

You're using things that happen throughout the day to talk about emotions. On the photo on the left, you're building in chances to talk about emotions throughout the day, outside of any kind of problem that arises. Why is this important? Research shows that emotion-focused teaching practices, is what that study calls it, is a great and successful way to build young children's social-emotional development, including relationships with peers. Home visitors, you can also model this for families.

For example, you can support families in communicating to their child that it's okay to feel sad, rather than to say stop crying, for example. You can also kind of talk with them about talking about emotions proactively, such as through book reading, as well as in the moment when those big emotions do come up. We're going to watch a quick video, and it shows some examples of teaching practices that incorporate conversations around emotions with young children. We'll watch it, and then we'll come back and chat a little bit more.

[Video begins]

Speaker 1: All right, Sierra. Are you excited, Sierra? I see the big smile on your face. That shows me you are excited. Are we ready? Are we ready to have Brittany place the necklace over Sierra? Drumroll, please.

Kimberly Montgommery: We're watching. Go ahead, Chase. Let us know, buddy. How's it going? Sad and loved, mad and happy. All four of those things.

Kimberly: I had one other boy who was distraught when his mom left this morning, and he cried for 30 minutes. He doesn't normally do that. Their family's going through a lot of stuff. When it was his turn, he came up, and he did happy, mad, sad, and loved. He pointed at all of them. I thought, Chase, that's right on. That's exactly right. You're feeling happy because we're having fun. You're mad because you got left at school, and you didn't want to be here. You're sad because you miss your mom. But you know you're loved, and she's going to be back. It was just this beautiful little connection that I'm feeling all of these things right now.

Kimberly: Let's do the binoculars and see how she's feeling.

Child 1: How are you feeling?

Kimberly: Loved. Awesome. Why are you feeling loved this morning? Tell me why.

Child 1: Making a castle.

Kimberly: What makes you feel loved?

Child 1: Making a castle.

Teacher 1: Okay. What do you think?

Child 2: Mom.

Kimberly: Your mom makes you feel loved? Oh, I love it. Thank you for telling me that.

Kimberly: I have a new girl who hasn't used any words in my classroom yet. Today, she pointed at loved. And I said, oh, when do you feel loved? Not really expecting to get her to answer. She said, "mom," really loud. And it was really the first time I've ever really heard her speak out loud.

Teacher 2: Yeah, he jumps over the moon. What happens? He looks like he's going to run right into the house. How do you think he's going to feel if he runs into the house?

Child 3: Sad.

Teacher 2: Sad. You know what? What else could he feel? Look at my face. How do you think I feel?

Child 3: Mad.

Teacher 2: Mad. Or how about, have you ever heard the word furious? Furious means really, really angry. Do you ever get really, really angry?

Child 3: Sometimes I do.

Teacher 2: Yeah, sometimes you do. Sometimes I do, too. Not very often, though. Usually, I just get mad. The child could be sad, mad. He could even be furious.

Teacher 3: They can name the feelings of other people. I think it's kind of made them a little more empathetic, too. It's like they know how the other children are feeling, and they kind of feel it with them. Because a lot of times when we're reading books, that's one of the things I like to ask them is, oh, look at their face. How are they feeling? Or like in the book today, someone was crying. Why do you think he's sad? And so, they're coming up with reasons, you

know, why they think he might be sad and then talking about how he can feel better. Maybe he could try taking some belly breaths, you know?

[Video ends]

Marley: A lot of good suggestions in there. Some of the things that they were working on is labeling emotions. They were also using a lot of visual cues. You could see how that was helpful, especially with some children that were working on verbal communication. Also using books to discuss emotions. These are all great strategies. For these examples, they're all filmed in classroom settings. I think these are a lot of useful suggestions to use in family child care and home-based programs, too.

If you have a program with mixed ages, pretty common in family child care programs, you can think about ways to incorporate all children in these conversations together. Older children can reflect on what younger children might be feeling in a moment. They can also model different emotions for the younger children, too. Home visitors, you can help families develop those sorts of visual cues charts and feelings charts if they're interested. You can suggest appropriate books or ways to incorporate talking about emotions into books that they may already have.

