

Understanding the Foundation of the Home Visitor Role

Joyce Escorcia: Hello, everyone! Welcome to our Home Visiting webinar series today. We are going to be talking about understanding the foundations of the home visitor role. We're excited to dig into that with you a little bit more. Thank you for spending your hour with us. I am Joyce Escorcia, your host for the Home Visiting webinar series this season. So excited to connect with everyone and just to get to know each other a little bit more and learn a lot of great things from each other. I'm excited today to have my great friend, Donna Ruhland, here. She has tons of experience with home visiting, a lot of stories from the field, and just a lot of great wisdom and things to share with us today. You're going to hear more from Donna in just a few minutes, but I wanted to be sure and let you know that she's going to be sharing a lot of her wisdom and experience with us today.

Want to also remind you, if you haven't already done so, to download your Participants' Guide from the resource list widget down at the bottom. We're going to be referencing the Participants' Guide throughout our time together. It's really been designed to help you take notes and highlights and questions and be able to list resources along the way. It also includes a resource list at the end. Any resources that we talk about will be referenced there as well as some other things that could be useful.

The goal today is, I'm hoping that you'll be able to walk away with just being able to really describe and talk more about the role of a home visitor and the role that home visitor plays in supporting families as they promote their child's learning and development. Also, to really be able to take away some resources and strategies to support parents as they are providing high-quality early learning experiences with their children. Hoping you leave with some resources and just some great ideas to use in the field in your work.

In the attendee chat, if you just want to tell us a little bit about what's your role, how long you've been in that role, whether it's that you're a home visitor? Are you supervising home visitors? Wear multiple hats? How long have you been in that role? Then, how confident are you in your role when thinking about home visiting or supporting home visitors?

I see, Roxanna, you've been a home visitor for almost five years. Wow, congrats, Roxanna. Thank you so much. Jennifer, home visitor for six years, and you feel pretty confident. That's great. We've got lots of answers coming in. Brenda, you've been a mentor coach for home visitors for nine years. That's pretty amazing. Home visitor for one year. Wow, so I'm seeing a lot ... A child development coach for your third year, hoping to learn more about supporting home visiting. Pam, you've been a home visitor supervisor for about three years. What I'm seeing here is that we've got folks that have been here for one year or several years. We just are excited for you to be here and be able to share some of your wisdom with other participants and share some of your ideas and things that have worked for you. I still see those kinds of responses flowing in here. Wow, 22 years for Myrna. Wow, and Mattis has said for eight years, but she's always trying to learn new things. Thank you for that.

We will just carry that forward during our time today that no matter how long or how short we've been in our roles we always come in learning and with a mind to just be able to learn more and grow more. Thank you for that.

With that being said, and thank you for sharing a little bit about who you are, we want to just tell you a bit about this season of our Home Visiting webinar series. This year, we're going to focus on foundational strategies to support home visitors. With that being said – and we're seeing the varying experience in the chat – just know that whether you're new to home visiting or just looking for a refresher, we really just invite you to join in the conversation.

If you're new to your role, feel free to ask questions, share your curiosities, or even some of your concerns or hesitations. If you're that seasoned veteran, then this is the place and the space where you can share advice and lessons learned along the way. We are just better together. We're going to do this thing together.

We're just going to get started there, and I guess the first thing would be just thinking about when someone who's newer to their role in home visiting, where would be the place to start? Where could a home visitor start? You may be here today saying, "I'm just not sure where to even begin in my role. This is my first year. This is my first month." I think that's the first question we want to ask Donna. Donna, where would you say someone ... Where is a good place to start? Just want to put the plug in as well for that Participants' Guide so you can write down all of your ideas and resources that are shared today. Donna, where to start? What would you say?

Donna Ruhland: Thank you, Joyce. I was thinking back. I've been in the field for – oh gosh – a little over 40 years now and a combined 17 years in home visiting. Really would like to talk to the person who said they've been doing this for 22 years. I think we could have some good conversations. We're really looking at that foundational piece. I'm excited about the breadth and depth of experience that we have on the call today. I'm hoping that you share your wisdom, as Joyce said, and that for those of you who are new out there, remember you're not alone. We're all in this, working together.

