

## The ABCs of Addressing Persistent Challenging Behavior

Sarah Basler: Hi everyone. Welcome to our last Coaching Corner webinar of the season. The past three webinars have been focused on relationships, emotional literacy and self-regulation, friendship skills and problem-solving. Today we're going to focus on the top tier of the pyramid model, which is intensive interventions.

Our topic is the ABCs of Persistent Challenging Behavior. Throughout today's webinar, we're going to use the words persistent challenging behavior and challenging behavior somewhat interchangeably. What we're talking about is the same types of behaviors. We're referring to those behaviors that are not responsive to developmentally appropriate guidance procedures.

I'm Sarah Basler, and I am coming to you from the National Center of Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning. I'm joined today by our guest expert, Dr. ML Hemmeter, or ML, as I know her. ML has helped to develop the pyramid model, and we have the opportunity to interview her today about what to do when a child or children are exhibiting persistent behavior. ML, you want to introduce yourself.

ML Hemmeter: Thank you, Sarah. As Sarah said, I'm ML Hemmeter. I also am with the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning. I also am at Vanderbilt University, where I do research and teaching and service to the community. We've been engaged in work around young children who have behaviors that are challenging for many years. I think this topic we're going to be talking about today is probably one of the most commonly asked for topics that we cover. I'm looking forward to talking with y'all.

Sarah: For our time together today, we're going to first start by — we're going to define what we mean by persistent challenging behavior. We're going to talk about some ways that a coach can support coachees to reflect about challenging behavior. We're going to get to interview ML and talk about the steps for addressing challenging behavior in coaching and practice. We're going to dig into some case examples. Then we'll talk about some considerations related to addressing and responding to challenging behavior equitably. We're going to end our discussion with Koko's Corner who is our Head Start Coaching Corner, coaching companion mascot, and we'll walk you through a link to walk through a feature on the coaching companion.

Just to remind everyone, during this year of the Coaching Corner webinars, we've been focused in on social-emotional development, which is one of the domains of the Head Start early learning outcomes framework or the ELOF as we call it. Our previous webinar was focused on friendship skills and problem-solving. If you missed that webinar or any of the past webinars this season, don't worry. You can catch that webinar on DTL's Push Play or by going to the Coaching Corner webinar page on the ECLKC. It will be important as we — one thing that we'll talk about is the pyramid model. This season we've focused on how coaches can use PVC to support education staff with using pyramid model as the effective practices.

As a reminder, the pyramid model is a framework of evidence-based practices for promoting young children's healthy social and emotional development. The pyramid model is built on a a tiered public health approach by providing universal sports to all children to promote wellness, targeted services for those who need more support and intensive services for those who need them. In this webinar, we're going to be focusing on that top tier of those intensive interventions with children. For more information about the pyramid model, you can check out the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations or the NCPMI website. We have some links within your viewer's guide if you'd like more information.

Let's start out with a little Q&A here. When challenging behavior occurs, not only do the child or the children and families that you're working with have big feelings going on, but the adults can also experience big feelings of their own. In the Q&A, share what it is that your coachees are telling you about how they feel when challenging behavior occurs. What comes up? What are those feelings or emotions that they're feeling? While we wait for some of those responses to come in, ML, what do you hear people report? How are they typically feeling? What are some of those things that pop up?

ML: It depends. I think a lot of times I hear people talk about feeling frustrated and like nothing they do works and that they don't have enough support, those kinds of things.

Sarah: I think I'm seeing a lot of great responses come in, stressed, frustrated, even disrespected, not understood. Defeated. I think too, and this comes in from my experience as a mom, but I think sometimes I feel maybe embarrassed. You might feel embarrassed that you don't know how to address it — wow, they're coming in so fast.

ML: The responses that we're getting, I can't even keep up with them, stressed, tired, defeated, overwhelmed, whatever, nothing works, is kind of an indication of how teacher, the way that people just have these responses popping into the Q&A, I think is so similar to what we get when we ask teachers or home visitors to talk about what kinds of things they see.

Sarah: Not good feelings. Hopeless, those kinds of words are popping up. I want to point out a resource that you might find helpful for you as a coach. If you're interested in doing a little activity that we call the hot buttons where it helps you — it can be an activity that you can work through. Talking about what are some behaviors that push the buttons of your coachee? Thinking about how those behaviors make them feel.