Another important thing here is simply allowing the time for peer play. It's an enormously important, perhaps even just subtle, part of us supporting peer relationships. For programs, is there time in the day devoted to peer relationships, you know, to peer play? Or is it all adult-provider-child interactions and structured time all day? For home visitors, ask families about their beliefs and desires for their children for peer play, including their siblings. We want to build in peer play time into group socialization events, model-making observations, you know, for parents of what you see happening as children interact and play.

If you have a mix of children of different ages, you can think about ways to support peer interactions across those different age groups in safe ways. Another quick note is that ample time for peer play is an issue of equity. We know from research that educators sometimes perceive children of color incorrectly as being behind in knowledge or academic skills needed for school. Time to play and to be active is often limited and then replaced by more teacher-directed activities. All children deserve and need time to build friendships in peer play.

Before talking more about your role as the adult, I want to first center us in the idea that children have social lives and naturally form social relationships. We want to give them that space and that freedom to develop relationships without our constant intervention if it's not needed. We'll watch a lovely video example here. I'm going to invite us to watch a sweet interaction between these three boys as they play together. They take turns and banter. They're helping each other out. They're commenting on what they're building. They're sharing laughter and shared interests. I want you to think about as you watch, you know, what might have gone differently here if an adult had stepped in to join them.

[Video begins]

[Inaudible]

Child 1: P-P-Power Rangers.

Child 2: Hey, I was going to say that first. That's really good.

Child 1: P-P-Power Rangers.

Child 2: I'm going to be the brown Power Ranger.

Child 1: I'm going to be the white Power Ranger.

Child 2: The brown Power Ranger.

[Video ends]

Marley: I really like that. They're very sweet. It's kind of both special and ordinary. They're engaging around shared interests and thinking about Power Rangers. They're laughing about something and building off of each other. You might not have caught that. But they're also building up each other's identity. At one point, one boy tells the other, hey, you know how to do that when he's kind of struggling with something. Of course, there's the camera person there. But they're doing a good job of sort of being a fly on the wall and letting them sort of forget that they're there.

How might that interaction have shifted if the adult was stepping in, "Hey, what color is this," or "How many blocks do you have," or "What does this remind you of?" I think this is also a really beautiful example of Black Boy Joy. If you haven't heard of that term, it's about celebrating and loving blackness and making sure that black boys can be happy, whole, and vulnerable children in a learning space without being treated like an adult. It's an essential part of building peer relationships. They're able to be themselves and be kids in that space, and it's part of that peer play.

I wanted to share with you a resource here. There is the citation at the bottom, and it's called Supporting the School Readiness and Success of Young African American Boys. We'll talk about it a bit later. I just wanted to mention it here as well. To return to what we were talking about in this interaction, about no adults being present or obviously interacting with them, other than the film crew. Thinking about when do we want to step in? When do we want to join them? Let's think a bit more about it. What is the adult's role in peer play? How do we know when to step in? Here's what we're going to reflect on a bit more.

First is observe them. Observing children helps us know when it's a good time to interrupt, when it might be a good time to interrupt to encourage language use or ask questions or extend their thinking. When there's a peer interaction going on, like what we were just watching, we might decide not to interrupt and just see what they do together and where their

interaction might go. That's a magical time of building peer relationships. It's also a good idea to do lots of reflection on what your own expectations of peer interactions are.

What do you like to see and what are you comfortable with in seeing in play between children and why? Some things that come up often is in risky play or big body play or loud play. Race does play a factor in here, especially with big and black male children. For example, we might not be as comfortable when they're playing loud or playing big body play. We need to really ask ourselves why does that make us uncomfortable? Or perhaps, boys dressing up as princesses, sometimes that might make us uncomfortable. We have to ask why.

Are we wanting to step in for the right reasons? I had a really great conversation with Mike Brown, also at the University of Washington, on a Front Porch from 2022 on outdoor play. I've linked to that in your viewer's guide if you want to check that out. That's a really great place for reflection on our own teaching practices. Play and social interactions are enormously cultural. Background from the family to the individual preferences, temperament, that really varies what play shows up as. It's our job to keep all children feeling like they belong and that they're safe and free from bullying or neglect or other forms of physical or emotional harm.

