

Responding to Persistent Challenging Behavior as a Leader

Vanessa Maanao-French: Good afternoon and welcome to our Education Manager webinar, Responding to Persistent, Challenging Behavior: The Leader's Role. I'm super excited to be joined by my friend and colleague, Dr. Gail Joseph, and my name is Vanessa Maanao-French. We are both with the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning. You may find that you've heard talked about this or been in webinars with this same topic, and that's because it is so vitally important that as a team we're connected, we're synergized in terms of our approach. Today, we're going to focus on you as an education leader.

Before we get started, I want to be sure to give a little bit of pause, so you have time to download the viewer's guide. Super important information embedded within, and it follows the content that we're going to share today, and there are places for you to put in your own reflections, your notes, circle some things you want to come back to, and resources at the end. We only have an hour with you, but there are resources you can go into more depth just for yourself or with your team.

In terms of what we want to do today is we want to discuss those persistent, challenging behaviors that you may be experiencing in the classrooms that you support, in the family childcares, or maybe hearing from home visitors who are bringing stories back from their home visits. We want you to use this time to share your strategies with each other. We have a phenomenal team behind us, not literally, but online, who will help us push out all of the ideas that you want to share with us in the Q&A widget, and you have been super good at using that Q&A widget.

We encourage you to do that throughout and to also pose your questions. We're going to try to save some time at the very end for some questions that you may have for us specifically, but always know we can revisit those questions on MyPeers as well. We're going to start off by talking a bit about staff well-being and the impacts of stress on the ways that educators interact with children. We're going to focus in on the behavior equation, which if you've joined the teacher time webinars will be very familiar with for you, but we're going to take it from a leader's perspective.

Hold on tight for that. About conversation, about developmentally appropriate practice, and where our expectations may be hitting the mark or missing the mark. And we definitely want to spend some time with a focus on equity and thinking about how our practices may or may not be equitable for children and where our implicit biases slip in. And then finally we'll wrap up with a resource spotlight, again to leave you with more things than we can give you in an hour. I'm going to turn it over to you, Gail, to tell a little bit about what we mean by persistent challenging behavior.

Gail Joseph: Absolutely. When we're talking about challenging behavior, we're not talking about kind of some lower-level attention-seeking behaviors that perhaps are well addressed with just some developmental behavioral guidance, but we're thinking about repeated patterns of

behavior that really seem to interfere with or perhaps put a child at risk of interfering with their optimal learning or engagement in relationship building, really in friendship building with peers and adults. That is what we're talking about is this real persistence around challenging behavior.

What we want you to do in the Q&A is in one word — difficult sometimes to come up with one word, but in one word do your best, one word, to describe the feeling that comes up for you or your staff when addressing these persistent challenging behaviors. Let's see, it's starting to roll in. We're wanting to see what is that one word that comes to you, that one feeling word around challenging behaviors. “Frustrated,” “dread,” great word. “Frustration, frustration, overwhelmed, frustration, exhausted, hard, frustration, stressful, scared, exhausting, frustrated, frustration, drained, stress, anxious.”

I'm feeling anxious as they're coming in. “Exasperation.” I can see these are on the tip of everyone's tongue because, or their fingers, because I think that this is a real happening in programs every day. “I'm tired, feeling sad, feeling discouraged, stressful, uncomfortable.” Absolutely. I think right now I just want to validate those feelings that this is not different than when we ask anybody else around these feelings what's coming up. I also just want to think about how it must be to come to work every day and feel these things, anxious, exhausted, frustrated, feeling stressed.

We're going to talk a little bit about some strategies to address this and help support staff that are experiencing some of these feelings. It was interesting that the word exhausted came up more than once in that list of feelings. This is some research that is what you know intuitively, we have research to back it up, that there is a feeling of emotional exhaustion is what we're seeing it called in the literature, sometimes we think about it as your burnout, but this idea of emotional exhaustion.

What we know, that when teachers and leaders are feeling those uncomfortable feelings on a regular basis, that contributes to what we call emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion, unsurprisingly, is attributed to, kind of causes some decreased capacity in supporting children's development. That only makes sense. You're feeling stressed, you're feeling tired, you're feeling overwhelmed, all of those feelings that you listed, and then a child engages in more challenge behavior, or another child engages in challenge behavior, it becomes really difficult to support all children's development.

It really becomes difficult to deal with children's challenging behaviors. That if you think about any kind of stressful event that you're bringing with you into work, and then a child engages in challenge behavior, we see that it's really difficult to be calm and think about that most effective teaching strategy at that moment. What we also know is that when you're feeling overwhelmed or stressed, you're experiencing depression, that you'll see children's challenge behavior as perhaps worse than it is, too. We also know that comes into play, that I might regard a child as having a lot more challenge behavior than somebody else might.

