

Engaging Teen Parents: Lessons from Teens about What Works for Them

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Angie Godfrey: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Angie Godfrey, Infant and Toddler Program Specialist at the Office of Head Start. On behalf of Yvette Sanchez Fuentes, Director of the Office of Head Start, welcome to Engaging Teen Parents: Lessons from Teens about What Works for Them. In today's webcast, we'll be focusing on engaging teen parents in Early Head Start, and we'll be looking at this important topic through the lens of the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework.

As you know, the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework is a system-wide approach to engaging families. It is grounded in leadership priorities, strong program management systems, and instilled through daily practices that are carried out by all staff. Each of us has a role to play in supporting family well-being and strengthening the bonds that parents have with their children. Of course, it is critical for Head Start and Early Head Start staff to engage all parents.

In today's webcast, we're focusing on teen parents. Teen parents face unique parenting challenges. Teenagers are going through their own vast developmental changes just as they are learning to nurture their rapidly developing babies. They're in the process of finding their place in the world and establishing themselves as independent beings with their own thoughts, ideas, dreams, and goals. And at the same time, they're learning to support their children and their successful growth and development.

Today's discussion will talk about what it's like to be a teenager, and at the same time, love and care for your baby, anticipate your baby's wants and needs, and plan for your baby's future. It's a very delicate balancing act. Added to the challenges of their own development and their responsibility for their new baby, some teen parents also face additional risks, such as strains with their family or with school. These circumstances can add even more complexity at a time when they are seeking stability. This can be tough for both the teens and the staff who work with them.

But as you will see today, teenage parents bring many gifts to the work we do together. They bring remarkable energy and commitment. They are eager to learn about their baby. Many teen parents are actively engaged with their baby and ready for the new challenges of being a parent. In Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs, we help teen parents to build a strong attachment with their babies and we support them as their children's first and lifelong teachers.

I just want to remind you that, as with all the work you do in your program, the work with teen parents is grounded in the Head Start Program Performance Standards. One of the standards that guides our work with teen parents is 1304.40(a)(1) – one of my favorite standards – which talks about the importance of working in a collaborative partnership with parents to establish mutual trust and to

identify family goals, strengths, and necessary services. This standard emphasizes that programs should be individualizing their family engagement efforts and building a respectful, trusting relationship, which we know is so important to teens as they develop and mature.

Another key standard is 1304.40(d)(1), which says that parents should be involved in program policy-making and operations, as well as other parent involvement and education activities that meet their express needs. This underscores the expectation that parents, including teen parents, are a part of decision-making at all levels of the program. No matter their age, the parents are recognized as full partners to support their children's learning and development.

Today's webcast will discuss how programs and staff can support teen parents; and we'll be learning from the very best experts there are: teen parents themselves. Recently, staff at the Early Head Start National Resource Center traveled to the Pacific Northwest and interviewed teen parents from three Early Head Start programs: Albina Early Head Start in Portland, Oregon; Puget Sound Educational Service District Early Head Start in Seattle, Washington; and Olympic Educational Service District Early Head Start in Bremerton, Washington.

The teen parents in these programs talked very candidly about their experiences and how their programs helped engage them in their children's learning and development. They are a group of very thoughtful and wise young people with many wonderful insights to share. We're grateful to them for sharing their thoughts and experience with us. I can assure you, you're in for a real treat today. As you listen to them and to our panelists, we hope you'll gain some new ideas on how you can improve your efforts to engage teen parents, and that you'll better understand how the work you do with teen parents has a lasting impact on them and on their children's healthy development. Jennifer?

Jennifer Boss: Thank you, Angie, for that wonderful introduction; and thank all of you for joining us. I'm Jennifer Boss, Director of the Early Head Start National Resource Center, and I'll be your moderator for today.

Engaging teen parents is such an important topic because many teen parents are being served in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs and Early Head Start programs, as the Baby FACES Study suggests. As programs respond to their community assessments, we also know that one-fifth of programs in the study reported that they served primarily teens; and about 93 percent of programs reported prioritizing teens in enrollment. So clearly, we know that we are serving many teen families in Early Head Start programs.

We also know that Early Head Start has been shown to have significant positive impacts on teenage parent families. The Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project found that Early Head Start programs had positive effects on the social-emotional development of children of teen parents, teen parents' supportiveness, and teen parents' participation in educational activities. But despite these positive impacts, we know from our discussions with programs across the country that engaging teen parents can be a real challenge.

Many of you have asked for more guidance in this area. To help give you that guidance, as Angie mentioned, we went straight to the experts – teen parents themselves. We're very fortunate to have been able to interview some Early Head Start teen parents and to ask them to share their experiences with us. We asked them to talk about the kinds of things they – their programs did to reach out to them and engage them and what they think other programs can do to be successful with teen parents.

Along with those interviews, we're also very fortunate to have some great panelists to share their reflections today. First, I'd like to introduce Sarah Merrill, Infant/Toddler Program Specialist at the Office of Head Start. Next, we have Kraig Gratke, Early Head Start Director at the Tri-County Community Action Program in North Central, Minnesota. And third, we have Elaine Harrison, Early Head Start Director at Albina Early Head Start Program in Portland, Oregon. A few of the teens we'll see in today's webcast are from Elaine's program. Welcome, all of you.

Before we begin our discussion, I want to be sure to call our viewers' attention to the Viewer's Guide, which we developed to accompany today's webcast. If you haven't had the opportunity to download it, I encourage you to do so now. You can use the link on your browser, which you'll find located under the word "Resources" on the right side of your screen. Also, if you're not able to watch today's webcast in its entirety, don't worry. An archived version will be posted on the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center – the ECLKC – where you can view it at any time.

Now, to get started. As we hear from our teen parents today, we'll be reflecting on what they have to say and using the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework to guide our discussion. Earlier, I had the opportunity to talk to Dr. John Hornstein at the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, and I asked him to give us an overview of the Framework. Let's hear what he had to say.

[Video begins] Dr. John Hornstein: Well, the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework is a roadmap for programs so that they can comprehensively and effectively engage with families and communities around the needs of young children. So, it's a – it's a – it's a sequence of ideas or frames the programs can use to get better at doing this. And the – the sequence or the framework starts with program foundations, which includes leadership, continuous improvement, and professional development.

From there – from those foundational elements, it proceeds to impact areas, things that really make a difference. And those impact areas are program environment, family partnerships, teaching and learning, and community partnerships. And from there, the framework – so, if you do those things, you do them well, then that leads to family outcomes. And family outcomes include things like family wellness, parent-child interaction, parents as lifelong learners – or families as lifelong learners, parents as teachers and – and as advocates for their children.

Jennifer: And the theme of relationships runs through?

Dr. Hornstein: The theme of relationships is essential to the whole thing. In fact, you could see it as kind of a blueprint for assuring that relationships guide the entire process, not just between the program staff and families but between staff and staff, and staff and other agencies. That – that – this is about making connections so that when people around young children make genuine connections with each other, then the children benefit; and we know that from the research.

Jennifer: And can you talk a little bit about how culture plays into this? So if you're looking at the tool with an overlay of culture, how does that fit?

Dr. Hornstein: Well, every interaction between program staff and – and families is energized by cultural beliefs. They're all cultural interactions. So what the Framework, I think, does is create an environment where every family who comes in is engaged where they are. So if you're a teen parent, if you're an immigrant, if you're the parent of a child with special needs, you're coming in with a certain set of ideas and beliefs about children, and – and about yourself as a parent, that needs to be kind of engaged – literally engaged. So, that – the Framework is – is kind of a blueprint that allows programs to do this in a comprehensive way based on evidence-based practices.