We do need to step in sometimes. But we should be continuously doing reflection and learning about our own views on peer interactions to help us reflect on when and how we should intervene. This is a really great place for professional development. For home visitors, what are parents and other family members comfort level with conflict and how do they manage that? I'm going to give you an example of when you might want to step in is in providing support for peer play for children with disabilities so you can help them build relationships with their peers.

We have another short video here on that. Really all children deserve and need opportunities to develop relationships with their peers. This includes children with disabilities. In this video, there's a teacher at a child care center who's providing direct support to Luke, who's a child with down syndrome, as he interacts in free play with his peers. You can pay attention to the ways that she encourages Luke and his peers to interact and provide support for that.

[Video begins]

Teacher 1: Come on down. Did you push Lola?

Child 1: Yeah.

Teacher 1: Okay. Make sure that it's important to raise that safe hand. I got it, Michael. Thank you. If you want to talk to your friends, you can tap them on the shoulder. You can ask for a high five. You can say, let's play chase. You want to ask Michael if he'll play chase with you? Say, let's play chase, Michael. Run! Watch out, Yuri. They're running.

Are you playing chase too, Lola? Lola's playing chase too, Michael and Luke. Hey, cutie. You're such a great friend, always helping Luke find a nice place to play. You're such a great friend. Yeah. Luke, great job being safe while you're playing with Michael. Nice work. No pushing, no pushing. It's a part of the game. You can say, Luke, you can push me.

Child 2: Push me. Push.

Teacher 1: That's okay. Now you can push. That's okay if you're pushing someone down the slide. That's a good sign. There you go. Very good.

[Video ends]

Marley: There's a lot that's going well here. In general, the environment appears to be accessible for Luke. He can run, he can get to the slide and the play structure. He can interact freely with his peers there. The teacher is providing specific adult support so that Luke is not just playing off by himself, unless he wants to, but he is interacting directly and freely with his peers. If we're thinking about things that might increase inclusion here, we could think about introducing some varied materials, maybe some loose parts, some sensory experiences.

Towards the end, he was showing he was really enjoying pushing his friend down the slide, which was fine in that context, but we could add in noticing that interest, maybe other things that he could push, like a swing or a wagon. Also social games can be a wonderful way for us to provide adult support in children with disabilities to interact with other children. It's also great to have some space for solo play so they can play alone if needed. I

had a much longer conversation with Jennifer Fung, who's an inclusion lead here at the National Center for Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning in that same 2022 Front Porch webinar on outdoor play. Go and check that out if you want to rewatch the full webinar. Had two great guest experts. Another role for adults we sometimes need to step in is in conflict resolution and problem solving. Adults are really setting the stage. Sometimes we don't even need to step in if things are going okay and we've kind of modeled and set the stage well enough in advance.

Sometimes we don't really even need to step in. There's a lot of modeling going on. We also provide the materials. We model behaviors. We also model language. Some of these problem-solving kits can be really helpful. I've linked to some in the viewer's guide if you're wanting to check those out more. Behaviors, that's things like taking a deep breath to calm down, et cetera. The language that I mean here is even modeling just how to say that something hurt your feelings so that you don't like that or examples of how to respond.

Sometimes it's enough to have modeled problem-solving and resolution skills and then see how children work through things on their own. Setting the stage also means we're providing a physical environment that is supportive of peer play and problem-solving. Part of this is creating a community of care. I want to share a video that's a really nice example of a teacher helping peers work through conflict in a supportive way.

[Video begins]

Teacher 1: I know. I see it in your face. Look at your eyes. Your face is so sad. Your lips are going down like that. It makes you very, very sad. It's exciting to have a house like this. I know. It's very sad. Look, she's thinking about a plan. What did you say, Megan?

Megan: I said we can keep room.

Teacher 1: We can keep room. How would we do that?

Megan: We can scoot over.

Teacher 1: We can scoot over. And what happens when you scoot over? Who's going to come?

Megan: Maybe Aiden.

Teacher 1: Aiden. That is a good plan.

Megan: Chase and Deborah that I don't like.