The way that I deal with that is different than if I was not seeing that kind of excessive challenge behavior. Then, not surprisingly, and my guess is that you've experienced this too, is that this emotional exhaustion is also related to staff turnover. I'd actually be interested to see people put that in the Q&A, if that's something that you're seeing as a reason that maybe you're experiencing some teachers leaving your program. Because if you're feeling like it's related to this kind of idea of emotional exhaustion, it'd be really interesting to see. The other thing that that we always like to think about, not only is that feeling, but thinking about what are the behaviors, not children, but what are the behaviors that push your hot button?

To help teachers become familiar with what are the behaviors that push their hot buttons because that is one of the first steps to being good at supporting children who might engage in some challenge behavior, is to understand what are the behaviors that I really have a difficult time with personally. One of the things that we know is that my hot buttons might be really different than Vanessa's hot buttons. It's important that I know that like, oh, it's when children tease other children, that's a behavior hot button for me. But I can do okay with whining, but maybe Vanessa's is whining and something else is something that she can tolerate.

I think that it's really important for us to understand kind of what our hot buttons are. And then I think another important piece to this is that we understand the relationship between that hot button and the feeling I have. A feeling is this kind of involuntary reaction that's elicited by an environmental event. A child engages in a behavior, and I feel frustrated, stressed, all those words that we came up with. I get this feeling, and feelings are related to thoughts and related to behaviors.

If I get this feeling of being stressed or frustrated because the child engages in a behavior that pushes my hot button, I might start to feel like, oh, that child is doing that just to cause a bad day, or that child is doing that just to get me, or that child is too difficult for me to have in this classroom. The thought that I'm going to have leads to the behavior. If I'm thinking that way, how am I going to behave when I'm interacting with that child? The place that we have this kind of magic moment to intervene with is how we're thinking. Yes, there are behaviors that push hot buttons, and you have those uncomfortable feelings.

And now let's use that uncomfortable feeling as a kind of a warning signal to check in and say, now, how am I thinking about this? And can I change the way I'm thinking about this? One kind of magical shift in thinking that I like to encourage teachers to have been to go from thinking, "oh, they are pushing my hot button," and now I'm thinking "this is going to be a terrible year. This is going to be the worst year I've had because of this child and their challenging behavior," into thinking, "wow, I am going to be challenged to grow as a teacher this year."

I'm going to be challenged to grow as a teacher and to really embrace that growth mindset and to use that kind of hot button and that feeling to think about growing as a teacher. And if we can get there and to helping and supporting teachers to think about this as a challenge for you, to think about how you can change things that might really support that child, that makes a huge difference. But in order to do that, we need to calm down. I'm going to send it over to Vanessa.

Vanessa: Thanks, Gail. I just love that idea of having those magical moments where you can really think about your behaviors and how they impact children and kind of recalibrate, calm yourselves. We've seen this slide before if you joined us at a previous Educating Manager webinar, and certainly if you've joined the Teacher Time webinars. I'm going to try to do my very best Katie Miller and Becky Sugrim impersonation of talking about this hand model visual of the brain. You can do this along with me. Nobody's watching you.

Feel free to join along with your hand. If we think about the brainstem being right about our wrist and the inner brainstem is the palm of our hand, the amygdala is our thumb. And if we put it together on top of our palm, now we have our limbic system. And our limbic system helps us to respond to stressors when we perceive a threat, it jumps into action. And oftentimes we need that. We need to escape danger; we need to be sure we protect ourselves or those around us.

It can serve a purpose. But when it is a perceived threat, or if it's a stress that is short-term, typically what happens is that our fingers, which are actually our cortex and prefrontal cortex, come down and they help us to regulate, to problem solve, to reason that this is short term, this is a minor stressor, it's going to be okay, I'm stuck in traffic, that person cut me off, but that's okay. Real life things that happen, but we engage our prefrontal cortex and we calm ourselves.

But to Gail's point earlier, what if we have educators coming into a learning space, and they've already flipped their lid, meaning that they are experiencing stress, and their limbic system is fully engaged to help them to mitigate the stress, but they're just hyper-aroused. They're walking into a classroom with a flipped lid, and they encounter a child who also has a flipped lid. Now we have what could be a disaster happening between these two with flipped lids. And what we know is that the children need us to co-regulate, to practice those regulation skills.

It's up to us as adults to be able to find the magic in that moment, to think about what is happening, how am I responding, engage in those regulation skills that we pick up along the way as adults. I'm going to not step into my classroom yet. I'm going to take some deep breaths, and I'm going to work my way back to here, so when I go into this classroom, I'm my best self, knowing that I could encounter a child who's here, and it's my job to be here and to help them do this.

We just want to come back to this idea of flipping our lid, to normalize that feeling that you have, but also to take advantage of the opportunity to learn from, to recognize those signs. And it can also happen in terms of greater context. Things can be building up for a teacher. I want to take this idea of flipping our lid into an example with a teacher. Meet Alex. Alex has been a teacher in a Head Start classroom for about four years. He was actually hired just before the pandemic for a few months. He had the taste of a classroom. And then the pandemic happened. Everything shifted. Classrooms closed down.