Even how, thinking about how those feelings then impact the relationship that you might have with the child or the family. There is a link within your viewer's guide to that activity. It might be a good activity to do with a coachee to kind of find out what are you feeling? What are your triggers? Because sometimes we don't know how to approach it if we aren't sure what we feel about those behaviors.

When children are engaging in behaviors that can be challenging for adults, many of those behaviors are developmentally appropriate. Those behaviors tend to be responsive to those developmentally appropriate behavior guidance and procedures. Those types of behaviors won't be the focus of today's webinar. Today, we're going to be talking about persistent, challenging behavior, which is defined as any repeated pattern of behavior that interferes with learning, engagement, relationships with peers and adults. It's also important to note that the behaviors that we're discussing today typically aren't responsive to the use of those developmentally appropriate guidance procedures and require a little bit more intensive support.

Another thing that I want to just highlight is that the way that we all view challenging behavior can be influenced by our cultural background, our past experiences, how we were parented. It's very deep. When we talk about challenging behavior there's not just one way to approach it. Often, we can be unaware of bias that we bring into a relationship or how we view behavior. That's going to impact how we are going to interpret and respond to these challenging behaviors.

As a coach, it's not only going to be important that you reflect with coachees to help them overcome bias, but you'll have to do some work as well. Even we as coaches can bring in this implicit bias with our work. It's kind of this constant loop of trying to become aware of them and interrupt those biases. Here's some general things that we know about behavior. Behavior is communication. That means that the behavior that we see or hear children exhibiting, is trying to communicate a need to peers or adults.

For example, a behavior could be communicating things like I'm bored, I'm sad, you hurt my feelings, I want some attention. Often challenging behavior can be the result of a child missing a skill or needing to know how to learn a specific skill. It might be that they're engaging in challenging behavior because they don't know how to ask for what they need in a different way. For example, if a child wants a toy that another child has, they might try to grab for the toy because they might learn, they might need to know how to ask for a turn. They might not know how to ask for request yet.

If challenging behavior continues over time, it can mean that it's successful at getting the child what they desire. For example, if you have a child that doesn't want to come to the table for meals, they want to avoid that, then they might hit their sibling or the child next to them, and that might cause them to be removed. Essentially if a child doesn't want to come to the table, they hit a child, and they get removed, then they get their need met. It's not that they, it's the way that they get to leave the table. What that communicates to the child is that if they want to leave the table, they can hit children.

Behavior can be unintentionally reinforced by adults. Adults can unintentionally reinforce these behaviors; these behaviors are not intentional of the child. Often, it's not that children are trying to manipulate us, although sometimes it can feel like that. It's we have to know that it's unintentional for the child as well.

This graphic is our pyramid flipped. When challenging behavior occurs, our first thought might be that we want to jump to the top of the pyramid and really an intensive intervention. Before we can jump to the top of the pyramid, we've got to first be sure that the coachees and the families have worked to put a strong foundation of pyramid model practice in place.

If we jump straight to the top and are focusing on these intensive interventions without that strong foundation, the relationships, the environment will be unstable because the coachees and the families will only ever be responding to behaviors. We have to have those supports at the bottom in place in order for it to be successful. Before we jump to the top of the pyramid, it's going to be important that a coach really support coachees to reflect and think about whether those foundational practices that are good for all children are in place.

Some questions you might ask your coachee or that you might as a coach observe. Has the coachee built relationships with the children and families? When you go to observe, do you feel like or see those relationships in place? Has the coachee or family designed the environment that's supportive and helps the children know what to do in order to successfully navigate that environment?

This looks different depending on who your coachee is. If you're working in a group setting, you might support your coachee to design the environment. You might support them in developing visuals or providing them with visuals. For a coachee that might be working in home, that might look different. A coach, or a home visitor wouldn't come in and rearrange the home, but they might suggest ideas or give them strategies or resources. Another thing is are there skills that maybe that child or the children need to be taught to be successful in the environment or in their interactions with peers and other adults?

Finally, if you are noticing that there are more than one to two children exhibiting challenging behavior, that could be an indication, specifically if you're in a group care setting, that there are some class-wide practices that maybe are not in place. Research that's been conducted on the pyramid model has shown that if tier one and tier two supports, which are those blue and green levels are in place, only a few children may truly need that intensive intervention. If you're noticing that it's a whole classroom full of what is being labeled as challenging behavior, it might be that some of those foundational skills are missing.