I think a great place to start would be to first understand what home visiting is. We'll see a graphic on the next slide for that. Basically, it's an early childhood strategy that can enhance parenting skills and promote young children's growth and development. I mean, that's the bottom line – why we're in this. Home visiting happens primarily in homes but also, of course, with the group's socializations, which provide those opportunities for children and families to connect and to learn from each other.

Home visiting programs help families provide an environment that promotes healthy growth and development. In Head Start's home visiting model, home visitors work with parents, family members to help them teach their children. While home visitors may model at times – and we'll talk a little bit more about that in a bit – the primary focus is the home visitor to parent.

With both definitions, there's an emphasis that the program happens in the home. With both definitions, there's an emphasis that supporting parents and families as they facilitate their child's development. Within the Early Head Start home-based program option, home visitors use effective home visiting practices that offer parents individualized support because we're all in our own individual spots – where there are areas that can be strengthened, areas that need strengthening – and to really help them use positive parenting strategies to promote children's learning.

Joyce: Wow, Donna, that is a good place to start. I want to take a step back because we got excited of where to start. I know you shared a little bit about the 40 years plus of experience. Can you share a little bit more about those roots, those deep-seated roots and home-based, and where that passion comes from?

Donna: When I first started visiting families in the home, it really opened up to me. After having been a classroom teacher and such, that close relationship that you have with the families, it's just so impactful. It even prompted me, honestly, to go after my master's, to go into infant mental health, because I realized it is so much of what working with families and with their children that you're really supporting that family at a deeper level.

I know classroom teachers and family childcare that they have their own relationships. But in the home, it's the unique view and that trust that the family builds with you when you say I'm going to come next week, and you actually show up and you're there for the family. They understand that. Then, every week you come back; it sets up that trust. For many of the families, this is a new experience for them. That's what got me about home visiting is how much it meant to the families. I don't ... It reminds me of those commercials where you say, "Priceless." I don't know that you can really put a price on that or maybe find a way to pull data that shows that. For the home visitor on this call, I think that you all know what I mean when I say that. You know how important that you are to the families that you work with.

Joyce: Wow, thank you for sharing, Donna. It's so important to see what fuels you and what brought you to here. Thank you for sharing that with us. Here, all those things that you talked about; this is just a visual that puts it all in perspective. This shows an example of the way home-based programs work. This is a visual. This visual is what we call the Theory of Change, and it's from an article by Roy Roggman from the 2016 issue of "Early Childhood Teacher Education." Again, that's referenced in your Participant Guide if you want to dig into that more.

When we think about the term, "theory of change," it means the theories of clear statements. Like a diagram, what you see here portrays the changes a program is making. This diagram includes a home visiting program, an infant/toddler classroom, and parent-family well-being and child development and well-being. Those are the things that we see represented here.

In a home visiting program, the home visitor facilitates parent and family well-being, and then family well-being leads to child development and well-being. This diagram that you see here really shows that primary effects go from the home visitor to parents and then from parents to children. On the other end, if we think about the classroom setting, teachers work directly with

children to impact their development and well-being. The classroom's connection to parents is a secondary effect. When we're thinking about home visiting, it really is from that home visitor supporting that parent as their parent is supporting teaching their child. One of the reasons I like this visual: It shows you the dots. I'm a very visual person, so stuff like this helps me out.

With that being said, we've talked a little bit about the basics and where to start in understanding what home-based is. Now, let's think about what are some of the benefits of home visiting. Donna, I guess I want to ask you that. What do you think are some of the benefits of home visiting?

Donna: Thank you for that question. I think there are so many benefits. I'm just going to pull out some of the main ones. First, I think going back to what I said before, that going into the family's home provides you that opportunity to really know the families well, to know how the household and how the family works, and who are the different members of the family, so that you know where to go with the strategies and such and that you share with them. That sets the stage for the close, trusting relationships that I talked about. It allows you then to be able to plan together to look at what you would like to see happen for the child. By engaging in those warm, accepting relationships with parents, you support a strong, secure relationship between the parent and the child. It's that parallel process piece. This helps parents become more sensitive, more responsive to the child. A secure relationship between young children and their families – that creates that foundation for providing rich learning opportunities.