Teacher 1: Well, look at you. You're calming your body down. I can understand your words, Sarah.

Sarah: You can stay in here and I can paint it. How about that?

Teacher 1: What a great plan. Wow.

Sarah: We're going to do it when the third term is over.

Megan: We'll do it together.

Teacher 1: We'll do it together, but that is a great plan, Sarah. Look at you.

Sarah: After the third term, it's going to be our turn with the house. We're going to paint it for them. That's how we protect it.

Teacher 1: What a great friend you are.

Sarah: Nobody else can get in.

Teacher 1: Look at that. You're opening room for your friends. You're sharing the house and you're saying we paint the house for them. They'll be so happy about it.

Sarah: Chase! You can actually come in here until we're done painting the house.

Teacher 1: Oh, what a great friend. Look at Chase.

[Video ends]

Marley: I love that video. To recap what we saw there. The teacher really did a lovely job of describing the child's body language. She talked about the emotions and helped calm that child down first. She made guesses about how the child feels to help her vocalize things because she was pretty upset and not able to vocalize them very well initially and helped her feel seen and heard. She didn't try to just immediately make her share or solve the problem when that child was in peak distress. That's a really key point.

Then, the teacher also helped facilitate the peer problem solving. She was helping bring out the ideas between the two children. At the end, she gave a nice recap. The teacher gave some specific praise around their problem-solving strategies, and she described the plan, which is a really nice way to reinforce and model these things for young children. The teacher is also building a sense of belonging for these children here. They both feel safe, they feel heard, and they can then problem-solve together in this environment. Building belonging in a program is such a big part of facilitating peer relationships. We're going to spend some time talking about that here next.

Thinking about identity and belonging is so key for peer relationships because all children really need to feel like they belong, that they're safe from physical and emotional harm, and that their cultures and their languages and their families and identities are affirmed and honored and celebrated. This is essentially the foundation for friendships and relationships to bloom. I see building belonging in programs as having two main facets.

This first one is about affirming all children's identities, both in and out of our programs. The second main facet of building belongings in programs is supporting a shared sense of belonging and identity within a program that children and staff share in. We sometimes call this a caring community. The video we just watched is a lovely example of the second facet of building a shared sense of belonging within a program. Let's dive into these two ideas a bit more here. Starting with this first one, affirming all children's identities, both in and out of our program.

This might mean things such as race, home language, ability, gender, ethnicity. This means ongoing work to counter stereotypes and bias in all our program settings with equity as the goal. It's hard to make friends and build healthy, strong relationships when we feel threatened or not seen or like we don't belong. This is key. We're talking about the preschool years here in Front Porch Series, and the preschool years are just this incredible formative time in young children's identities. They're discovering who they are. They're discovering what that means. They're also looking outward. They're discovering how others see them. This is a huge topic, ongoing work for us all.

I wanted to point you to a few resources that can help in this aspect of building belonging. The first is the Multicultural Principles for Early Childhood Leaders. This resource is divided into ten chapters, and so each chapter presents one multicultural principle. It's got research and guidance to support that principle. It also has questions, discussion activities, and it's also available in Spanish. I'm excited to share that the Multicultural Principles have been revised and will be rolled out probably late this summer, early fall. Keep an eye out for this. It's a wonderful and great resource.

The second one I wanted to highlight, I already briefly mentioned this, is this new resource called Supporting the School Readiness and Success of Young African American Boys: Strategies for Culturally Responsive Strength-Based Practice. I'm super excited about this one. It is packed with wonderful content, tons of good research in there, a lot of references that you can then go check out. It talks a lot about building relationships and promoting social-emotional development. A lot to check out in there.

One more great resource for affirming young children's identities. It's called Healthy Gender Development in Young Children. It talks about variability in gender norms and gender identity and expression and has lots of great tips and, again, lots of research summaries, which I really value. These are all pretty big resources. They're hefty. I encourage you to check them out in your own time. They're linked in the viewer's guide in that resources section again. You might check them out and build them into your professional development in your program if that's part of your role.