Jennifer: And then – and you talked about the word engagement versus involvement; can you say a little bit more about that?

Dr. Hornstein: Well, yes, we've used the word involvement for a long time, and many programs have been doing what we call engagement for a long time, but we've made it more systematic. So, the – the difference really is – is about – okay, there's a parent coming to a program, can you do something with us? Can you volunteer in our classroom? Rather than meeting the parent where they are and engaging them – whether you're the bus driver or the receptionist or the teacher or the family service advocate or the director – everybody is – is there to actually engage the parent where they are around the child.

Jennifer: Can you tell us how programs can apply the Framework to work with expectant families?

Dr. Hornstein: Ah, yes, expectant families. Well, you know, the – the whole relational part of the Framework applies to expectant families, but perhaps even more intensely. Expectant families are imagining the child they're going to get. They're realigning their lives in order – or they're not realigning their lives in order to deal with this – this expectant kind of baby, the – the imagined baby. And that imagined baby can take a lot of forms in a parent's mind, but what they get is a real baby. And so, kind of joining parents during this period is – is very important work.

And just like we were talking about school readiness, it's almost like we're – we need to talk about baby readiness. So, what kind of circle of care needs to exist around an expectant parent so that they can feel successful? And when the baby arrives – you know, we've got great research in – in Boston where if you take that baby, you show it to the father, if you demonstrate what this baby can do that first day, that that father's more likely to be there later on. So, this – these early processes in becoming a parent are –

are times for relationship building. By definition, human beings build relationships. They let go of some during pregnancy, but they also build some during pregnancy. [Video ends]

Jennifer: I want to take a moment to reiterate some of the key points that John made because I think they're so important. First, as he said, the Framework serves as a road map for programs; and we're really talking about systemic change, not just to programs adding on to what they're doing, but really changing in a systemic way to engage parents and families and community partners in every aspect of program life. Also as John said, all of the aspects of the Framework happen in the context of relationships.

When you look at the Framework, you'll see a purple arrow at the top going over all of the columns that says "Positive & Goal-Oriented Relationships," and that's to serve as a reminder that all of our parent and family engagement activities are grounded in ongoing relationships with babies and their families. Now, for today's webcast we'll be focusing on the four program impact areas of the Framework, which is the pink column of the Framework, and we'll be discussing how we engage with teen parents in the four areas in that column: Program Environment, Family Partnerships, Teaching and Learning, and Community Partnerships.

One thing to keep in mind throughout our discussion today is that there are some key developmental differences between teen parents and older parents. Teens are going through developmental shifts in their lives that are very similar to what we might see in toddlers as they strive for independence and autonomy; and this is a very normal process and it's developmentally appropriate for them to be going through these changes, and we should expect – what we should expect of teen parents.

For those of you who are interested in learning more about this, there's a chart in your Viewer's Guide showing the three stages of adolescence – early adolescence, middle adolescence, and late adolescence – and all three of these stages are characterized by different features of physical development, cognitive development, and social-emotional development; and you'll find those outlined in the chart. Also, teen development was covered at length in an audio conference we conducted back in March of 2011, called "Serving Expectant Teens: Principles for Practice, Resources and Curricula." This audio conference is available on the ECLKC, along with several wonderful resources on teen development.

Now, let's look more closely at the four impact areas in the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework, beginning with program environment. John and I talked about program environment, and I asked him to help explain the concept and what is really – what it really means to engage families through the program environment. As you listen, you may want to take notes in your Viewer Guide so that you can reflect on them later. Let's take a look now.

[Video begins] Dr. Hornstein: The program environment impact area relates to creating a space – and when I say "space" I'm talking about the physical space as well as the interpersonal space – for families to come in and feel welcomed, to be valued and respected for who they are no matter where they come

from. And so, the physical space – if you're thinking of teen parents, what does a physical space need to be like?

Physical space, for one, needs to be a safe space for their children. I think all parents want a place where their children are safe, and particularly if they come from unsafe environments themselves, but also interesting – interesting for children. And so, when they see the pictures of their own children on the wall and they see people like themselves, then they feel welcomed. But then there's the attitudes of the staff. What are staff doing to accept everybody who walks in the door? What are they doing to – to – to create that welcoming atmosphere? And I think it goes beyond just welcoming. I think it goes to taking that extra step because teens sometimes will give you mixed messages about whether they want to relate or not. Again, that's true of a lot of parents, not just teens.

So, what do staff do to actually engage with a parent in the welcoming kind of way in the – create an environment that's accepting? And I think part of it is – is where's that parent's energy when they walk in the door. You know, what's that parent interested in? Can you tap into that? And that may be a negative thing, like, you know, "Why is this here?" Or, "Why is that there?" And – and to interpret that – that energy that the parent brings, even if it's – you know, takes you aback. "Oh, this is about safety for the child." Or, "This is about this – this parent's particular interests." So, that's what we mean by a – a welcoming environment.

Jennifer: So, the environment is both the physical environment as well as the relational environment; the people in the environment are as important?

Dr. Hornstein: Right, right. And the two work together. You know, the space that's welcoming is easier to relate to other people in.

Jennifer: Now, one of the things we've learned from the Baby FACES Study is that teens who are served in Early Head Start programs often come to the programs with multiple risks. Can you talk a little bit about understanding how to – how a program can approach thinking about their environment with teens who have such risks?

Dr. Hornstein: Yeah, I think that that's a – Jen, that's a really good point to make. I think teens are very competent. They're very competent people. They – they have intense ideas about how to parent and – and how to be as people, and they're – they're – they're working on that. But, they also – many teen parents come with other risk factors. And I think the – the program needs to be set up in a way that it's not just about child development for the child.

It's not just about teaching for the child, but, it's kind of – if they want to talk about something that's beyond that, that the environment – the interpersonal environment, the staff – let's say it's a teacher and not a family service advocate – that they actually accept what the teen is bringing in terms of, let's say, a violent situation. So, a welcoming environment kind of accepts all the issues. It doesn't necessarily

address all the issues directly, but it – it accepts them and then channels the – the information to the right place. [Video ends]

Jennifer: So, as John said, it's both the physical environment and the relational environment that's important here. And it's so important to – for programs to really think about accepting teens for who they are when they walk through the door. We asked some teens in this next video clip to talk to us about the program environment and the importance of the program environment to them. Let's hear what they had to say.

[Video begins] Mom 1: I just love, like – you know, like, once you just, like, walked through the door, you feel like – you feel like you're so safe because of the security they have; you know? Everybody has, like – their different [inaudible]. You just go into the classrooms, you know. There's, you know, no way for other people to come in, or... And, like, the – the people – the teachers that teach, you know, that take care of the babies, they're just really, like, awesome. I just love them.

They – I mean, they have taught my son how to crawl. He's now, like, on the stage where he's trying to walk now. And, you know, he – he's even using his hands for, like, sign language, you know, to say "more" or "stop" or "thank you." So, that's really – you know, that's really nice, and I just love it. You know – and he gets – you know, he's really comfortable with the people around here, that he doesn't – you know, like, I feel like he's safe here, and that he feels really, really comfortable.

I mean, and the – you know, the people, like the – the supervisors here, they help you out, like, a lot. And, you know, like, I just love coming here and talking to them. You know, every time I see them, you know, we just stop and say hi and how you doing and stuff. And that's really, really great to hear from someone else. Even though I'm a teenager, like, probably in some other places, they wouldn't really take me as – you know, as a grown-up now; and over here, you just feel that comfortable, you know, like – they talk to you as you are, like as an adult. You know, they don't treat you, like, as a teenager no more.