To think more about those benefits in addition to the relationship with the family, the family also feels supported by the home visitor. That goes back to that Roggman graphic that you shared with us, Joyce. That it's more direct with the parents. You're observing the child's development together, which is really important, because especially for first-time parents, they may not understand what children are capable of doing at certain ages or what they're still working at and what's emerging for them. It's almost like the baby whisperer, the toddler whisperer – that you're able then to say, "Ah, this is an important developmental step," and to let them know about those milestones and how to best support them. It's one of those pieces that you share with parents and make that connection. It's almost like they have their own cheerleading squad with them. But it's not about you. It's about them and their role as a parent as a mom or dad or a parent.

Some of the other benefits include that along with that observation is how learning activities can be included in everyday routines. Then, with the socializations, those are great times for networking with the families, for each other, parent education, and then peer play. The little ones may not really have that experience about going out and playing with children around their own age or their own age.

We know, and I know that article, the Roggman article, talks about this well – that families are healthier, they're more self-sufficient with home visiting. The children are better prepared for school, and I would say for life because these are foundational skills for them as well. There's more positive interactions, then, between the parent and their child.

Joyce: No, I'm just ... It kind of fills my heart when you talk. What an opportunity and what a gift. I just think about that first-time mom. I have a three-year-old and just to think of that support or that opportunity to be there, to be there, like you said, as that cheerleader and say, "Hey, you've got this. You're doing the right things." They can see that connection of just doing and being present and doing the things that you have to do and getting that affirmation of, "Man, I'm doing the right thing, and this is helping my child to learn and develop." Those aren't natural connections, right? Unless you know and understand some of the science behind it. To be able to be that for a parent, what a place of support and strength.

Anyway, that made my heart happy there when I was thinking about ... I guess I was just thinking about those late nights and just saying, "I'm doing the right thing." Thinking about sharing interactions, whether it's from diaper change or conversations at mealtime. Just to know as a parent, me being present and intentional and talking and communicating and all of those things really play into a child's growth and development. That's a special place be.

Donna, keeping the conversation going, and we've talked about what home-based is and the benefits, right? Now, I want to ... Can you share a little bit about the home-based structure? What does that look like, feel like within a program?

Donna: When we talk about that structure, we need to start talking about the Head Start Program Performance Standards, or HSPPS, as we always like to shorten it to that. It defines the specific regulations for all programs serving infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and pregnant women. They also include requirements for the home-based program option. As described in the HSPPS, home visits and group socializations are guided by research and home-based curriculum that is aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, or ELOF. The research studies consistently show that the most important role of the home visitor is structuring child-focused home visits that promote parents' ability to support the child's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development.

Let's look at some of the foundational pieces of that. For caseload, a program that implements a home-based program option must maintain an average caseload of 10 to 12 families per home visitor. Home visitors cannot have more than 12 families at one time. Of course, home visitors can check with the supervisors to find out how their program assigns specific caseloads. It's really per that program.

There's an average of 10 to 12 homes, or families I should say, per home visitor – a maximum of 12 families. There may be some variations in that. That may occur for many reasons, such as a family having more than one child, a home visitor traveling a great distance between families. I think most of my families were in a very tight urban area, so I didn't have to travel quite that far. But I know from talking to other home visitors that that's not always the case. It could be that extra time is needed for current challenges or family stressors that the family is experiencing, or some other reasons that might impact your time working with specific families. Many programs have a formula or some other means to determine and track each home visitor's caseload. As a home visitor ... [Crosstalk] Yeah?

Joyce: I was just going to say, what I heard you say there was that communication with your supervisor or other folks in your program is key to understanding the specifics, right? The performance standards gives us those parameters, but it definitely sounds like communication and understanding your own program's processes and policies and procedures would really be essential for someone just coming in.

Donna: Yes, definitely understand why those instances were made or different decisions. As a home visitor, then, you would make home visits to each of your enrolled families on a weekly basis. That's for a minimum of 90 minutes for each family. Then your program's research-based, home-based curriculum should provide sufficient content, activities, and resources for each visit and promote the parent's role as a child's teacher – first and longest teacher – through experiences focused on the parent-child relationship.

The home-based program design tells us home visits are planned jointly by the home visitor and parents and reflect the critical role of parents in the early learning and development of their child or their children, planned using information from ongoing assessments, and those help to individualize learning experiences because those assessments tell you where the child's at, what's emerging, what areas might need strengthening. That data is really important.