We were talking about that first facet is about supporting the individual identities of children. Now the second facet is what we're talking about, building a shared sense of belonging and identity in a program. That way it's something that all children and staff in a program can share in. This is also important. We sometimes call this a caring community. This is a research-backed way to support peer friendships, even when children are different from one another or maybe they come from different backgrounds. More about that soon. We'll talk more about that.

Home-based programs can work to build in the shared sense of belonging and community with families at group socialization events. Think about how to build belonging with families in home visits too. Parents and other family members can think about what words or actions make their children feel safe, included, and like they belong. Some more resources. It's a big topic. I want to leave you with some things to carry forward this work. There's a 15-minute in-service suite on creating a caring community, and it's got a ton of resources attached to it. I think some of the handouts will be helpful for all program types, talking about how to model and promote positive social behaviors.

I also want to direct you to the IPD, or the Individualized Professional Development Portfolio. If you're unfamiliar with it, it's a learning management system, so it can support you in professional development on your own time. All the courses are free. One course I want to draw your attention to is called Building Belonging is particularly relevant and a great resource for what we're talking about here. You can even get CEUs, or Continuing Education Units, if you finish a course.

I said we would come back to talking about building relationships between children who are different from one another, more similar. This is such a key topic, so we're going to come back to this. This comes up a lot. In-group preferences is sometimes what this is called. Children develop particularly close relationships with others in their same groups. For example, children on a sports team might develop special friendships with others who play the same sport. Or children who commonly form close friendships with others who share their age, their race,

their gender. This is where the term in-group preferences are. It's what scientists tend to call that.

Forming social groups and close friendships is an important aspect of children's social-emotional development. It's a central part of feeling like they belong. However, sometimes in-group preferences and peer relationships can make adults uncomfortable. Staff might ask, why are all the black kids sitting together? Or why are there only ever groups of girls at this activity table? It's a great place to pause, reflect on why that's making us uncomfortable. This is another wonderful place for staff reflection and professional development. Because we know that having connections and friendships with people who we share identities with is not a bad thing. In fact, it's quite the opposite.

Research shows that children feeling like they belong to a group is linked with their self-esteem and overall social skills and relationships. We want to support this. We can ask ourselves, are children all the same in a group because children are actively excluding other children? Or is it because they feel like they don't belong elsewhere? Then, we do need to step in. While it's natural to form in-group preferences and gravitate towards people who are similar to us, our brains also naturally group people, sometimes by stereotypes. This typically does begin to happen between the ages of three and six, so right in this preschool time.

It's also important to facilitate a sense of shared belonging between children of different races, language backgrounds, cultures, family traditions to help counter this. There is something key I want to call out, is that when prejudices, bias, stereotypes are present, we all have them, we do need to be ready to navigate this to help protect children who are negatively impacted by those stereotypes. We're going to talk about some strategies here.

We're thinking about supporting diverse peer relationships across stereotypes. We know that we all have biases. We know that they can be unconscious, so we might not even be aware of them. We also know from research that they are present as early as preschool. Is there anything we can do about them? Can we reduce biases in ourselves and others? Again, with this goal of helping support peer relationships with all children.

There's a landmark study that I'm going to share aspects from, from Patricia Devine and her colleagues in 2012. She discovered some key parts of reducing your biases is about being aware of them and consciously working on them. Her work has been repeated in many studies since. It's been well replicated, so I feel good about the results. This work is mostly on adults, so I'm going to translate some of her research ideas into suggestions appropriate for Head Start preschool age programs.

Some tips to reduce bias and support peer relationships across groups. One, when a stereotype happens to come up, pause and talk about it. Don't just pretend that you didn't hear it or quietly move on and hope it doesn't happen again. Research shows that pausing to address stereotypes or bias things that children and staff say is a key part of reducing bias. Talk about it. Help children understand what is and isn't true about what they just said. Then you want to replace the stereotype with examples of non-stereotyped people of that group.

You can help them bring to mind someone of the group that was just stereotyped that doesn't fit that stereotype. Perhaps somebody they know, someone from a book or TV show, and just imagine and talk about them, reinforcing positive, non-stereotypical examples of the group that was just stereotyped. Do this calmly with curiosity, not shame. Just talk about it. Make it part of the culture of the program. Research shows that not addressing stereotypes and bias when they come up, this actually increases bias thinking in young children and adults alike.