In your viewer's guide, there is a link to the Circle Time Magazine, Season 2, Edition Five, and it has even more reflection questions that you might consider using to walk through with your coachee and kind of determine what support is needed. Is it universal? Do some children need more targeted support, or does it really warrant some intensive intervention? Now we're to my favorite part where we get to really dig in with ML. As I mentioned, we're so glad you're here to share your expertise and wisdom with our participants. We'll get started. When challenging behavior occurs, what is the first thing that you recommend that a coach do?

ML: Thanks Sarah. I'm excited too. I'm going to talk about two things related to what I think you have to do at first. You really talked about the first one, but I want to just expand on it a little bit more. The first thing that we always have to do is what Sarah said, which is observe to ensure that the bottom levels of the pyramid are in place.

Sarah talked about this, but I want to point out a couple of important things. One is that it's important that we make sure that the bottom of the pyramid is in place. This is whether you're in classrooms or at home, that the bottom is in place. Before you can develop a behavior support plan for a child that you're going to implement in the context of that environment, you have to be sure that the environment can support it. For example, if we have a child who isn't following the routine of the classroom or is having a difficult time with transitions, it would be hard to develop a plan for them if the classroom's chaotic to begin with. That's one reason.

The other thing that we have to think about is that when we talk about the bottom of the pyramid and we talk about universal practices, that doesn't mean we do it in the same way for all children. It means that we're implementing good, effective prevention and promotion practices and making sure that each child gets what they need. Maybe we have a really well-designed classroom environment and all the children, but this one child you're really concerned, or the teacher is really concerned about is engaging in the routines and transitions and is doing well. But this one child isn't. The first thing I would say is do they have the transition cues they need? Have they been given the support they need to engage in that transition?

When we're looking at whether the bottom of the pyramid model practices is in place, we're saying are they in place for all children? Are they individualized for those children who might need a little bit of help? Sometimes what looks like a child who needs more intensive supports can be addressed by just individualizing the bottom levels of the pyramid. That's an important thing for coaches to support coaches to look at is whether every child's getting the supports they need around the bottom of the pyramid.

The second thing that we want to do is if all that's in place and the child's still engaging in behaviors that are persistent, then I think it really requires that we think about a team. I think way too often when a child has behaviors that are challenging the adult. We saw this in the list of things that people typed in a minute ago. That adults don't feel like they have support, or they feel like they're being blamed, or they feel like whatever. Especially for an adult who's in a group care setting, it's important to get a team of people around them to support their use of more intensive interventions.

Sarah: I wonder what would the process look like for a child that may have a disability or a suspected delay, what would you recommend?

ML: In some ways, I'd say it's no different. We're really looking at the individual needs of children. At this age, we don't need — there's lots of children who have potential delays and disabilities that we don't even know about yet. But having set, and I think if we just continue to think about each child and what support that child needs, that's really the important thing.

The one thing I would say in addition, especially when we're talking about children with disabilities, is there's other supports available for that child, right. There's that child has an IEP or an IEFSP. They presumably have some support from an OT, a speech person, someone like that who can be helpful in supporting the team around children who have disabilities or suspected disabilities.

Sarah: We have a question in the chat that I feel like we want to address, even though we're going to be talking a lot about forming a team, coming up with a plan. The question was, "but what can teachers do in the moment when they're having these severe violent behaviors? Because it takes time to get these universal strategies in place. What would you recommend?" I have somewhere to lead them because we have a great module about that.

ML: This is a good question. I think the important thing to remember is that anytime we respond to a behavior, we're only preventing its occurrence at that moment. We're not going to change anything for the child long term. In the moment, we have to keep the child safe. Within our programs, we should have guidelines. I'm not going to tell you what those strategies are, but within our — because it will be different for every program. But within our programs, we should have strategies that say this is what you do when a child's behavior is severe and violent. The reason I can't tell you what that is because different programs have different regulations around what you can do.

But at the very least, this is something that people in group care settings need to know they have access to support around those children. The point that these universals take time is so true. I think we often talk about safety net procedures and that means what do you do to keep children safe while you're trying to get other things in place? That will somewhat depend on individual programs.

Sarah: I do want to draw viewers' attention to a resource that is located in the resource list of the viewer's guide and it's to the preschool modules, module five. It's all about challenging behavior. What we're walking you through today is what to do like creating a plan and how you go about that. There are some great strategies in there for what you can support coaches to do in the moment. There's talk in that module about the escalation cycle and what to do when children are at the peak. I want to make sure I direct you to that great resource because we won't be covering that today, but it would be very helpful.