Alex had to learn a new way to be a teacher of Head Start children. That included being completely virtual for a set of time, then going to hybrid, then closing down, then coming back

to hybrid. We all went through that roller coaster of getting back to fully in-person. And his program is now fully in-person with a fully enrolled classroom for the first time this year. And as a supervisor, let's just pretend you're Alex's supervisor, you've noticed some shifts in what's happening in his classroom. The beginning of the year, things were clicking. It was great.

Transitions were smooth. But now you've noticed things are not quite as smooth. Going from outdoor play to lunchtime is chaotic. Kids are everywhere. It's worse when we go from lunch to nap. Already a struggle. But it's chaotic. And the kids seem to have forgotten all the rules and the routines. And the assistant teacher in the classroom kind of pulls you aside and said, you know, I used to plan with Alex and now he doesn't let me. He says it's faster.

He just does it on his own and he'll tell me what we're going to do on Friday and then we'll just jump in and do it. And then she also confided that she saw him crying in his car one morning before he came into work, and she didn't know how to address it. Holding all that about Alex and knowing that his classroom was a bit chaotic, you can kind of envision some of those behaviors that may be happening, especially at transition. We want to think about what may be happening for him.

I apologize that first bullet is hard to read. I will read it to you. Here's some more things about Alex to know. He hasn't had a consistent teaching partner in over three years. He's frustrated that he doesn't have a rhythm to his teaching that he felt like he had before and he's feeling like he's failing. And that came up over and over again in your comments about feeling exhausted, feeling defeated, frustrated. That's what's happening for Alex and the joy of teaching that he used to have is gone.

The question we have for you is if you know these things in context, these stressors that are happening for Alex that you may not hear from him directly, how would that change your attitude about supporting him? And what might be those unmet needs that would help him to close his lid, to help him to be able to be in the room, the full self that he wants to be? You can tell he wants to be a joyful teacher. Based on what happened in the fall that he can have a classroom that's just humming, and the kids are fully engaged.

Here is a question we'd love for you to wrestle with in the Q&A and we'll patiently wait for your responses. What would you do to prioritize supporting Alex, knowing his backstory and some of the context that's been happening for him over the past couple of years? Again, what would you do to prioritize your support? We can see those coming in. "Regular check-ins," yes.

Gail: Love that idea. It's what you do for children, like, let's check-in.

Vanessa: That's so simple but powerful, Karen. "Ask and listen."

Gail: "Do some observations," maybe you can find out what exactly is kind of troublesome. I love that. Great. "Self-care." "Food."

Vanessa: Food. Don't discount food.

Gail: Oh, didn't listen. Yeah, that's coming through loud and strong. Also, that idea to be able to observe and provide some feedback.

Vanessa: One more time, "supporting" "mentoring." Love that. "Positive encouragement." I love that somebody said schedule time for reflections. It's not just like, we have this moment now, but it's like, we actually are going to build this into the schedule that you're going to get some time for this.

Gail: Yes, dedicated time. Because it's important.

Vanessa: A future support group. And then there was something about a roundtable. Things are coming in so fast.

Gail: They disappear.

Vanessa: Yeah, they're disappearing. And there's so many great things in here. I love that idea around a future support group. Both to kind of share and validate those things. And then, let's help each other out.

Gail: Let's swap some strategies. What works for you that I haven't tried yet, maybe?

Vanessa: Yes. "Days of appreciation." Okay, we love that. That's all recognition. Oh, this is neat. We could just sit here and watch for days.

Gail: Yeah. We should have just asked this question and then turned it over.

Vanessa: Yes. But do please have them keep coming in. Because what we will do is we will pull them all together and put them on MyPeers. You can see all of these strategy ideas that came from this webinar. Don't let us stop you if you want to contribute more. And I think your ideas resonate with what is on this next slide about how leaders can help staff. And that is to help them to recognize those thoughts and feelings as signals.

What do I need to pay attention to? Have those magical moments where you're like, okay, this is something I need to pay attention to and do something different. And also, to ask for help. This can be a tough one. Sometimes we think that asking for help is a signal that I don't know how to do my job. It's a signal that I'm not competent or I'm not confident in what I do. But in reality, we are wired as human beings to want to help each other. And actually helping each other makes us happy. If you want to make somebody happy, ask for help. But we need to normalize that asking for help is a part of how we do business.

We talk about responsive relationships being that we're all in this together. And if staff believe that, then there's no shame in asking for input or to have a thought partner from across the hallway, or for two home visitors to compare notes and be like, this went wrong. How do you do it? And then taking some time to learn and learn. And that came through your suggestions as well for what you would do to support Alex; stepping back, observing, learning, coaching, mentoring. And then the other amazing strategy is to be strategic and really think about using

the behavior equation. With that, I'm going to toss it to Gail to talk about the behavior equation.