Mom 2: I walked in and there was a lot of teen moms. And I can – well, looking around the room, you could see there's pictures over there about teen moms. And they look very involved and it just – that's something that I liked, that you have all these other teen moms around you that are physically there. And they – actually, like, some of us get together and we play with our kids and stuff. So, it's like, you walk into your – into the room and you know when you look at these girls that they're there, and that you have people to talk to and stuff.

Because, yes, you're a mom, and so is like 20- and 30-year-olds. They're moms, too; but being a teen mom, you go through a lot more different stuff than you would when you're 20 or 30 because you have people, like I said, looking down on you or you have – trying to finish school and – high school and all that. So when you sit there and you talk to these teen moms, it's – they're really – you're related to them. Like, they know what you're going through, and they can sit there and they can help you out in any way they can if they've already gone through that.

Dad 1: I mean, there's a lot of – there's a lot of, like, girls there that were pregnant at my school, and when I would go to the parent meetings, there's nothing but the moms. So, I was the only dad there. And it was just like – and then, it was just like them seeing me coming in and picking up my daughter. Coming in – it was like something new to them. You know, it was like – like, whoa, there's a teen dad that's really here, that's doing what he needs to do.

So, it was like they – and then that's kind of what made me unique, and they kind of started recognizing that, because it was, like, something that they probably never see that much. I had to like – basically, like, show them that I was a committed person – a committed dad, and, you know, get my stripes up, you know, get some bars; you know? So, at first, like – like, I was saying, they were kind of like – they – they saw that I was a committed person and then that's when they kind of started to, like, engage me. And then I would, you know – you know, do vice versa, you know, and kind of started, like I was saying, build that relationship with – with the staff there.

And so, yeah, like, at first they weren't, like – they – I mean, it was shocking to them. So, they were just like, you know, shocked for the couple – first couple weeks. So, I didn't really let it affect me, but, you know, they kind of started to, you know, come around and be supportive of me. And then – and also, like, I was – you know, I was doing good.

Mom 3: It was very open. You could see the entire center from the moment you walked in. I could point: "My son's over there." The space it – it – it – it was a very open space. They – you – you could see the babies' side, you could see the toddlers' side. They had these nice little dividers right down the middle, so you knew you're baby's not going to be trampled on by a – a toddler that doesn't know any better. [Laughter] But at the same time, you can still see your child when you walk in.

And – and they – they – oh, I loved – they have pictures of all the babies all over the walls. And it just made it seem like it was much more inviting, that each child was special in that center. Oh, the teachers were amazing. They were so good with my son. In fact, my son – at the time, there was a teacher named Ms. Kelly, and he just latched on to her. Oh, my goodness. And, of course, Ms. Nicole – he loved Ms. Nicole, too. And the teachers were amazing.

The – the – the help that – it wasn't just, "Okay, give me your child. I'll watch your child while you're – while you're at school." It was, "Okay, I'll watch your child. Do you need something? Do you have a house? Do you have transportation to school? Do you have enough food? Let me show you all these programs that can help you." And everybody was friendly. There was always an ear to listen to – or that would listen to you and your issues, and ways of solving the issues. And, it was just amazing. It was an amazing experience.

Dad 1: It's kind of like, you know, when – let's say, if you work at a retail store and somebody comes in and you ask them, like, "Hey, do you need any help?" And then, they say, "Oh, no; I'm fine," and then you kind of just, like, go away. That's not good enough. You got to, like – you know, you got to ask them questions like – don't let – don't give up so easy. And just, like, more of, like – keep asking them, like – or

be like, if they – if they didn't need any help, then, you know, make suggestions, have them try the product on, and stuff like that.

So I – you can try – bring that into the Early Head Start. So, like, basically, engaging with them; and if they're being a little resistant, like, "No, I don't need help," or they're not really wanting to talk that much, like, you know, kind of give them a little push, because somebody, like, always needs a little push. You know, you really want to try to get them, encourage them, and stuff like that. [Video ends]

Jennifer: Wow. What insightful comments from these young parents about what programs did to invite them in and to welcome them in. Kraig, can you talk a little bit about what your program does to invite teen parents in?

Kraig Gratke: Yeah. I think it's – it's really important to – right off the bat, to engage them as equal partners in – in, not only their child's education, but in their education as parents. I think it's important that it's portrayed that this is a partnership of – of equal values and – and – and everybody's involved at the same time. You know, the other thing is that we try to do is, you know, have times for teens to get together, during socializations or home-based. And certainly, we have pictures of kids with their parents, and have that all over, you know, in the centers. And, you know, family albums for kids and parents. So...

Jennifer: And – and Elaine, what else do you all do to invite parents in? And, talk a little bit about what you do with teen dads.

Elaine Harrison: Okay. I think it starts at enrollment. When the – when the parent comes into the door, I think they need to see welcoming and inviting staff – knowledgeable, trained staff who will really welcome them into the center. We serve parents in the home-based and center-based model. So, some of the systems we do, like continuity of care and primary caregiving, builds that relationship, builds that attachment, builds that bond between the mother, the child, and the – and the staff.

And in home-based, we do the same with the home visitor and the child, and – and the program builds that strong attachments and those bonds. We think communication is very important in both systems, that you have to have strong written communication, as well as a verbal dialogue – honest dialogue with parents. And also with their environment, as Kraig said, that the environment is welcoming, it's inviting, it's – they see pictures of the babies, like the teen said – pictures of them doing well.

And our teen fathers, we probably struggled with that more than any program when we started. One of the parents talked about in the – in the clip that he was the only father there. So as we struggle with that or with all our other fathers involved in Early Head Start programs, we probably struggled a little bit more with the teen father. How do you invite teens in and communicate in a language that they understand that they're a part of this program? So, fortunately, we can say we're successful at that now from trial and error and from learning from it, that our teens are engaging. We learned how to schedule workshops and trainings and events so the time is conducive to them, that they can get in. And we have

used our teen fathers as examples of – of how to be involved in their child’s life, and – and used them as role models for other teen fathers coming in. So, that has been helpful.

Sarah Merrill: I love that, because the relationship is a dynamic, and not only were you speaking about the program staff bringing their piece to the relationship but the parents bring their half. And he spoke eloquently about that. It takes time to build a relationship, and the systems and the environment help bring those messages to life. But, it's really the people who make it real.

Jennifer: And – and I heard both of you talk a lot about what you do to train your staff so that they – they understand adolescent development and they know how to, you know, sort of engage with teen parents. Can you talk a little bit, Kraig, about what you all do?

Kraig: Yeah. We spend a lot of time every year doing some in-service – some training around adolescent development, you know, kind of where they're at; and I think that changes. And, you know, one of those things, too, it's important to recognize that we have teens in our program that – you know, 13 to 19. And I think there's a continuum of development that – and staff have to understand, you really have to take parents where they're at.

When they first come into the program, you understand, you know, that – that that’s their age, and understand you have to figure out where they're coming from. And, they're all different. And so, really work – work with them from where they are. And we spend a lot of time talking about that and – and just kind of processing those things and – and making sure that everybody is – is understanding that; you know? I mean, they're parents, but they're teens. So – and they, you know, need a little bit of extra special stuff going on for them.

Jennifer: What about you, Elaine?

Elaine: We take time training our staff in what is our philosophy of care of infants and toddlers. What do we believe so we can communicate that to the parent? And then, we talk about shared decision-making, shared leadership, shared roles, that we're not the experts. We’re not the experts in these children’s lives; parents are the experts. And we’re going to help walk with them, not lead them. We’re going to be right beside them all the way. So, I think that has instilled in the teen parents a voice. We’re hearing their voice, and that they have an important role in their child’s development and they carry that forward wherever they go.