You mentioned developing a team. When this happens, who's part of this team?

ML: That depends. That's maybe the answer to all of these questions is it depends. But I think the important thing to remember about teams around children who have behavior that's challenging is the team should be mostly composed of people who know that child best. We don't want this behavior team that comes in. We want to say who interacts with this child on an everyday basis? Who's important to have on that team? Who can inform us about that child? Then we want someone who can help support that team.

We generally think about a team as being the teacher, the family childcare provider, the home visitor, anyone who's working with the child and the family. Then we always want those of y'all who are out there, who are coaches, we think you're a very important part of that team.

We always want to have the family as an important part of that team and to support that family, to be engaged in that team. Then we often think about other people supporting the family. Maybe a child spends half their day at their grandmother's house, and their grandmother struggles with behavior. Having the grandmother on the team would be a really great team member too.

Y'all mentioned, or Sarah asked about children with disabilities. If a child has an OT or speech person who could be useful, they might be on the team. Then we want someone on the team who can support the process. For many of y'all who are coaches, that will be you. Some of you serve in that role as kind of a coach, a behavioral support person. It can be a mental early childhood mental health consultant. It can sometimes, if you're in more of a school-based setting, it could be a school psychologist. But it's someone who understands the process, who can support these other people to engage in the process.

Sarah: What is it that these team members do? You've got the team. Now, what do we do?

ML: I was thinking about this and getting ready for today, and I think one of the first things a team should do is make sure they have a common commitment to an outcome or a common goal. I've worked with teams where it's often some members of the team are looking for a way to help the family find another placement for the child versus having a common commitment to supporting the child in this setting. That's what I think is the most important, that our goal is to help this child remain in the setting where we're working with them. Having that common goal is important. Then it's a matter of collecting information about the behavior. Collecting information.

I've seen a couple of questions come in about other things that are happening in the child's life. It's gathering information on that. It's gathering any information that might help us better understand the child's behavior. Someone mentioned — Sarah when you were talking a minute ago, about why children engage in behavior, someone mentioned things that are happening outside of school that might be influencing children's behavior. We want to find out about those things in a way that feels supportive. Not in a way that feels like we're somehow blaming families for what's going on outside of school.

Sarah: Awesome. Now we've got our team. We know what that team is going to do. What would you recommend that the coach or team do next?

ML: I kind of jumped ahead a little bit. But obviously the most important thing that we have to do as a team is understand why behavior is happening. Many of y'all have seen this kind of notion of an ABC analysis or an analysis of what happens before a behavior happens. What does the behavior look like? What happens after the behavior happens? And that begins to tell us why the behavior happens or function or meaning or purpose.

Often say that children's behavior has meaning, and it's our job to figure out the meaning. What is it they're trying to communicate? What is it that they're trying to tell us? I'm sad. I'm scared. I'm angry. I'm hungry. I don't know what to do. I miss my dad. I, whatever. We're trying to figure out what that is.

That's important because you can imagine that the behavior itself doesn't tell us anything. If a child is biting, a child might be biting because they want to play with a child and they don't know how to interact with that child. They might be biting the parent to get the parent's attention. They might also bite to get someone to leave them alone, or a totally different reason. The biting isn't what helps us know what to do.

The why they're doing it helps us know what to do. Let me just give you an example. We have a little Emilio. Imagine Emilio is playing with a toy and walks away and leaves the toy there and another kid picks it up. Emilio looks over and that child has it. Emilio goes over and takes the toy from the child, and the child gets scared, gives it up. Emilio gets the toy and the function of that is for to get an item. That's a really simple example.

Behavior is rarely that easy. I wanted to give you a simple example to make the point. I want to say two other quick things. One is the word consequence can seem punishing, and that's not what we mean. We don't mean if you do this, this is going to happen. It's just a way of defining what happens after a behavior that influences whether it happens again, something like that. It's a way to describe that.

The other thing that I want to point out here that's important because of some of the questions I've gotten, is there are also things that we sometimes call setting events. A setting event might be, let's say Emilio has asthma and had an asthma attack in the night and didn't get any sleep. He gets to school and on a good day, if another child takes his toy, he might just go do something else. But on a day when he's had no sleep and he doesn't feel good, he might be more likely to engage in challenging behavior.