Gail: Absolutely. One thing I'm thinking about is that the behavior equation, and we often think about that in terms of supporting young children, and you'll see that you could also use it to think about supporting adults as well. Let's talk about the behavior equation. First, let's talk about why challenging behavior might be persisting.

Remember, we're talking about some persistent challenging behavior. And we believe that challenging behavior persists because it works for the child because the child gets a need met by engaging in challenging behavior. And usually, working for the child means that they get access to something or someone. A toy, or sitting by someone special, or someone's attention.

Or it is to avoid or escape something or someone, something that's too hard for me to do, something that's boring, something that I don't want to do. Those are usually pretty simplistic. But it usually kind of comes down to this, I either am trying to get something or I'm trying to get away from something as a way to think about behavior, the function. We also know that challenging behavior communicates a message.

It's usually communicating, I want something, or I want to get away from something. And that message is usually challenged behavior can be communicated when a child maybe doesn't yet have verbal language skills or an augmentative communication system to be able to communicate what it is that they want. And it might also be used when a child might have verbal skills but does not yet have social and emotional skills to be able to get that need met in a different way.

When we think about any kind of behavior, actually, we think about it in terms of the form and the functions probably very familiar to you. The form is really what the behavior is. The form is I might be using my words, I might be using my hands and hitting, I might be kicking, I might be saying please. Form is just what the behavior is. And then the function is the reason or the purpose of the communicative behavior. I want something, I want to get away from something in its most simplistic form, we're thinking about it in that way.

Oftentimes, when people are struggling with children with challenging behavior, they'll come to me or other people, or they'll come to you, and they'll just give you the form. I have a child that fights a child that gets a child that is disengaged, goes, and sits by themselves, whatever. They're just telling you the form usually because that's what's presenting to them. That's what's pushing a button maybe.

What we really need to do in order to develop an effective approach to supporting that teacher and for that teacher to support that child, or that home visitor to support the child is to think about the function. We really need to understand the function because otherwise, no matter what we do, the child is going to persist perhaps in challenging behavior. The behavior equation that's probably familiar to you is we think about as the ABC.

The antecedent, what happens right before? What's the situation? What's the demand? What's what happens right before that activates that child's behavior, the challenge behavior. Then the B is the behavior. And here, it's the form of the behavior. It's talking, screaming, hitting, whatever the behavior is. And then the consequence is what happens after. But it's not just what happens after. But what happens after that actually kind of stops the challenge behavior.

If a child is asked to come to circle time, that's what activates it, that's the antecedent, the behavior is that they start kind of screaming, tantruming, that's the form of the behavior. And then the consequences, the teacher says, "okay, they can go. They don't have to stay at circle time, they can go someplace else." If that consequence being released, if you will, from circle time, stops the challenge behavior, the child just wanders off and is no longer engaging in tantruming, then we can really discern what the function is.

That function is likely that they were engaging in that challenge behavior to escape circle time, or to avoid having to sit at circle time. If the teacher said, "oh, they can go. They don't have to stay at circle time, they can go away," and the child's challenging behavior persisted, maybe it got a little bit more activated, then maybe the function is to get the teacher's attention, that that's why they're engaging it.

You really want to think about what that consequence is that kind of stops the challenge behavior, if you will, because that helps you understand what the function is. If you think about the antecedent, or the activation of the challenge behavior, the behavior, and then the consequence as being what we observe for, a behavior support plan is pretty simple. And that is prevent, teach, respond.

We think about what currently activates the challenge behavior, we want to think about what can we do that could prevent the child from responding to that activation? Could it be as simple as a room arrangement change, that might be helpful? Could it be something like, I'm going to start circle time with a song I know that child loves, or I'm going to use a prop at circle time, that is a character the child loves. That's a prevention strategy that might stave off their desire to leave circle time.

Teaching is to teach the child what to do instead, if you don't want them to hit or scream or kick, what might we want them to do and to really consider where the child's developmental skill level is. If the child is only using one-word utterances, but using challenging behavior to communicate a message, we want to maybe teach them to just say mine or my turn. We don't want to teach them to use a multi-word complicated sentence yet.

We think about where the child is developmentally and teach something that they can use right then. And then the response is instead of the consequence responding to the child's challenge behavior in a way that gets that need met. Instead, we're going to think about how we're going to respond when the child uses this new replacement skill. And we want that new replacement skill to be as effective as the challenging behavior was. Otherwise, they're going to just use the challenging behavior. They're pretty smart. They're just going to use what worked all the time.

We need to make sure that that new replacement skill like saying mine, or I need a break, or please works every time for a while. And then we can teach them a tolerance for delays, as we call it. But we also want to say, how are we going to respond when that challenge behavior persists. And the trick here is to help the teacher not respond to the challenge behavior in a way that gets their needs met. But instead to redirect the child to maybe use that new skill that they're learning.