Sarah: Do you have ongoing systems? Because it's – training is certainly important, but we know development happens at peaks and valleys, and I imagine the staff must need some support to individualize, and teens have some vulnerable – potential vulnerable issues. What's the ongoing support that you provide your staff?

Kraig: Well, we do a lot of reflective practice. I mean – well, reflective practice, reflective supervision. And so, we meet with some regularity about all of our families. But, you know – I mean, teens, again,

because we tend to focus on that as our enrollment population – the ones that we're geared for – so we spend time talking about what their families are like, you know, where they're at, what their needs are. And, you know, sometimes that means getting – working on driver's license kinds of stuff, facilitating stuff with high school, a lot of those kinds of things. So...

Sarah: It's hard work.

Jennifer: Well, thank you. Thank you all for this. Let's now move on to the next impact area, which is family partnerships. So, let's take a look at the clip of me talking with John about that aspect of the Framework.

[Video begins] Dr. Hornstein: Well, the family partnerships impact area is really kind of the core of this. And it – it's – it's about establishing kind of goal-directed partnerships with – with the families around the needs of the children and the families as a whole. And so, the – this impact area requires, I think, a lot of thinking about how you do that intentionally. How do you – how do you make a relationship with another human being? How do you make that connection so that – that people can do what they need to do?

I think the research is pretty clear on this, is that when – when people actually connect with each other in an authentic way and they feel good about that connection – just that connection between two people – that on both sides – the staff side and the parent side – they're more able to do what they need to do. So, the – I think there are a number of ways that – that programs do this. One way is by focusing on the child, by getting that common focus; because you know the parents, even though their behavior might – may – might not indicate it, that they're real interested in the child. That's why they're there. So if you can both focus on the child together, then you've got gold.

You know, if you're describing the child the way the parent sees the child, then you're building that – that connection. But, I think another way to establish an authentic partnership is to create some kind of mutuality. So, on your side, you've got power. So, when we share data with families – well, a lot of times programs share data – "Oh, this is what we know about your child" – and the – the parent sits there and listens. Well, the fact is – is the parent owns the data. So, how do you establish a conversation about sharing data where the parent has as much power as the program?

So, I think that's – that's another way. And – and in a sense, I think what we're doing when we do that is we're – we're saying, you're a – you know your child best. You're competent. You're supporting that competence, and then both sides feel stronger and more able to do things. So, you know, I think there's a – a real science to partnerships. And what we're trying to do is – is provide evidence for that.

Jennifer: So, in building on the belief that the parent is the child's first teacher, of course, and bringing that to the relationship, you're saying?

Dr. Hornstein: Absolutely. Absolutely. The – the – as the parent, and like I said, even that teen who's not sure they want to be there, who is kind of surprised at what you're sharing about cognitive development or language development, that they, in fact, know a lot. And how do we use that strength in order to do what needs to be done, both for the child in a classroom or in a home visit and for the parent in – in the community?

Jennifer: So, can you talk a little bit more about who is the family in thinking about – particularly about teens and who that family is?

Dr. Hornstein: Well, I think that is a very interesting and challenging area for programs. So, who is the family when the teen's involved? One thing about teen parents is they're probably as different from each other as they are from any other, you know, group of parents. I think it's easy to stereotype teens, but don't do it. You know, so – so some may be living with their parents, some may be living with other teens, some may be homeless, you know, so – so I think – I think getting a real picture of who this family is is important.

I recently met a teen parent who was living with great-grandparents. And the great-grandparents were doing a lot of, you know, the caregiving of the young children. So, whoever is working with that family needs to get a picture of – of who's important. And, we make guesses and we test those out. So, I think – and – and you brought up the issue of culture earlier, too. Well, culturally, you know, who's the decision-maker in a family? So – and it's probably not one person in most families, but in some families, some people are called that. So – so I think it – it's less imposing some kind of prototypical, you know, picture onto a family than discovering who is this family and what is the circle of relationships around the child? [Video ends]

Jennifer: So, the key to family partnerships is really recognizing the parents as fully competent and engaging them as their child's first teacher, as John said. We asked the teen parents to talk a little bit about family partnerships and what that means to them, and what programs did to build their trust. Let's take a look at what they said.

[Video begins] Mom 4: It took me a while to actually get a relationship going because I'm not – I don't just like, "oh, hey, yeah," and tell my whole life story to somebody. I really have to get to know them and trust them. So, it took me a while before I could do that. But, after a while, talking to Rosio and being able to talk to Adrian's teachers, it helped me a lot.

Like, honestly, Rosio's helped me in so many ways. And the teachers help me with Adrian and help me become a better mom, so it's – it's really – it's really good. Like, I don't know how to explain it. It's just, being able to talk to somebody and know that they care is a good thing. Like, I could go home and talk to my mom all the time. She's going to always be there. But, it's just like – it's different. Like, I – I kind of thought about it and I was like, "Well, they're trusting me to bring him here and help him better himself, so, I got to kind of give trust back."

I would always call and check on him. I was able to talk to him and ask him if he liked it, and he would always -- yeah, he loved it here. And just being able to know my kid is happy where he's at and nothing's going to happen to him is a good thing. It just -- it takes time. It really does. Like, when you first meet somebody, you -- it takes time getting to know them. So, that's what I had to do. I had to take time, let it run its course, and just get to know somebody after a while. And that's what I did; I really got to know the teachers. I got to know Rosio. And then, after a while, I kind of felt comfortable and relaxed.

Mom 5: A lot of times with -- especially with teen parents, people talk down on you a lot. Like, I mean, it's good to get feedback from older people, especially when, like I said, I didn't know what to do; you know? But sometimes people will talk to me like I'm dumb or something. You know what I mean? Like -- like, I -- because I'm a teen parent, I don't know anything. But, Karen never did that. She was more of -- like a friend, I guess.

I even talked to her -- even after Amaya started going to the center-based, I still talked to her. Anytime I needed to talk about an issue with, like, Devon or with Amaya, like, I always turned to her even though I wasn't seeing her on a regular basis anymore, you know. She definitely brought me a lot of resources, but it's only when I asked. Like, she wouldn't just, you know, bring a bunch and overwhelm me. It was like -- it was more of like I was confident enough to ask her. Do you know about this? Can you get information for me for this? And then, of course, she would bring me what I needed.

Dad 2: From -- from our point of view, you just got to be yourself, you know. We really want to know who you are. I mean, we're invited -- I mean, we're inviting you into our home.

Mom 6: Everybody was very lenient. Like, sometimes I'll be running late and they're like, "Oh, I'll see you when you get here." And I go to school at 6 a.m., so her aunt brings her. And they're just -- they're always so helpful. And I'm just like, "[Sigh of relief] Yes." And the big thing for me was calling. I call a lot and see how she's doing, or I'll come in and -- you know, and I'm really glad that they encourage that. Some daycares don't. [Laughter] So, it was nice. It's nice.

Mom 7: They teach him things. Something that -- like, they help him develop more. And they always ask, like, if -- I don't know how to put it in words. Like, they have a goal sheet that both me and the teacher, like -- they're like, "Okay, well we want him to walk by a certain time." So, we really, like, focus that, me at home and her here at school. So, I think that's pretty cool to set up goals. [Video ends]

Jennifer: Wow. I -- I love this. I mean, what great messages from these parents. So, clearly, trust and respect were big issues that they talked about that are important for engaging with teen parents. Elaine, can you talk a little bit about what your program does to build trust with teens?