Home visitors, if it feels appropriate within your relationship with families, this is also something you can share with parents and caregivers so that they can understand the goal of why it's important to talk with their children about stereotypes when they come up. I'm going to show you an example of a video about something like this coming up in a Head Start preschool classroom setting. In this video, one child references a stereotype, turns out completely unintentionally of calling an Asian American person a banana. The Asian American boy is a little upset by this, and the other child is confused as to why, and you can see how the teacher talks through this misunderstanding. We'll discuss a bit more after we watch it.

[Video begins]

Teacher 1: Adava is Filipino American. So is Isabel.

Child 1: Teacher, I'm going to draw a banana.

Teacher 1: Yeah, I think you might be Vietnamese American.

Isaiah: Yeah. Banana?

Child 1: I don't say banana.

Isaiah: I thought you said banana.

Teacher: But how did you feel when he said that?

Child 1: Anxious.

Teacher 1: It made you feel a little anxious? Yeah, I feel a little bit anxious, too, when people make jokes about my ethnicity.

Isaiah: No, I didn't joke.

Child 1: I hear you. I heard you say banana.

Isaiah: No, I thought he said banana.

Teacher 1: Oh, Isaiah, you thought he said that?

Isaiah: Yeah. I didn't joke.

Teacher 1: Oh, you didn't joke.

Isaiah: It sounded like banana.

Teacher: Hmm.

Child 1: What did you say?

Teacher 1: It sounds like that might have been an accident.

Isaiah: Yeah.

Teacher 1: You were trying to clarify what he said. Oh, how do you feel now, knowing that it was an accident? Maybe in the middle?

Child 1: Yeah.

Teacher 1: Cool. Isaiah, I'm glad you told him that that was an accident. That's a good idea.

[Video ends]

Marley: One thing that you'll notice, the teacher was very calm throughout that, didn't have judgment, helped tell them both through that. Misunderstandings happen all the time. I mean, we're all susceptible to a lot of the societal messages that may be told about the various groups that we belong to. This is a good example of engaging all children in problem-solving from that lens of equity.

Feel free to reflect on any situations like this that maybe you've encountered and how you've handled them. You're always welcome to share with us in the Q&A kind of how that went or what strategies you used. This is another excellent area for ongoing professional development and conversation with staff. We're always practicing having these conversations and working to get better. I've given you a lot of great resources in the Viewer's Guide to dive into this a bit more.

We've been talking about some of the research-based ways to support children in having diverse peer relationships. One key strategy is addressing stereotypes directly, which we just covered. Then another from research is helping children see people from other groups, whether it's other races, ethnicities, whatever that might be, as individuals. What this means is talking about things that make people their own person, not just a member of a group identity. This is a great place for identity-affirming stories and books with characters from different cultures, abilities, genders, and so on.

Make sure that your program is rich with stories that show the diversity, the humanity, and the individuality of everyone. Don't only feature black characters in stories about sports, for example. Give everyone the opportunity to share and imagine what researchers call individualizing information or the details of our lives that go beyond group identities, things

that make us individual humans. We can have children think about what a character's favorite food for breakfast might be or if they have a pet.

Practice taking the perspective of another person, especially people who may have different identities than you, another place that you can practice with books and stories. Address any stereotypes that might come up here. Then you want to support lots of opportunities for engagement with people who are different and celebrate our differences. The goal here is that we want quality time spent together over time, not just a one-time thing. This is how relationships and real strong, pure friendships are built.

We can do a lot of facilitating and modeling, talking about our differences between people and celebrating and affirming our identities and what makes us special, what is part of our story. All children need this, but minoritized children may have had especially harmful stories told about their identities that need buffering by these sorts of positive sense of self and group belonging that we can help provide. In thinking about building friendships across groups, we've talked about addressing stereotypes directly and individualizing information. Number three, this building a shared identity across groups.