It's not the asthma attack or the lack of sleep that triggers the challenging behavior. It's the kid taking the toy from him. But it's more that the child taking the toy from him is more likely to trigger his behavior on a day when he hadn't had as much sleep. Knowing that Emilio had an asthma attack the night before and didn't get much sleep helps us be more intentional about supporting Emilio. That was a long-winded way of saying that the first thing we want to do is figure out what the meaning of the child's behavior is.

Sarah: I'm glad that you included that information about the setting event. Is that what you called it? Because so much of that does impact or influence how flexible you are throughout the day.

ML: It just means that if we, it just helps us know how to support Emilio. It doesn't mean we have to, that we don't have any control over it if he has that asthma attack. It just means he needs more support, might need more support that day.



Sarah: Once you've identified the possible function, what happens next?

ML: Once we know the function and it's important to recognize that children might engage in behavior for different reasons. They might engage in behavior because they don't know how to interact with friends, and they're trying to learn how to interact with friends. They might engage in behavior because they're not regulated enough, and they haven't learned to calm themselves down when something makes them mad. There're different reasons that they might engage in behavior. But once we know a reason, we develop a behavior support plan that looks something like this, where we think about what are the things, we can do to keep the child from engaging in problem behavior, to just prevent it all together.

Because as someone said, when we're teaching a new skill, it doesn't happen overnight, just like it doesn't happen overnight to learn to read right. Let me give you an example of Emilio's, and then I'll make that point. Remember that the function of his behavior was getting a toy from another child or wanting something another child has.

Depending on how old he is, we might think about how we add new materials to the setting where he's most likely to have those behaviors. That could be novel materials. Maybe if someone gets a toy he wants, he's happy to go get a different toy because there's lots of new things. Or if he's younger, we might think of his favorite toy is a red car. Let's have five red cars. If Kit takes his red, takes one red car, there's still plenty of red cars.

We also need to teach him how to ask for a turn. That's going to be the skill that we're going to teach him is how to ask for a turn. In order to teach him that, we're going to use a scripted story to teach him. As we go to free play or whatever it is, we're going to say, now remember today, when you want a toy, someone has, what are you going to do? We're going to practice with him. If we do all those things well, it's less likely that he's going to engage in the problem behavior and more likely that we're going to have an opportunity to teach him. We're teaching him this new skill, and now we've got to think about how we're going to respond to his behavior.

Let's say we've done all the prevention strategies. We've put five red cars in the group. We've read him, in the group the area, we've read him a scripted story. We practiced at the beginning of center time, and the first thing he does is asks a friend for a turn. We do a lot of positive with them. "Wow, Emilio, you took turns with your friends that made him...", or "He's so happy that you are taking turns with him." Something like that. That's the best-case scenario.

If we see that he's going to start to take the toy, we try to interrupt it and say, "Emilio, remember, what can you do if you want a turn right?" and we get him to practice it. But if we miss it and he takes the toy, we return the toy to the child and we say, "Emilio, let's practice, let's see what you can do if you want to turn, let's try that again." Something like that. That's what the behavior plan would look like.

Sarah: That's super helpful. I want to draw everyone's attention to some resources that can support that. In your viewer's guide, there should be links to a way to take ABC data and some

data sheets. There's also another resource that I'd like to draw your attention to called, it's called Positive Behavior Support or PBS. These tools are to support forming a team, developing a plan and supporting implementation of the plan. It walks through the whole process and I'm missing the, it's the routines-based support guide, which is one of the resources on that page. But there's lots of information about how you kind of walk through this whole process. The things that we're talking about here.

That routines-based support guide has some, it's meant for a classroom setting, but there's also a family-based support guide that talks about common routines that you see in a group setting or at home and some prevention strategies, some ways to reinforce it and some skills to teach and things like that. It's a super helpful resource, and I would recommend downloading it. I have it binded over on my desk so I can refer to it.

We've talked about a few things here, but I wanted to know, what is one thing that you just really want coaches to know, or a few things that you think are really important to know about challenging behavior that coaches need to keep in mind?

ML: For all of us who have worked with children or had children or been around children, I'm pretty sure we've all had the experience of a child having behavior that has been challenging to us. I think, as we saw from the responses earlier, that it's very stressful and it's very stressful for families. If you're a home visitor working with families, I mean, if we think it's stressful for us in the classroom, think about what it's like if it happens all day in your home. That you have a lot of negative time with your child, right. I think we have to start by saying this is very stressful to adults. I also think it's important to think to adopt the assumption that everybody's doing the best they can.