Then, they should be scheduled with enough time to serve all of the enrolled children in the home and conducted with parents and are not conducted when only babysitters or other temporary caregivers are present.

Also, I think I should mention the number of visits a year. Those are spelled out in the standards, as well. That's 46 visits per year for Early Head Start and a minimum of 32 visits per year for Head Start. A program that implements a home-based program option must make up the planned home visits that were canceled by the program and attempt to make up those that were canceled by the family. Of course, home visits can't be replaced by medical, social service, or other appointments such as that.

One more thing. For socializations, in addition to the one-on-one home visits, you'll offer group socializations to families. That's at least 22 times a year for Early Head Start and 16 times over the course of the program year for Head Start. Those, again, are planned jointly with families. They invite both child and parent participation and provide age-appropriate activities for the children as well as occur in a classroom, community facility, home, or field trip setting, as appropriate.

Joyce: Anything, Donna, anything that ... Because we've had a question or two pop up, like if there are multiple children in the home that are enrolled in home visiting, any considerations there? Or should there be more time allotted beyond that 90 minutes?

Donna: I think because they're being served, then, as another child, go back to your supervisor and talk to them about the amount of time that is appointed for that family.

Joyce: It's all about having that communication and connection with your supervisor. Because I know one thing that I've heard a lot when working with home visitors is that sometimes they feel like an island at times, because they're out in the field so much. That's where it's so important to have those connections with your program supervisor and be in the know and have a place and space to ask those questions and to understand all of your program culture and structure and all of those things.

Wow, I feel like we've already covered so much in just a little bit of time. Whenever thinking about being a home visitor, it does take a lot. Right? It takes a lot mentally, physically. There's a lot of things to consider. Donna, can you share with us more about just the role of the home visitor?

Donna: Sure. Basically, as I said before, you visit the family weekly in their home, helping the parents explore their relationship and really in that context of supporting their child. The first task is to build that relationship with the family. Through that partnership, then you can really talk about those hopes, expectations that they have through observation, interaction with the family and the family together with the child. You help the parents really gain or maintain a clear understanding of the child's learning and development. Of course, taking input from the families about socializations and such.

There - I did [Inaudible] safety going into the home. I don't know if that's something that you're going to include in the series, but I know that is included in the beginning home visiting series. I didn't know if you were going to include that in upcoming sessions or not, Joyce.

Joyce: Yes, definitely, we'll be digging into that a little bit later in our season. Any tips that you want to share now, sure would be appreciated.

Donna: Because I was thinking that could take the whole session in that. You really have to be aware of your surroundings. I always made sure that – kept everything pretty clear inside my car and that kind of thing so that I kept things in my trunk just to come into an area and be safe and always have my cell phone with me and my keys and such. I knew that if I ever felt that a situation was not safe, that my supervisor would understand if I would go back to my car, call her, and say, "Hey, this isn't a safe experience at this point." I have to say that in all of the time that I did home visiting, I didn't have to do that. But I knew that that was an option for me.

I was also fairly planful about when I scheduled families – looking at the time of day, especially considering traffic and things like that too – so it was a little bit on mechanics at that point. Those are just a few tips. But again, I know in that beginning home visiting series, there is a whole session that talks about safety.

Joyce: Yeah, definitely. I'm glad you pointed that out. Anything that we're talking about today ... If you're on here were like, "Man, I want to dig more into knowing just about the structure of the home-based option" or "I want to dig more into just knowing my role", the beginning home visitors series on the iPD is a great place to start. There's a link for that. We have a link for that right in your Participants' Guide. It's right there. Thank you for sharing the few tips and bringing

in that safety piece, because as a new home visitor that could be definitely something that comes up.

I want to invite our participants that are here with us today. As you're sharing – again, because we have this veteran staff here, you've been here five, 10, 20 years – just to drop in the chat. What are your answers to some of these things? What has worked well for you? Right now, we're talking about a home visitor role. For you, what do you see that as for yourself? As Donna's sharing, again, this is a group conversation. Feel free to drop that in the chat for others as well. Sorry, Donna, I was doing another plug to get everybody connected.