Elaine: I can. I think what struck me in that tape the most is when the teen said it takes time. And it does take time to develop relationships and to communicate with each other, and to develop that rapport with each other. I think we do a three-prong approach. We have a relationship with the parent -- the teen parent, with their child, and they have a relationship with us as a program. So, that's all built on --

builds trust; and the trust comes from us following through, having respectful communication with them, asking them for their input, listening – truly listening to what they have to say, and making changes where we need to make changes.

Jennifer: What about you, Kraig?

Kraig: I would agree. And I think that you building relationships with teens starts with asking them what they want, and – and asking them what level they want us to participate in their lives, because it is their lives. And so – and that changes over time as that relationship builds. The other part of that, I think, truly is understanding that all parents can make mistakes and they're not any different. And so, just because they're teens, that doesn't mean it's a bigger mistake than anybody else. It's just part of – part of growing up – part of growing up, having kids, which everybody has to go through.

So – and communication is key. And I think the way we communicate with teens is different because it's a lot more face to face and it's, you know, a lot more communication. And they observe how you interact with other adults, and if they're – if you're not treating them the same, they pick up on that. So, it's important to – to, you know, carry that out across all parents.

Jennifer: Yeah, I mean, I heard them say very clearly, authenticity is important. Sarah, did you want to add to that?

Sarah: I was going to say I liked that authenticity. And one of the teens used the term friend, but I want to perhaps expand upon that. And that's her interpretation, and I think it's probably broader than just a "pal" friend. It's somebody who has my back, who helps me think about who I am as a teen, but more importantly, who I am as a parent. So, I think the child is the real window to get a lot of that relationship building. And I'll go back to John, when he talked about the goal-oriented relationship building. I think they all talked about having the goal of security, the goal of being a better mom, being a better dad.

Jennifer: And – and when you talked about the – the friend thing, what – for me, what that brought up was also the importance of maintaining professional boundaries and, you know, how critical that is with parents, but in – in – particularly with teen parents, who, you know, maybe could misconstrue the relationship there. So, how do you all support your staff to maintain the kinds of boundaries that they need to with their teen parents? I'll go to you first, Elaine.

Elaine: Okay. I think that's where reflective supervision comes in for us, because each family is different. Each family invites you into their home and into their lives differently. And there's cultural traditions and rituals that you want to respect, like for – many families may invite you to the birthing of their child, to a birthday party, to – to special events in their child's life. And our program says go and participate. It doesn't say get comfortable; don't kick your feet up on the table and relax. It – so, you work that out with your – with your supervisor or with somebody you can reflect on: "What can I do when I'm there? How far can I go?" And you can be professional, even in that setting.

Sarah: To honor the milestones and the role of being a mom or dad.

Elaine: Right, right. Right.

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely.

Elaine: And celebrate with the family.

Jennifer: Yeah, that's so important. What do you want to add to that, Kraig?

Kraig: Well, we do a lot of training around boundaries and around – particularly because we're a very small community. There's a lot of small communities, and so we have staff that may have teenagers of their own going to schools with teens that are part of our program. And we run into people in the grocery store and everywhere else. And so, we – we let, kind of, the teens define what – what level of – of – of interaction there are – there – I mean, there is between the staff and – and the family.

But still, really talk about boundaries and what's safe. And, you know, a lot of our families come from child protection, and so there's a – a different level of – of service that – that goes on when you're in, kind of, that setting. And I think it's important to talk to parents about their boundaries, too, to some degree to protect them. Because if you're getting stuff subpoenaed for court and stuff, it's important that they understand that that relationship exists.

Jennifer: And Elaine, I – I think you talked before about the importance of making sure that both families and staff understand the policies of your program, and can you talk a little bit about that?

Elaine: Yeah. Families and our staff understand our policies and procedures, and especially the grandparents, because they're very involved in teens' life, too. And – and they want to have input and – and oftentimes, they are still the caregiver of their child. So, we invite the grandparents in to have the dialogue, too. It's easier in the home-based setting because they can participate in that home visit. In the center-based setting, it's – we take a little bit more time and effort to pull them in, to invite them into the environment so they can learn and grow and change along with their teen too, and support their – their child through those changes.

Sarah: Extended families, huge with this population. We heard one of the teens mention an aunt. So, it's not just the grandparents, it's...

Kraig: The whole works, yeah.

Sarah: The – the whole works, from family to friends.

Jennifer: Okay. Well, thank you all. This is great. So – but I think I'd like to move us on to the next impact area, which is teaching and learning. So, let's take a look at what John and I talked about earlier with that aspect of the Framework.

[Video begins] Dr. Hornstein: With the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework, what we mean by teaching and learning, we're not taking over teaching as – as – as solely for – for parent engagement. But – but what we want to do with that is to think about a shared process, that the learning process of the young child is shared between the teachers and – and the families. Because essentially, and this – I think this is true at all ages, but is particularly true for infants and toddlers – that – that learning is nested in relationships. It's about what you do together that – that leads to the learning process.

So, it's a shared partnership. The parent, as I said earlier, is – owns the data, owns the information. And the communication between the staff and the parent involves discussions of how learning happens. You know, what does a baby do? What does a – a toddler do in the learning process? And I think there's a recognition with this that learning is not just an intellectual activity, but always involves emotion. Interest is an emotion; and shared interest is even better.

Jennifer: And so, sometimes there are – some people struggle with trying – of making the connection. So, what's happening with an infant and toddler? What does that mean when we talk about teaching and learning? How do they understand what – infant development and how parents can support their child's development and what that has to do with learning?

Dr. Hornstein: That's – that's a great question because so many people have viewed infants as these kind of passive recipients of care for so long and, you know, the research is showing us how competent infants are when they arrive. They're learning minute by minute. And so, the – the kind of shared environment of the infant is – is – is – is profoundly important for a child's learning.

So, let's think about, maybe, a nine-month-old. A nine-month-old is starting to crawl around and pay attention to things in a different way. The nine-month-old actually will do something and look to the parent to see if what they're doing is okay. Whoa. The parent all of a sudden has a different role in that – in that infant's life. So the child is looking to what I think about when I'm looking at something? So, when they're playing with things together, the parent and the – and the infant are – are kind of in this shared learning environment.

So if you think about that, and you project it to school age, it's the same kind of thing. The – the nine-month-old playing with blocks with the parent and looking to the parent, and saying, "Oh, wasn't that exciting?" is kind of the same kind of joint attention that's required when a child's sitting in a classroom in – in first grade looking at a book and saying to the teacher, "Oh, I just saw what you saw."

So, the – you know, this – this constructive process in – in infancy, of sharing both the emotions of surprise and interest, but sharing, kind of, the attention... I mean, kids are successful in school later

because they pay attention to the right things and they can regulate themselves. And so, paying attention to things with adults and regulating yourself with an adult, prepares kids for success in school later on. So, I think if we can get this message across to parents through programs – and to program staff, because it's not always apparent to program staff either – then I think we'll be very successful in building toward school readiness because we know that parent engagement and school readiness go hand in hand. [Video ends]

Jennifer: I love what John just said there, that parent engagement and school readiness really go hand in hand. Sarah, can you talk a little bit about – before we go to the teens, talk a little bit about the importance of attachment?

Sarah: We know that babies and toddlers learn best when they are held in a positive relationship, which is a secure attachment. And these relationships are built through those everyday moments that are positive. The child can count on the mom or dad or the caregiver to respond to their cues, can provide a warm and welcoming environment, and they know that their world's going to be safe and they're going to be taken care of, and that they're important and valued. 1304.21(b) particularly talks about this approach.