Nobody wants children to engage in challenging behavior. But when we're stressed as adults, we respond to behavior often in ways that escalate the behavior rather than deescalate the behavior. As long as we think people can deal with that on their own, teachers aren't successful, families aren't successful, right. I think it's just important that as coaches we think about how we check in with teachers.

There's this work on vulnerable decision-making points, which is just the idea that there are times when as adults or teachers' families, we have to make decisions about how to respond to children's behavior. What we know is that you're more likely to make bad decisions about how to respond when you're tired and stressed. It's really important to help coachees, whether they're, whoever you're coaching, develop strategies for calming down before they respond to a behavior. Because we almost always respond better, more positively, more effectively if we've done it, if we've calmed ourselves down. We can't calm children down if we're not calmed down ourselves.

I think that that's what coachees need support around, checking in. How's it going? Can I jump in and, you know, read a book to the children and give you a break for a few minutes? Think about what we can do as coaches, that's not just about helping teachers implement effective practices or helping families implement effective practices. But how can we reinforce the effort

that families and teachers and caregivers are making towards dealing with this? With these behaviors.

Sarah: Prioritizing self-care that looks different. Not just self-care but you have to be taking care of yourself to be able to be flexible and be able to handle these things going on. I do want to highlight something that comes up in that module that I was referring to earlier, and it's about developing neutralizing routines. It made me think when you were talking about how sometimes we need to support coachees to figure out what they're going to do in that moment, that they can stop them from responding in a way that is negative or harmful.

One way to do that is to support a coachee to develop a neutralizing routine, although we won't go into that today, that is included in that module five. I was having flashbacks of my bath time with my sons, and I have a neutralizing mantra that I say whenever they're experiencing challenging behavior. They're having a hard time. They're not giving me a hard time. Things that kind of interrupt the way I think about it.

ML: One thing just really quick, which is as Sarah's responding to the, I mean is talking about the modules. For those of y'all who don't know, the modules, the NCPMI modules have been totally redone. When she, and the new version has just been up about a month. When she's referring to module numbers, it's because there's new modules, just an FYI.

Sarah: Thank you for clarifying. There's links in the viewer's guide.

I think we have about time to do walk through one case example. Here we have, we're going to meet Akela and the Smith family. This example and both these examples should be in your viewer's guide. We're going to walk through this example and then you'll have one to take with you and work through if you want to do that on your own. Akela is a home visitor and is working with the Smith family. The family has shared that their two-year-old child, Zoe, has been having a really hard transition from bath to bedtime. Recently, Zoe's behavior has started to escalate. Zoe's been throwing toys and furniture in the room, pulling the sheets off their bed, and hitting their parents and siblings.

Akela has reached out to her coach to help problem solve what to recommend that this family do first. Everybody's feeling really stressed. What might the coach recommend that Akela do? I want to open up the Q&A box for you to share what you think the coach might recommend that Akela do first. As we're waiting for those responses to come in, ML, what do you, what would you recommend? What were some strategies you might recommend they try first?

ML: I was thinking about one of the first things I would tell a coach or a home visitor to do with a family would be to ask the family to describe the routine. One thing I think if you, all of you who have young children reflect on your own life, you probably have routines that go really well and then some routines that don't. I think sometimes the routines that go well are routines that happen in the same way every day. The child knows routine and they're predictable. The first thing I would want to ask a family is, I think it was bedtime, bath to bedtime, "Tell me a little bit about that routine?" "Does it happen in the same way every day? And what do you want Zoe to

do during the routine?" to get a sense of what you might need to do to support Zoe? I would start with that.

Then I would ask the parents or the family to collect some information like what happens right before Zoe begins this meltdown. Maybe there's a really abrupt transition that the parent says you've got two more minutes and I'm emptying the bathwater and then boom, the water gets emptied versus making that a softer transition. You have two more minutes, and then you and I are going to figure out the best way to empty the bath. How can we make the routine a little bit softer for Zoe if we know what the trigger is for Zoe?

Sarah: We're seeing lots of good responses. There are some things like, questioning at getting more information, do they have trouble with the transition, finding out what's, how it feels going through the transition. I've even seen things about setting a specific routine, using visuals, giving choices. There's a lot of strategies you might offer, but I love the reminder to always get more information. Like find out what's going on because we can throw out strategies, but maybe they already have a pretty solid routine, and this is just something new. I like that you remind us to do that.