Donna: I was thinking about a couple of anecdotes and stuff. I'm trying to stop myself since I know that our time is limited. But definitely, we could have another hour just in conversation about that.

Some of the things with the home visitor role that we wanted to point out about. Yes, we know about supporting parents' relationship with their child – that's first and foremost – but also about selecting activities with the parents. Thinking through that. This is the key thing, too, I wanted to mention, encouraging families to use every day, what they're doing every day and routines, their materials in the home.

There was a question in chat about what do the activities look like. That's one of the things that we're going to talk a bit about is why it's so important to look at what is in the home and what routines that the families are doing throughout the day every day just to get the household – keep it running and such.

Let's dig into each of these topics, and the first one is supporting parents' relationship with their child. Home visitors provide services in the home as well as that group socializations. Again, supporting the parent-child relationship, helping that child's learning and development. For example, we encourage positive interactions between the parent and the child at every home visit. We might notice the parent's strengths and share them with the parent or say, "You know, I saw smiling when your child said that new word, and he was really happy when you did that." It's really helping to reinforce that with the family.

Joyce: Wow, Donna. It brings up a couple of things. One, from your experience and thinking about the role of a home visitor, what role does the culture and a family's beliefs play in you as a home visitor were to support that relationship?

Donna: Yes, I think culture impacts every aspect of a child's development, and it's the lens through which we see development, as well as how development occurs. If a child is held more or has a lot of floor time – whatever it might be – that's going to impact how the child is developing. There are strengths in each of those kinds of scenarios. Home visitors who are sensitive to this understand how to approach what they do with the families, using this lens with that. I think through observation, through holding back a bit, talking to them, observing how they do things, being sensitive, and being sensitive to the family's way of being, knowing

that it's about them and their child and it's not about us and what we're doing ... I think that's one of the biggest ways to be open and sensitive to how families do things.

There's culture, and there's also family culture too and how every family has their own way of doing things. One of the things I always think about is taking off my shoes. When I lived in one part of my home state, I noticed that - where we were brought up, we always took our shoes off when we would come in the home. Then, when I moved to the southern part of the states, I noticed that people didn't do that. Then, I had a coworker point out to me, "Oh, it's because you get more snow in the northern part." Then I understood, there's some regional piece to that as well. Now, when I walk into someone's home, I automatically look down to see if there's a mat for their shoes and if they're wearing them and should I take them off. Or I ask.

I was raised understanding you don't sit down until someone asks you to sit down. These are those differences. I think holding back a bit, not coming in with our agenda front and center, really does help us to understand how the family operates and how they want to be interacted with, if that makes sense.

Joyce: Yes, definitely. What brings up another question for me the other side of the coin. Right? You were just talking about the role of culture and family's beliefs. The other side is, how could a home visitor's culture and beliefs impact their role in supporting families?

Donna: This is one area, especially considering that we all have a background in early childhood, child development, and teaching young children. We have our own culture, but then we also have this knowledge of early childhood. When you come into somebody's home, you're carrying those glasses. Your own culture, your own family's expectations, all of those things are part of you, as well as what you've learned. Often, what you learn in those classes are about classroom and how we teach children in the classroom. So, you have to adjust a bit. I think home visitors, it takes a really special skill set because it's not just the knowledge of child development and teaching, which is huge. It's also having that additional piece of working in sensitive ways, empathetic ways, with families and understanding, wearing their shoes, walking in their shoes, understanding where they're coming from, and the decisions that they make. I think empathy is one of the great ways of doing that.

Joyce: Yeah, definitely. Thank you for sharing that, Donna. I see different questions popping up in the chat. We've been pulling some of those through, and then we'll be circling back to some of those at the end as well. I will say, I'm loving our attendee chat. Folks are supporting each other and giving ideas to each other. Thank you guys for that. Donna, to keep the conversation going as far as that home visitor's role, what about the selection of activities with parents? What's the home visitor's role with that?

Donna: In that collaboration that we have with parents, it's the joint planning piece. As you pull the information from assessments, from observations, from the families have said they're interested in, as well as from, of course, the research-based, home-based curriculum that you have, so pulling that together and talking to the parents about, "OK, we know we're working on this. Here are some activities. What do you think? Where should we go next? What would be a

good activity?" Again – and we'll talk about this a little bit more – looking at what can be embedded throughout the day during routines as well as during those times that they might have that one-on-one playtime with the children as well.