And Elaine, you've mentioned the continuity of care and primary caregiving and the ongoing environment that creates these relationships. And I love that he mentioned that moms and dads are most critical to supporting the readiness of child development and later learning for infants and toddlers.

Jennifer: Great. So, we asked the teens in this next clip to talk about teaching and learning and their role as their child's primary teacher. Let's hear what they had to say.

[Video begins] Mom 3: And my mom had heard of Discovery, and we came over here, and I applied and got in and just fell in love with the program – fell in love with the program. It was – it was amazing. I – I knew, like, nothing about pregnancy. Absolutely nothing. I mean, I was – I was – let's see, I was 15. I almost turned 16 at that point and knew absolutely nothing. And all of a sudden, I had somebody who knew, like, everything, that was there to help and guide me and give me information through every step of my pregnancy.

It was like – they had a little packet of papers just stuffed full of information: what I should be eating; how much I should be eating [Laughter]; my baby's development at that time, which was really, really interesting to – to know what was developing. And – and the – the visits with Amy; she would always ask at the beginning and end if I had any questions or anything like that. And if she didn't have the information at that time, our next meeting she'd have, like, a book filled with information on it. And that was – that was amazing.

Mom 8: They talked to me about goals for Carter. Like, we have our visits and we talk about goals; and at home I don't normally think about that, but when they ask me, it – it gets me thinking, like, well,

"What kind of goals can I set for Carter?" Like, before he was walking, I – my goal was to help him learn how to walk. And when he started walking, I wanted to help him be more balanced and be more cautious of walking, and like, learning words and stuff. And with Early Head Start, they also helped him learn things and it helped me.

Mom 9: Yeah, I mean, it's cool seeing his little binder thing because they keep – like, they keep track of his motor skills or his – I don't remember what they're all called, but the different skills that he learns over time. Like, I know – I'm like – I get really excited when he learns new things. But, they look at it – they look at it in like a learning aspect, to learn from the kids, and I never really look at it like that. I'm just always, like, "Oh, that's so cool. He can do that now." But, when I see their binders and stuff, I'm like, "Wow, I never thought that he was doing that because that's how his brain works. Like, that's really cool. I never thought of it that way."

Dad 2: The home-based program – the home-based program is about – see – because the center-based is all about doing stuff when you're at school, but the home-based is all about what – what you can do with your kid at home. The way that she taught us how to interact with our baby – because we don't know what we're doing, really – so when she teaches us how to interact with them, we get – it's all about, like, relationship building. And when you relationship build with your – with your daughter or son, you know, it – it helps a better understanding – and a better understanding of what they want and what you – what you want from the baby, too. And so, that's what – that's what she did for us.

With this – with this program, it makes both parents – we – we co-parent. And so, if we're both trying to do two different things, then the co-parenting's not going to work. It's gonna collide instead of go, like, parallel. We're not gonna be on the same page. But if – at the home-base, we're – we're on the same page because she teaches us both the same thing because we're both there. It made us bond. It made our relationship stronger because we're on the same – we're on the same page. So, we know what we're doing now.

Mom/Teacher: The parent is the key teacher there in that anybody working with them needs to make them believe that. And so, it's asking them questions. You know, what is your child like? What is your – you know, what is important to your child? Because the parent's going to know that better than anybody else. And making sure that we're never crossing that line as to, "We know more about your child than you do." That's never going to be the case, and we're never going to be a better teacher than that parent is.

At the end of the day, that parent spends more time and more interactions with them than we ever will. And so, if we can build them up in that and let them know that, then that's going to help them for the rest of their life, not just, you know, the however many months they're with us. [Video ends]

Jennifer: Wow, again. Talk about authenticity. I mean, these are just completely – I love listening to these young parents talk about themselves and their babies, and what they've learned and how their babies are learning. I also want to make a point to note that the last – for our viewers, the last parent

that we heard speaking was a teen parent herself who's now a teacher in a program. So, she's speaking from both – as a teacher and as a teen parent. So, a lot here about attaching with their babies and learning their babies. And how do you – Elaine, how do you – how do you and your program, sort of, support teen parents in their healthy attachments with their babies?

Elaine: One of the teens talked about being on the same page, and that's our first step – is being on the same page. And one of the teens talked about the "little binder thing." We used to do a binder, and we went to more of a digital portfolio because we want to capture these moments in this child's child development in all these areas of growth and share that with the parent in a format that they could feel and see and live more interactive.

So, we would videotape a child taking his first steps, riding a bike, singing songs, language development, babbling, or the – or the teacher holding the baby, singing to the baby. We would get audio tapes of the children saying their first words or singing songs in English and Spanish, or – or doing their sign language communication. We're scanning documents of them doing their drawings – their first scribbles and their drawings. Scan that into the portfolio so we're showing a – a live document – a living document, an ongoing document, of their child's development that they – we videotape it. We send it to them by email or we will print it off and give it to them, or we will make copies so that they can share it with their families. So, it's a sharing experience in the growth of that child, and all framed around the development of that child.

Sarah: It's fabulous. It's making that learning moment the child has a learning moment for the teen, and to have that all about "Look what my child's doing." And we heard all the teens talk about that – of how amazing their child is, and that's exactly what we want.

Jennifer: Kraig, what about you?

Kraig: Well, I think, you know, along the same lines with their ongoing assessment process, that's really the parents that own that. And they're talking about their children, and we're having conversations with them, and so, we learn a whole lot about children by watching children but also from what their parents are saying. And in the same regard, we talk about that development in a context of these are the steps and these are the next steps. And that helps the parent, I think, take that in, that what they're doing is okay and good. And I think it also gives them some goals to shoot for. And we ask them, "What are your goals? I mean, where – what do you want for your child down the road?"

The other part of that is – is teen parents – they're still in the process of education themselves. And we ask them what their goals are for their education, because I think it's important to foster their love of learning, too. It's important that – that they continue down that road and – and understand that – that – that's important for them, but it's also important for their family.

Jennifer: That's – that's a key point, particularly with teen parents. Yeah. And did you want to say something?

Elaine: I want to add, for children with special needs, it's really a good way to bring the parents and – what Kraig just said about "Where do you see your child?" – for them to vision their child in the future and get them to look long range. "This – this disability is not going to hamper my child. He's – she or he's going to grow and develop and – and be the best possible individual they can be." And I think that's been empowering, when parent's can look beyond the disability.

Sarah: That's right. You're building on the hope and – I heard both of you speak of this, as well as the teens – the program systems and tools, such as goals and ongoing assessment -- all those that you have to do are being used very proactively in supporting the ongoing growth and development and encouraging new milestones and future hopes.

Jennifer: So, I – I also want to ask both of you, how do you help the staff in your programs help the parents, too, to make the connection between what they're seeing in their child's – infant and toddler's development and what that means when we talk about learning, and make that connection for them? Kraig, what do you all do in your program?

Kraig: Well, that is – it really goes back to relationships, and understanding relationships. And I think, you know, when you talk to parents or you watch parents interact with their children and you comment about what they're learning, that really brings it home, because I don't know that any parents really understand in the context that all of those interactions are learning interactions for the infants, toddlers, every – all the communication, all of those pieces. And so, just having that kind of conversation, going: "Did you see that? They smiled." Or, "Did you hear that?" I mean, picking up on cues, talking about baby cues. That means this. I mean, is there a pattern to the behavior? Those kinds of discussions. So...

Jennifer: What about you, Elaine?

Elaine: In our teen classrooms, we had wrapped a program called "The Incredible Years" around the teens so that they can be together and they can discuss development with a – with a school counselor. And they can see development from that aspect, and then spend time in the classroom and see what the teachers are doing in the classroom, too. So, that's for our center-based model. In our home-based model, I think that's ongoing part of it. You know, it is through – the parent is the teacher. So, we're – we're working together so you can see these goals and milestones develop.