That is the behavior equation. And that is a way that we can support teachers and perhaps do the observations ourselves as leaders to help create a good, effective behavior support plan. Now, you can find some ABC data collection and action planning forms that are available to you and available to educators to use, educational staff to use. It's pretty simple.

As a leader, we want to think about how can we support educational staff to use these? How do we support them to use to collect data in a busy, bustling room, or during a home visit? How can we figure out a way to provide scheduling, extra support, materials, and resources to be able to do that? Maybe it's video in the classroom, and then sitting with the teacher after and actually completing the ABC form as a way to do that.

Vanessa: We did have one question that came through, Gail, and I wondered if you wanted to address now. And the question is, "what if it seems like the behaviors are happening for no reason?"

Gail: That is such a great question. What I'm taking from that is that it seems like the behaviors are just kind of erratic, and we can't find anything that's happening necessarily in the classroom, or in that setting, the environmental setting that is activating it. Sometimes when that happens, when behaviors are feeling kind of erratic, another thing that we look at is what's called a setting event.

Something that happens before we are even with the child that kind of sets that child up to engage in some challenging behaviors that sometimes doesn't set them up. Let's say that a child is up all night, because they had an asthma attack, and they come to the classroom, very, very, very tired, they haven't slept very much, they didn't feel very well. And then while they normally would be okay to wait and take a turn at their favorite activity, the computer, on random days, they seem to kind of push the child off the chair and engage in challenging behavior.

It feels like there's not a pattern to it. But really, what the pattern might be is a setting event. We can also encourage that's where communication with families is really important to understand. Did they have a good sleep? Did they not? Did they start a new medication? We also had a situation when I was a Head Start teacher, where a child, it's very random, that they would be at circle time, and they would take their shoes and socks off and throw them.

And I was like, "What is going on? Are they sitting next to someone? Is it what we're doing at circle time? What is going on? Is it for attention?" And we couldn't really figure out what it was. It actually turned out that they had started a new medication, and one of the side effects was

itchy feet. Having that communication with parents and teens. Hopefully, that gave you a little bit of information out there.

Vanessa: That's super helpful. Thanks, Gail. Yeah, sometimes, to your point, the antecedent isn't in our space. It could happen on the bus ride in. It could happen as a child's getting on the bus. It could mean that breakfast didn't happen this morning. Going back to flipping our lid, that child's lid is open, walking in the door. On that note, a poll question. We're curious if you use a data collection and behavior plan similar to what we've described.

We're going to invite you to participate in our quick poll. Yes, for sure. Absolutely. You're not quite sure, maybe you are. Or not yet. I see some answers in the Q&A widget as well. Let me go over to the results of our poll. It's a bit mixed, but strong. There's 60% that yes, you are. There's 17%ish and then the not yet. I like the not yet. See, we're leaving room to try something.

Gail: I love that.

Vanessa: I just want to quickly, there was one question about if you need to have a BBA or be trained in ABA, applied behavior analysis, to be able to do a behavior support and I just want to say no. Anyone can do that. They're hard to implement, but they're easy to kind of come up with. The antecedent, behavior, consequence, prevent, teach, respond. Excellent.

We'll have those resources for you as part of this webinar, but we can also pop them on to MyPeers as well. We can all do this. Another question for you all to consider and share. How do you support education staff to prevent and respond to challenging behaviors? Especially curious for those who are maybe in that not sure or not yet category, what you might be doing instead. Yeah. We'll give a little bit of pause to add your answers.

Gail: While answers are coming in, I want to say that in the most effective behavior support plans that I have seen, the prevention column is the most filled. That's where you have the most options. You can think about setting a predictable schedule in a picture format. You can think about visual reminders. You can think about using the child preferences and embedding those throughout so that the child's level of engagement increases. You can think about peer support. There're so many things that we can do. And you can use multiple ones at the same time. Prevention is really big. It's really key. Because then teaching and responding, our choices become a little bit more limited.

Vanessa: Yeah and as you bring that up, Gail, it makes me think about the special episode that the team, that Teacher Time did this summer that really focused on how do you create that environment. There're so many great strategies in that webinar too. We'll add a link to that in MyPeers too. It'd be a great one to revisit really at any time, even though we did it at the summer as like a prep. It's great to revisit at any time, especially if you have new staff. It could be fantastic. We always onboard with that webinar.

Gail: Yeah.

Vanessa: I'm not just saying that because I think it's amazing.

Gail: Yeah.

Vanessa: But it's amazing.

Gail: That is a good idea.

Vanessa: We're seeing lots of things rolling.

Gail: So many things.

Vanessa: We'll pop those back out. Visual supports are being added. Having a behavior specialist, that's fantastic.