During the home visit itself, you can look at including that time to plan the next visit with the parents by asking them, again, about their goals, their child's interests, and the ideas they have. Then, again, as I said, reviewing the screening, ongoing assessment information, looking back at the curriculum, and of course ELOF and connecting with that when planning the next activities.

Joyce: Thank you. It often brings up another question for me is like: What are some ways that a home visitor could incorporate a family's traditions and home language through those activities?

Donna: I think asking the family about any songs or chants, maybe finger plays, those kinds of things that have been done with them when they were little or when they went to kindergarten, preschool, what they themselves had experienced, and especially considering if this is a family that has a different home language other than English, so asking them about any traditional songs and such that they may know. Even – and this is really empowering for the family – ask them to teach you those so that now they are the one who are instructing you. That's a really powerful piece for the families. Then you can sing those songs together. If they don't remember any of those or had those done, then to do a little bit of research and find out any of those [Inaudible], especially languages and such, maybe even doing some of that research together. I think that's helpful as well.

Joyce: I love that. That's just another way to affirm parents as teachers, right? Their roles as like the teacher and educator. I love that idea. We're just keeping the conversation going here. When we're thinking about encouraging families to use everyday interactions and materials in the home, any suggestions or tips here?

Donna: This is probably one of my favorite topics when it comes to talking about home visiting and pulling on my experiences from the past. When you bring in special toys or materials – those kinds of things – and talk about "Oh, this really helps with fine motor" or "You know, this is great to support language," and the child plays with them, and it's exciting. Then, you pack it up and you take it out.

The fallout of that might be that the parent might feel that they can only teach that if that material is there, that it's this magic piece, and now it's gone. Or even if I had it for a few days, and now I have to give it back, that our learning time is done. But we know that children ... What are the things they're interested in? It's what the adults are doing. The phone they're talking on. Whatever routine they might be doing. They're interested in that. If we think about ways that the families can embed some of these activities or to do these activities throughout the day in routines and with materials that are in the home ...

I remember when my daughter was a baby, I had one of the cupboards I had cleaned everything out and just put in pots and pans and cups and things that she could crawl over,

open up, and pull everything out and play with. We were able to do seriation, do fitting cups into things, talking about the different words of the materials themselves. We got language in. We did some pot banging. We did so much with that, and it didn't cost anything. It was something she knew was there, so we could always go back to it and play with it.

I think using those materials has a number of benefits. One, they're familiar with the child, they're in the home, and they're always accessible. It lets the parents know: You don't have to go out and buy these high-priced materials. You can use what's in the home and it just makes great sense. Or we can do an activity while we're doing some task around the house. Folding clothes, we can do color matching. We can do sorting. Putting toys away, we can put toys in the basket and we can count those toys as we're putting them away, or again, look at matching the colors. Let's put the blue toys away. Let's put the red toys away. There are a number of different things that we can do in the home throughout the day and to fit it in just with what we're doing.

Joyce: I would say, I love how you say you feel tempted to buy the things. I have to laugh at myself because I've been in that place as a parent to buy the \$40 whatever thing, knowing that all those things are right there. I have what I need. Again, I just think, what an opportunity as a home visitor to affirm the parent with that. Like, you are enough. You have enough. You have what you need. You're doing the good things with the right things. I think that's amazing. And to that point, what would you say to those folks that are saying, "Why is using those home materials so important?" I know you've touched on that some, but anything else to add to that?

Donna: I think it reminds the families ... I like what you said: They're enough. What you have is ... This is good stuff. What you're doing with them is important, and it's adequate. So often, the thought is "I can't do it. I don't have the right materials." Because the toy manufacturing, school supply places would love parents to buy into – they have to have these things. But to let families know that they have what they need in the home.

The most important piece of that is the parents. Anything that the parents are doing with the child is going to grab that child's attention, and they're going to be excited about it. Especially if they're helping the parents do big grown-up things like putting the toys in the basket or doing something with the clothes or throwing them in the basket, whatever it might be because those are big grown-up things. Or doing cooking activities as they get a little bit older, they can help parents with stirring and doing some of those kinds of activities, making play dough out of flour and water and dry Kool-Aid and those kinds of things. There's just so much that can be done in the family's home. That's the biggest benefit is letting the families know that they don't need to have special things, that they can do this with what they have.