Children in our program or in a group socialization event, they might be coming from all sorts of different backgrounds, experiences, home cultures, and that's a wonderful thing. We want to talk about our differences and celebrate them, but we also want to build a group identity that all the children and staff can share in and connect in and use it as a springboard to build those relationships. How do we do that? Shared experiences over time within a program, along with those routines of the program culture, maybe in this center we greet each other with a special song or in this home we take care of each other. There's a lot of wonderful ways to build that kind of caring community that I'm sure many of you are already doing.

There's an interesting strategy from research that I wanted to share quickly. There's this whole field of research that has looked at how moving together in time and space. I mean physically moving together, like dancing, especially in unison or in synchrony. Moving together can help improve social interactions and increase what they call prosocial behaviors, things like cooperating, sharing, or helping. This one study was looking at preschoolers, about four-year-olds, and they found that when preschoolers swung on swing sets in unison rather than off like this, they cooperated with each other better in a puzzle and other challenges right after, which is amazing to me.

Scientists think that moving together, especially in unison, can help people feel more alike or similar, and it builds a shared experience. That is so key in building peer relationships. These kinds of activities are a really great thing to add to programs, including home visits with siblings. Look for activities that encourage movement in unison, maybe learning a dance to a favorite music, mirroring games where one child leads and another, or even a small group has to mirror their movements. These are great ones.

For children with disabilities, think about adding in various sensory experiences that can be experienced in unison with their peers. Can children splash in water in a rhythmic way together, or can you try touching or tapping their body, if that's okay with them, in time to music with their peers? There's a lot of ways to use this strategy to build a shared sense of belonging in your program. We're just about out of time, but I wanted to share a few last things here with you. We've been talking about building relationships, not only with people who look and act like them, but with people who might be different from them as well. It's such a key part of what children can learn and benefit from our wonderful programs.

I did want to touch on this last hot topic about the COVID pandemic in terms of the pandemic's effects on social relationships for children. There are two good resources here that can maybe help you with any questions that you still might be getting from families or staff. They come from zero to three, though many of them are relevant up to five as well. There's been a lot of stressors for children and families and staff throughout the pandemic, and that certainly plays a role in children's peer relationships. There's been a very direct impact on peer relationships that for most young children, the pandemic has limited opportunities for children to interact with their peers for at least some part.

The takeaway here is that relationships and social skills take time and practice. Many children have had limited ability to do so in the past few years. You might be seeing some of the effects of this in your program as children may be struggling to form friendships or interact with their peers. What's important to know is that children can practice these skills. With your help, they can build these social skills and their peer relationships again. It just takes adult support and practice. These resources have some great suggestions for ways that you can practice with them.In summary, what we practice and what we do with children on a regular basis matters. Modeling is such a key part of this right now.

Things like how to initiate and sustain interactions with friends, talking about emotions, sharing, a lot of the things we've been talking about. Work on those moving and unison activities that we just talked about to boost feelings of belonging and prosocial behaviors. While many children may need some specialized support to build social skills after having such limited opportunities to do so in the pandemic, all children still have the capacity and the potential to practice and build and sustain meaningful social peer relationships now and in the future. You are really a big part of helping make that true.

To wrap up and summarize here, we know that building and maintaining peer relationships is a positive and important aspect of child development. It's a key part of school readiness, however you want to look at that, academic success, and it's just part of health and wellness overall. Adults play an important role, including modeling, talking about emotions, and conflict resolution, and by building a caring community and a culture of belonging in our programs.

Adults are also providing direct support for all children to form relationships with peers, which of course includes children with disabilities or suspected delays, and with children who just might be different from themselves in any way that that shows up. Just a reminder that preschool-age children are going through a remarkable period of identity formation between

ages about 3 and 6, and they are learning so much about themselves, who they are, where they fit into the world, and they're looking outward to their peers and the people around them to reflect back to them who they are and what they can and can't do.

We can help all children gain skills to facilitate relationships with people who might be different from ourselves and to feel confident and good about their identities and their sense of self, which is really that first step towards building skills for positive peer relationships that benefit us for life. With that, we will be back for the last Front Porch of the Year in September, on September 7th, and we will have more research and practices to share, and we're going to be focusing on inclusive play for all preschoolers. We hope to see you then and thank you so much for your time and your attention and for everything that you do on behalf of children and families.