Gail: Absolutely. Know that when staff have access to a behavior specialist, mental health is important. Their stress goes down and their ability to implement these behavior support plans goes up. Thinking about accessing those coaches with specific skills, skills in the pyramid model, conscious discipline, lots of great things coming in. Thank you.

Vanessa: And again, we'll push these out so you can see all of these ideas. Maybe some will be new to you to be able to look at a little bit closer to see if they're a good fit for your program. I'll also add them to MyPeers as soon as I can. Not tomorrow.

Gail: Okay. Yeah, okay.

Vanessa: We want to shift gears just a little bit and talk about developmentally appropriate expectations of behavior in young children. When we do that in Head Start, we love to reference the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework or the ELOF. It is, especially for new staff, I would say it's great for them to learn what our expectations are at different ages so that we stay in the realm of not expecting too much of children and always being sure to offer the right amount of support.

The ELOF is a fantastic training tool, but also an ongoing resource when planning for what happens in your classrooms. The other one I wanted to be sure to mention is CDC's Milestone Tracker. It comes as an app. This is especially helpful for home visitors. They may already be using it already, but it's great because parents can also have it. Even if not a home visiting program, it would be great to share.

Center-based staff can go out and talk with their parents about what's happening and have a shared language about expectations for children's behavior and skills. And I wanted to pause for a little bit on two of the subdomains that we have within the ELOF. The first is a child managing their emotions and thinking about our expectations for infants and toddlers and then our expectations for preschoolers.

We are expecting that our infants and toddlers are beginning to learn new ways to comfort themselves and to respond positively when they are comforted by a familiar adult. And the emphasis here is that it's with the support of familiar adults. They're not ready to fly solo on these skills yet. It's always with the support of a familiar adult.

And when we think about those older toddlers and we start thinking of them as little preschoolers, no, they're not. They still need so much support. And when we think about the preschoolers expressing their feelings and looking to adults for assistance, these are emerging skills that still need adult support. It's with increasing independence, but again, not independent quite yet. They're still learning these important skills.

Gail: Absolutely. This is so helpful because I think that we get so many requests for supporting children with challenging behavior and so many requests everywhere from all over the world. I think that a lot of these behaviors are developmentally appropriate. They're just developmental behaviors. They are young children increasingly becoming more independent with expressing their feelings in ways that are appropriate to the situation.

If we're not expecting that for 60 months children in our educational settings right now are learning to do that. And so that kind of that magic moment for a teacher too might be like, like, okay, they're engaged in this challenging behavior because it's developmentally appropriate. And my work here, my challenge is to learn, is to help them learn ways to do that. And that really shifts someone's experience.

Vanessa: Yes.

Gail: If they know that, like, hey, this is every educator's experience because every young child is learning this in our presence, that can help.

Vanessa: Absolutely. Let's do one more quick example because I think it's super helpful. And this is about managing actions and behavior. Again, tied with emotion, thinking about the child's actions and behaviors. Our infants and toddlers being able to follow routines or to manage short delays. Again, this is happening with the support of familiar adults. The toddler breaking down because they just can't wait to go outside and they're like, I don't want to put on my coat, I just want to go.

They still need the support of adults. And when we think about our preschoolers, also, it's still with increasing independence. They're only beginning to understand the consequences of their behavior. Let's hold on to that. They're just beginning to understand the consequences of their behavior. And I think often this goes back to what you said before about this child's doing this to push my buttons. That's not a connection that they are making, but it's a connection that we as adults are making.

And when we think about managing behavior and their actions, a child with a flipped lid really, really needs our support to come back into some co-regulation space, to be able to make some choices, to be a problem solver, to be able to move on. But that takes us as adults as well. I'm

hoping this kind of focus on kind of where children are at developmentally is helpful for staff, because sometimes it's that recalibration of our expectations that can make all the difference.

Gail: Absolutely. Because if somebody is feeling overwhelmed and stressed, it might be because they have a really different expectation.

Vanessa: Yes.

Gail: That they think young children should be able to do all of these things without any support or without any struggle at all. And yet here, I mean experts all over the country, developed this ELOF. They're agreeing that young children before kindergarten are really still learning this, and educators, that's one of the best things you can do is help support young children to learn these social and emotional skills and understand that a lot of its developmentally appropriate.

Vanessa: And I think, too, about staff who may be changed to work with a different age group. I was a preschool teacher last year.

Gail: Absolutely. Now I'm working with toddlers and my lens is preschool. And now I'm expecting things my toddlers just aren't ready for. Yes, this is a great reframe. And if this is helpful, please take it and run with it.

Vanessa: That's right. Now, it's so important when we're thinking about anything that we're doing to focus on equity. And certainly, we see this come up a lot when we're thinking about supporting children with challenging behavior because we know that some of the outcomes are very inequitable in terms of who is getting access to support and who is instead being expended and expelled. We know that that has been very inequitable.