ML: I think the important thing is to remember to always be curious when we're doing this work. Curious about what the child's behavior is. Curious about what the family wants and what it looks like now. Curious will help us, approach it from a more positive perspective.

Sarah: Thank you, everyone, for your responses.

ML: I know, I wish we could, like, print them out. They're great.

Sarah Basler: I know, they're good. I'm going to move us on to because I want to make sure that we touch on this before we close out our webinar. We're moving into our focus on equity portion. I just wanted to ask what is something important about challenging behavior and equity that you just want to make sure that we know.

ML: Let me do this fast because we don't have a lot of time but recognize that there's no quick fix to this. I think most of you are probably aware that our data on the use of exclusionary discipline is disproportionately affecting young children of color, particularly young boys. I think that a lot of that is because of implicit bias. We know — but nature of what implicit bias is that you don't overcome those biases without support. I think it's a perfect role for a coach to help teachers reflect on or caregivers reflect on who they're providing supports to and who they're not. How they're interpreting behavior.

For example, if a child is, maybe a child at home, a child, and they're in the family, they do lots of rough and tumble play, and we've decided that rough and tumble play is not okay at school. Why is rough-and-tumble play not okay at school? That's where our biases enter in. Rough and tumble play can be done at school if it's done well. If children know how to do it, if children are supported to do it, all of those kinds of things. But our biases creep in when we start saying this

is wrong and this is right. Or this is how I did it, or this is how my mom did it when I was a child or whatever. All of that allows biases to come in.

I think one of two things really quick that are important about this. One is that care providers work in in a context of a program for the most part. There has to be a program-wide commitment to equity that says we're focused on equity. We want to make sure every child gets what they need to be successful here. I want to support this child in a way that respects and confirms and builds on their culture and their background and their family and all that. That has to come at the program level.

For a coach to support a teacher and say, I noticed that you're responding to the same thing in different, that two children can do the same behavior and you respond to one child punitively and one child supportively. Let's think about why that is. The only way you can have those conversations is if the coachee feels safe to have those conversations. That has to come not just from the coach but from the program, from the administration, from those who are responsible for the supervision of the staff we're working with. I could say a lot more, but I know we're short on time.

Sarah: That's great. Thank you. I think too, coaches do have some say in that with coaching agreements. You can put into your coaching agreement; we will have hard conversations about equity and bias. I'm going to — and just being transparent, I might have these conversations with you, and you also please tell me if you feel I have some bias that needs to be checked. Opening it up, you can do it that way.

ML: I love that idea.

Sarah: Our last question before we wrap up, what might a coach do to help support coachees to respond to challenging behavior in equitable ways?

ML: I'm glad you asked this question because I think I gave an example a minute ago of how a teacher or how a coachee might not respond to behavior in an equitable way. But I also think we need to think about our coachees implementing practices equitably. If we know that supportive conversations and positive time with an adult and positive supportive feedback and all of those things are important for children's social-emotional development, one thing as a coach we should do is help coachees look at whether they're using those supportive practices with all children.

Are they getting, are those practices getting to the quiet child who might have more internalizing behavior issues? Are we spending so much time with the child who has behaviors that are challenging dealing with that behavior that we're not spending time with them in positive ways? I think a lot of it is helping coachees look at how they're distributing their use of positive time, positive practices, positive attention.

Then we're implementing culturally responsive practices, which is about how are we affirming children's cultures in the classroom and how do we have difficult conversations with children

when they say things about other children? But that is hard work. I think we would all agree that we're much better at doing it if we have the support of someone who is there to help us do it better and not to judge or evaluate us. Which is what I think coaches can do.

Sarah: Coaches, you're important. I feel like we could talk another hour about all of this. I'm sad to say that our time is coming to an end. Thank you so much for being able to answer all these questions and walk us through in really thinking deeply about how to do, how to do this work that can be kind of challenging. Before we go, I want to point you to the viewer's guide where you can walk through an example.

Well, not an example, but this is our coaching companion mascot and Koko is going to give you an opportunity to learn about a Head Start coaching companion feature. In this episode, Koko encourages you to learn how to add comments and resources to an action step or focused observation in the Head Start Coaching Companion. Thank you so much for spending your time with us today. I know an hour is a hard, a long time to carve out, and we just are so glad that you were here with us today and we will see you next season.