Jennifer: I love how one of the parents in the clip talked about how, you know, I can understand learning from reading a book and from studying, but being with my child and being with the – the caregivers or the teachers in the program really helped her to understand her child.

Sarah: It's not just the children learning. I wanted to pick that up, that these teens are absorbing everything. They're watching the home visitors and the – the teachers interact and learning how to build relationships. And, you know, they're really modeling what – what the parent wants to learn.

Jennifer: Well, so much more, we could keep talking about this for a long time, but I want us to – I want to take us to the – to the fourth program impact area, and that's community partnerships. So, again, I spoke with John earlier today about the community partnerships piece, and let's hear what he had to say.

[Video begins] Dr. Hornstein: Well, it's interesting that it's not called parent and family engagement. It's parent, family, and community engagement. And there's a reason for that; that – that parents and their children aren't just isolated. They're not just these dyads. And I think a lot of child development theory has kind of supported the fact that we should just pay attention to that dyad and we'll be okay. The fact is – is that people live in communities. And as you mentioned earlier, teens have a lot more needs than just the child development part of the – the program. Head Start can't do everything for families. So – so this notion that – that – that children and – and parents are – are kind of nested in a community; and those communities vary.

I mean, think about, you know, migrant families or – or think about, you know, inner city versus rural versus suburban. So, communities are very different from each other and they all have an environment in which learning and healthy development take place. So, we need to think about community engagement. How do we, as program staff and – and program leadership, how do we actually create a system within this community that a parent can rely on and – and that a child can thrive in? How can we create a trustworthy system for children and families?

Jennifer: And I love the way that you describe families as being nested in communities. And it makes me think about what we talked about earlier with the Baby FACES study and some of what we know about – particularly about teen parents and the risks that they often face. And it seems that the community engagement part of the Framework is, for that reason alone, so crucial. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Dr. Hornstein: Yeah, yeah. I think it's – I think in particular for teens, it's – it's a – a challenging part of this because they are in schools, many of them. They require the services of, you know, whatever agency, protective services, or – or – or whatever. So, communication between programs is essential – good communication is essential. And so, the same kind of principles we're thinking about for working with families can be applied to working with other professionals – with other agencies, other programs. And that's a real challenge.

You know, in my work, I talk to people about working with kids and families and most people will say something – "Yeah, I love working with kids. You know, and I've learned how to work with parents, but boy do I have trouble with that other agency." You know, those – those people are doing the wrong thing. It's an easy place to go when things aren't working with a family. You don't want to blame the family, so maybe you can blame the other provider.

So, I think that we have to work very intentionally to form these partnerships with other programs, to know what a family needs, to – to work with them, to empower them to work with these other

agencies, and – and hopefully to promote some of the ideas we're talking about in the Framework with other programs. Because I think what we've got is – is – is a – a pretty comprehensive and systemic picture of how family engagement can work, and it'll be far more successful if it goes outside of Head Start as well as within Head Start.

Jennifer: So, what I'm taking away from this is that relationship building with parents, with families, with communities is complex and – but it's necessary for the type of work that programs are doing.

Dr. Hornstein: Right, it is complex. To raise a child in today's society is a very complex endeavor. And if you're poor, if you're homeless, if you're a teen parent, if you've been exposed to violence, that ends up requiring a complex response. But that's not necessarily a bad thing; complexity isn't bad. It's the fact that we can be thoughtful and intentional and even courageous in the face of these challenges that allows us to do a good job with families. If we can be present, if we can be intentional, if we can recognize the importance of relationships and authentic connections, then we can get done what needs to be done. [Video ends]

Jennifer: So, community partnerships are about building a trusting system of care for parents and children in the community. Let's hear what the teens had to say about the importance of the community resources that the program used with them and how that was helpful to them.

[Video begins] Mom 1: There was, like, some people that went to talk from – like, they went to my school to talk about this daycare, and then they were telling us that if – it feels more like a school for them than a daycare. And, you know, once I heard that, I was just like – oh, you know, I just – I was surprised. I was – you know, it was like, well, the daycare was, like, amazing to me. I was like, that's where I want to have my son. So, you know, I heard about the opening and I just came right away.

Mom/Teacher: It's not just Early Head Start that you're receiving when you start there. It's programs throughout the community that they've learned about because they're educated in that. And the teachers are really good about just making sure, whatever your need is, there's somewhere else in the community that they can connect you and be a part of that. And I think that's – key number one is getting you connected. And then, not giving up on you. [Laughter]

You know, there's – there's days where we don't see students for a week at a time. And that – you know, that's where they're at at that time. And that's okay, accepting them there and not making it a down thing; building them up and saying, "Okay, where are we going from here," no matter where you're at. And for some people, that could be – you know, they could be homeless or they could just be challenging with the – the, you know, abuse or substance abuse issues. And, it's kind of building them up from there. Where are you at now, where do we want to go, and what steps do we need to get in between there?

Mom 9: So, we came here and we talked to Mary, and Mary told us all these things that she could help us with. She said I could get my baby in the daycare. She said I could get – she could help me sign up for

DSHS for medical care and get me on WIC so that I can get food for me – like, healthy food for me and for my baby. So, my mom was really grateful that the school was actually here to help me. So, when I came here, it was like a miracle, pretty much, because I didn't know there was all this extra help that I could get. And my mom was really – like, she cried the day that we came here to talk to Mary because she put so much hope for both of us and for my family and stuff. So, it was really nice to be able to come here.

Mom 1: He – I have talked to him a lot. He helped me out with novels for counseling. And, you know, he's always, like, asking about, like, appointments, about, like, getting, like, him to the dentist and, you know, bringing the paperwork back from them to see how the baby's doing. And, you know, he's – you know, he's always there. Like, if you need anything, just, you know, let me know and I'll help you out. And he has helped me out a lot through, like, counseling, through, like, you know, things that I need for the baby, and even for his medical coupon, and like, for – just, you know, for – to ask if anything, like – like if I need something else. He's a really, really nice person.

Mom 3: Actually, the teachers here are – my – my son was a very late talker, and we were – I was – I was concerned. And one of the teachers was the ones that had pointed out that maybe it was his hearing, because he – he was 18 months old and he would babble, but we never got any words. Nothing. Said nothing. And they – they were the ones that – they – they had a – a lady come in and test his hearing and it didn't come out so well.

So, we went to the doctor and found out that he had absolutely – like, almost no hearing. He – because he'd had ear infections frequently, his – I think they're called eustachian tubes, that connect your ear to your throat to drain off the infection – were plugged. They weren't working, so all of the infections stayed behind his ear and actually made it so his ear drum couldn't move. So that promptly got fixed, thankfully. We got tubes put in his ears.

But, I mean, I – I didn't – I knew that he should've been talking and I – I mean, I just thought that he just cognitively wasn't there. I never would've thought of the – the hearing issue, until someone said, well, hearing is directly related to speech [Laughter], and they – they – they had someone come in and test him for it. If we hadn't had that, he probably still wouldn't be able to hear all that well. Well, I probably would have eventually figured it out, but it would have been a whole lot later.

Mom 6: Early Head Start'll help you by – they help me deal with DSHS a lot of the times. [Laughter] It's a public assistance program. They have working connections or school connections for child care and food stamps. But a lot of times, like, some people just don't get the paperwork. And so, they would – you know, their – our case managers will sit down with us and be like, "All right, let's fill all this out. Let's get everything you need and get it to them." And that was like – they helped me so much with that. [Video ends]

Jennifer: Wow, again. I just love that we were able to – to hear straight from the experts themselves about these issues. So, several of the parents in these clips talked about how they came to the Early

Head Start program through lots of different channels. Elaine, can you talk a little bit about how program – how teens come to your program?