We want to provide some moment to pause and think about how can we focus a little bit more on equity. And one of the ways that we can do that is a really nice kind of 3R strategy is to encourage educators to, when they're kind of dealing with some persistent challenge behavior that might be beyond what is developmentally appropriate, that we want to review, reflect and then build some resilience. The review is kind of several things we're thinking about when we're reviewing.

One thing I'm going to review and think about is, "Does this child have access to all of the things that we understand are supportive of young children." "Do I have a trusted relationship with this child?" I think so much in the ELOF, so much of it was with a trusted adult, a familiar adult. "Have I built a trusting relationship with this child?" And we know that positive relationships with young children are built by these small positive experiences, these small moments, we think about them as deposits in a piggy bank.

Repeated positive interactions build a positive relationship. "Do I have a positive relationship with this child?" That is one thing to think about. I often think about that kind of the uncomfortable feeling I get when a child has pushed one of my hot buttons, that a child's behavior, I should say, has kind of activated one of my hot buttons. One of the things that is

really hard to think about at that moment, but a really important thing to review is, wait, have I built a positive relationship with child and what can I start with in this moment to build that positive relationship?

That's really hard to do because I'm kind of feeling stressed, but I want to remember that I can change the way I'm thinking and the way I'm thinking is going to be, can I build a positive relationship with the child? Because one of the things we know happens when children exhibit behaviors that an adult finds challenging, is that the adult will engage in avoidance behavior. They actually don't interact with that child as much and the only interactions they have are to try and control their behavior, which does not build a really positive relationship. That's one of the things that we want to think about when we're reviewing.

Does this child have access to all of these universal strategies that we know are really important? Then the next thing is to think about reflecting and to reflect on my own values and thoughts and feelings about the behavior, and to think about where my own cultural background, upbringing, the way I experience parenting, the way I experience teaching, is that kind of influencing what's happening here in a way that makes their behavior seem more challenging than perhaps it is.

Was I raised to think that every child should sit at the lunch table until everyone is finished and then excused altogether? But somebody else, a child that's coming from a family where when they're done eating, they can leave and go engage in something else. Is the child getting up and leaving and my expectation coming into conflict? That's really causing me to think that is a challenge behavior when it's not. Right, that can be a big thing. And also, to reflect on my expectations for young children and where are those coming from?

And I have this great example of this story. I was once at the zoo and there was an early childhood educator that was on a field trip with all of her preschool class. And I was there without a preschool class, but I was observing. And there was clearly a little setup for them to enjoy their lunch at the bottom of this hill. The educator is coming over the rest of the hill with the children following. And one child runs ahead to get to where the lunches are. And in my moment, I kind of tense up because I'm thinking, well, if I'm the educator, I'm wanting them to be behind me. But instead, what this educator says is, "that's right, Jordan, lead the way."

Gail: That's brilliant.

Vanessa: It's brilliant. Encouraging this child. And I just thought, oh, why would I have thought that children needed to be behind me? Was it around safety? Well, that wasn't really very unsafe. But it just made me think, reflecting on, wow, what expectations do I have and behavioral expectations do I have where I'm kind of creating some more challenging behaviors than might actually be there. That's a kind of reflection. And then the resilience piece. And the resilience piece, we've kind of talked about that. What are my strategies I can use when my lid is flipped if you will?

But thinking about, how am I going to build some resilience here where I can have those feelings, that when a behavior kind of pushes my hot buttons, I can have those feelings, but I can use that feeling as a signal to myself to calm down. And then what strategies do I have to kind of build that resilience and to be able to calm down? And if any of you have tuned in to Teacher Time, Teacher Time often has a strategy, or every time we have a strategy in the All About You section that provides a lot of practical strategies that might be helpful in an educator kind of building that resilience there.

Gail: This is a great opportunity to reflect and with our focus on equity, to really spotlight Black boys in particular. And what we know from studies is that Black boys are nurtured less and disciplined more. And they are expelled and suspended at higher rates than other children. And I just think about the impact that has on a child's building sense of identity, how that impacts a family's sense of connection to a program, if their child is being disciplined more and nurtured less, and just the long-term considerations for that young Black boy. Who will nurture me if not my teacher?

Vanessa: Absolutely.

Gail: And that's just hard for me to swallow. And then the other that I wanted to bring in for us to consider is adultification. And this is when we see young Black boys as older than they actually are, and therefore less childlike than their white peers. We attribute sometimes the size of a child to age absolutely inappropriately. And these young Black boys deserve to be playful and joyful and expressive in their full selves.

And yet adultification pulls that back from them, where we are expecting from them beyond the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, behaviors that are unreasonable for their true developmental age. Just a little bit of time for you all to think about these two biases that happens for these young Black boys, that they are disciplined more, nurtured less, and that we adultify them and don't allow them to be fully childlike, and how that may play into some of these behaviors that we are perceiving from young Black boys in particular.