Joyce: Definitely. I love that we've gone in a few, some suggestions coming up in the chat as well, so just keep those going.

Donna: Helpful.

Joyce: As we're coming to a close here, what advice would you have for home visitors and really understanding their role and their work with parents?

Donna: I think, again, being open and empathetic is really important. It's just important, again, to be aware. We all have our thoughts about children, families, what they should do, households – all of that – and be aware of our thinking about that, and how important it is not to carry that lens in with us and to remember that that first task we have as home visitors is to establish and maintain that relationship with the family, making connections and then working together to look at what are the ways that we can relay the activities and those kinds of things that we can really ensure that we're supporting the child's development and having those outcomes that we'd like to see.

Joyce: Definitely. Donna, when thinking about those supportive principles, what's maybe one or two principles or suggestions, thinking about what we see now on the screen, to help home visitors really understand their roles and work with parents?

Donna: I think we've covered a lot of this at this point, but I think the supportive principles is really important in just that term in itself for home visitors to really look at ways to shine the light on parents and their role with the child. This is one of those areas. Modeling is such an important activity for us as early childhood people, but we have to be really careful with that with parents.

If I go in and do an activity one-on-one with a child, let's hope that with my early childhood background, it would go really well. I would capture the child's attention and it would be great. How does the parent feel? The parent may feel like, "I can't do that, he doesn't respond that way with me." We don't want to shine the light on ourselves, even though I'm getting a lot of afternoon light right here. We want to make sure that the light is shined on the parent. That's where we sit back a bit and say, "Here, let's try this with the child." Then maybe we give some suggestions or cheerlead them on or say, "That really went well. What if next time we add this and this and this." Really being empowering and making sure that that spotlight is on the parents and not so much on us. Building on their strengths, supporting those interactions, and then, again, reinforcing the learning opportunities that are happening in the home itself.

Joyce: Definitely. Again, just another plug for our Participants' Guide. We have links to resources for the ECLKC that I know provide different ideas and all kinds of great things related to all of these principles. Because I've seen a lot of love in the chat for just going there when thinking about using materials in the home. There are resources, some great resources on the ECLKC too. You don't have to try to come up with a lot of these ideas. They're there for you to use as you need. Just putting another plug-in for that.

Donna, I guess because it really is about supporting the parent, right? I guess my last question for the day would be, if you had to pick one way to support parents in their role of teachers and educator, what would that be?

Donna: I think that it would be the gift of time. When I say that, because young parents – all parents – are really ... They're busy. They have lots going on, lots to manage. There's a lot of demands. Their plates are full. We can give them that gift of time by showing how they can do those activities with their child through those routines, a little bit of what we talked about doing clothes sorting and picking up toys and sweeping ... All of those kinds of things and embedding the learning opportunities, that gives them the time to do those things so they don't have to try to make special time and maybe never have that special time. I think that's the biggest gift we can give them is how to really help them think through how to do those activities and such throughout the day and make the time with their child, make all that time more quality time.

Joyce: Definitely. I just want to say, I love ... Ebony put in the chat that she shares with the parents that she's a support, coach for building a learning strategy. [Inaudible] she says, "I share, 'I'm your parenting cheerleader. You got this.'" And I just, I love that. Just wanted to pop that out there as well. Donna, any kind of last bit of advice? What would be your one thing for folks to take away with as we're wrapping up in our last minute here.

Donna: I think the collaboration is key, but I also think for each other, using resources like MyPeers and going to events so they can talk to other home visitors. I think that's really helpful. I know it helped me back in the day. That's important.

I like that whole being the cheerleader for the families. I think you just ... Having that is the greatest gift for families, and especially families where they may not have a lot of extended family. I think it's just such a crucial, critical piece.

Joyce: Well thank you. I think that's a great way to end our time together. Thank you, guys, for joining us. Please mark your calendars for our next webisode, February 14. We'll celebrate February, love, kindness, and friendship together. Thank you for trying out the attendee chat with us, and we just encourage you to keep doing good work. If you have any questions, please take it to MyPeers. We just look forward to connecting with you there. See you on MyPeers.