Vanessa: Absolutely. This is so important. Many things as leaders that we can implement to support educators to be more aware of this, to reflect on their own implicit bias, and also to look at the ways that when we're collecting information about program quality, around all kinds of observations that we're making, that we can bring that to somebody's attention as well. I mean, the thing about implicit bias is I'm not aware of it.

Gail: Right, you don't know.

Vanessa: I'm not sure that I'm having that feeling. So important. And for those that have been following us with the five Rs of that space for reflective dialogue, where you can be open and have these conversations that can be challenging to have. Quick question, and you can just pop a quick yes or no into the chat, because the information that we've just shared with you comes from a guide that is new on ECLKC, or ECLKC, or ECLKC, depending on where you're from. But

it's the Supporting the School Readiness and Success of Young African American Boys, and it's a collection of strength-based practices, and it's fairly new on ECLKC.

If you have seen it, downloaded it, let us know. It is new as of last year on ECLKC, but it's built from a guide that was developed in 2014. And if that information was interesting to you or information you want to bring back to your team, please, please, please, I encourage you to go on to ECLKC and find that guide. It is wonderful. The other resource to spotlight is that Teacher Time special episode that I gave a little shout-out to earlier. It is phenomenal. It's a little bit longer than our normal webinars. I think it may run 15 minutes-ish.

But that is because it has these 10 amazing tips with strategies that you can implement today, incorporated into that webinar, and that is available on ECLKC. And if you have been following Teacher Time, it's been a whole season has had this focus. There is a series for infants and toddlers and a series for preschoolers. These are available on Push Play and available on ECLKC. Please check those out and share them with your teams. A couple more resources for the Supporting the School Readiness and Success of Young African American Boys would be the webinar series. They've had one so far.

There will be three this year, and the next one is coming up in June. Be sure to sign up for that one because they do go into depth on the strategies that are embedded in the guide. It would be absolutely worth your time to join that webinar series. And then there's a video that we have used many, many times in webinars and in different resources, but it is a great video for your staff, especially new staff if they have not seen it yet. And that is a quick — I think it's five, ten-minute, video with Dr. Walter Gilliam talking about implicit bias and the impacts on preschool expulsion and suspension.

Check that one out as well. And more resources, more resources, more resources. Again, we want you to leave with many, many things you can do next. The in-service groups are phenomenal. I think many of you already know about them. But taking a closer look at the behavior has meaning, SWEET in particular, but all of the engaging interactions and environments, that collection is outstanding.

And then, of course, the Education Manager webinar series and the one we did last year that was specific to emotional and behavioral self-regulation may be of interest. Very new on UCLKC is new tips for families around challenging behavior, and these are all linked in the viewer's guide. Many more resources for you to check out. We might have time for one question.

Gail: One question. We knew that we would be kind of quitting our time here, we're going to be looking for one question. We have been getting a lot of questions about the certificate and credit, and I know that our Q&A team is addressing that, so you're going to get that information. And we're going to make sure that we take care of you with that. I'm just looking through.

I think that there was a question about additional resources or books that would be helpful, and I really think that all of the materials and resources on ECLKC are free and they're available,

and many of the people that have helped develop them have also written some books. But rather than having to purchase the book, you could look over all of the ECLKC and see that, and then there is something you need to check out from the library is there's a new book out around unpacking the teaching pyramid, which is helpful, and I would encourage you to look at that one. Get that one from your local library. Do you have anything else?

Vanessa: No.

Gail: Any other questions coming in?

Vanessa: No. Friends, there are like 600 lines of questions to roll through. No, I didn't see anything that really popped out, but, again, we'll take these questions, and if we can address them, roll them up, we can pull them on to MyPeers as a continuation of this webinar. Thank you all for your engagement, and don't let us winding down stop you from adding a question if you have one. But as we close down, we wanted to be sure to thank you for what you do every day.

We talked about where staff may be in terms of wellness and what they are walking into classrooms or into visits or into their provider home. You are their support, so thank you for being steadfast and supportive to help them understand the behaviors, develop those behavior plans, and then to individualize supports, and also to take care of yourself. And then, finally, we want to be sure to let you know, if you are in the area, and even if you're not, fly in and see us.

Gail and I will be there. June 6th through the 8th, we are hosting, as a national center, a Learning and Leading with Equity Institute. It will be two and a half days of super interactive, engaging, and insightful sessions. We encourage you, if you can, to join us. When the webinar closes, you will get a pop-up that will give you all the registration information. Do join us, if you can, and spread the word. We would love to see you in Dallas.

Gail: Absolutely.

Vanessa: And I think with that, other than, say, come and find us on MyPeers, let's keep the conversation going, I think that wraps us up for today's episode.

Gail: Yes, and so many people were giving so many great ideas, too. We just want to give props to them because they were giving so many ideas.

Vanessa: Excellent.

Gail: So many ideas.

Vanessa: I love this community.

Gail: See you next time. Thanks.

Vanessa: Thanks, Gail.