Elaine: Teens come to our program through the school district. They're referred into our program. But what we found in community partnerships, that we can't do it alone. Early Head Start can't do it alone. So, we had to form many community partnerships to help us support our families – all our families. So, we have partners with our dental, mental health partnerships, schools, churches, businesses, and our Part C early intervention partnerships that helps us support all our families.

But, what we've found is that we need to build new partnerships around our teen parents, and listen to their needs and provide some of the needs and supports around them. And I encourage all programs who serve teens to look at how you communicate with teens and what – what they're asking for. And look for those solutions in your community. They may be brand new partnerships and some that you never thought of.

Jennifer: Can you talk a little bit more about the – the partnership that you have with – is it a church?

Elaine: It's a church. It's a church that has adopted the school. And they provide everything for the teens that they could ask for. They supply a wish – a wish list for the classroom. Each – every – every month, they send out a wish list and say, "What do your teens need?" And they go from things like clothing; food; diapers; prom dress for the prom; graduation pictures, where they have professional photographers come in and take their pictures. So, they're supplying all the needs these – these teens could want. And in the Early Head Start program, we couldn't do that. We can't do that, period. [Laughter] But our businesses can support us and our churches and people around us can support us, and that just helps that teen a little bit more.

Sarah: I love that.

Jennifer: Kraig, did you want to talk a little bit about what you all do in your programs to invite the teens in?

Kraig: Yeah. You know, what I was thinking about around this really was – again, we're very rural and there's not a lot of resources. And for a very long time, we were the only – only program that was offering services related to teen – pregnant and parenting teens. And so, you know, there's one other program now that with – with county public health. But, we do a lot of joint visiting with – with public health, with special ed.

But our population really – our teen parents come from within that community. They make referrals from within, and that's really based on staff and how staff are viewed in the community, you know, the respect that they've garnered from everybody. And we've had to build a lot of relationships with community partners to kind of advocate for – advocate for teens and – and move them along. And that's knowing people by name, you know, at places and having those kind of relationships with other

providers. And sometimes, you know, like I said, it's advocating. Sometimes it's running interference, depending upon what system they're running up against. And – you know, really, it's all around relationships within that greater community.

Jennifer: Yeah, and – and I talked with – with John earlier about the complexities of these kinds of partnerships. And – and it can be hard sometimes, particularly when – Early Head Start programs often, I think, are seen as sort of leaders in the community, and I think you've talked a little bit about that, too. And – and people look to the program because of the comprehensive services. So, there's a great potential there for partnerships, but sometimes the partnerships are – are challenging. Sarah, did you want to add something about...

Sarah: I just thought you both said it so lovely, and you – Early Head Start is often seen as a leadership. But you also mentioned that we can't do it alone. We really need the whole community to support the special populations in our – in our systems and services.

Jennifer: And Elaine, I – I love what you had said, I think once before, about having an 'anything you need' attitude. And I think that speaks to what you were saying earlier; yeah?

Elaine: Right, and I think, you know, the more we wrap supports around our teens, we build a stronger community. And as we help our teens grow, they're helping the next generation grow – the babies – right – that they're having. So, it all makes our future a little bit brighter, a little stronger, helps us in our retirement. So... [Laughter]

Sarah: And it's also thinking of the community of teens, too. I love that they're getting the prom dresses and getting support, and making – making their milestones as teens as well as parents.

Jennifer: And Kraig, I think you'd said earlier, too, about – back to the sort of complexity of the partnerships, that sometimes you have to work with the teens to build trust in other agencies.

Kraig: Agencies... And that's – in particular, you know, like I said, we – we have relationships with child protection, and so a lot of our families come out of that system to us. And sometimes, it's the teens themselves that are in child protection; not only their kids, but themselves. And so, some of that – from their life experience, is very hard to get them to trust other people. And, you know, we deal with family violence, domestic violence, some sexual assault kind of stuff within that population. And teens are private by nature. And so, to kind of dig into and understand, ask questions about what's going on with them, link them to mental health resources, folks that can sift through all of that, because we can't do it all on our own. And so, really, I would echo: it's building a community around teens and building the supports to help them.

Sarah: You had mentioned some of the complexities and the special issues, and because of that, sometimes teen parents have a harder time getting into early intervention and Part C's because it becomes tertiary almost. So, I loved that our teen mom really spoke about, "I knew something was

wrong, but I really needed, sort of, support to help me get the hearing screening." And we know the earlier identified, the earlier screened; and the earlier that the – the interventions come, the better off the child is.

Jennifer: Very nice. Well, again, you know, it's hard to get everything in in one webcast. We could keep talking about this for a very long time. But I really appreciate your time, and I wanted to give you all an opportunity to just give some concluding thoughts. And Kraig, I want to start with you.

Kraig: You know, I – I think in – what I would say, really is, you have to hire the right people; people that understand teens, that have a real willingness to go there and – and to embrace that and enjoy it. You have to love teens' energy. And, you have to be real flexible because they're ever changing themselves. And, you know, there's no real set schedule, so you have to be able to adapt. And take in grandparents and great-grandparents, and all of that. There's a lot of other system – kinds of family systems stuff that wrap around teens. And sometimes that's good, sometimes it's not so good, and – but they all have an influence and you have to be able to – to deal with that. But it's – it's really just you have to really like to work with them.

Jennifer: That helps. [Laughter] Elaine, what about you?

Elaine: I want to say the teens give a lot of strength. They have a lot of strengths and they bring those with us – with them when they come to our program. So, it's – our goal is to build upon those strengths – and recognize them and build upon those strengths. And I think teens, more than any of our – all our parents, allow us the opportunity to have a reciprocal learning community where we can learn, grow, share, make mistakes, come back together, and learn from each other. Teens do that so, so easily.

And then when you think about children learning through play, teens are so close to play. They are so close to play that they are naturally getting down there, playing with their children; while older parents tend to be a little bit more hesitant, more resistant, may have to coach them a little bit more and guide them. But teens embrace that so easily and readily. So, I – I just love working with teen parents.

Jennifer: Thank you.

Sarah: It shows through your stories, absolutely. Well, from the Office of Head Start, we know that there are a lot of regulations and standards that we require programs to fulfill. And hearing you speak today, as well as hearing the teens, it's nice to know that these requirements can be framed into a goal-oriented relationship and really bring positive outcomes. So, when the work gets hard, think about the messages that the teens you heard today and the teens at your programs are telling you of how important you are in supporting the future generations.

Jennifer: I'd like to thank all of you for serving on our panel today; and I'd like to thank John Hornstein for talking with us about the Framework; and Angie Godfrey, who gave our federal welcome. And, of course, thank you, our viewers, for joining us today. As always, we welcome your feedback. After the

webcast, you will receive an evaluation by email. We ask that you please take a moment to fill that out and share your thoughts and ideas with us. You can also send any ideas you may have for future webcasts to the email address you see on your screen now: ehswebcast@esi-dc.com.

As we close out, we particularly want to recognize the teen parents who shared their thoughts with us today. We've talked a lot about the strengths teen parents bring to our programs, and these teens did such an incredible job of helping us to understand their experience. We'll close with some of their reflections about what it means to them to be teen parents and the impact of their Early Head Start program on their lives.

[Video begins] Mom 5: Yeah, if you watch the – the shows on MTV – "16 and Pregnant" and this and that – they do kind of, somewhat overreact what it is to be a teen mom. It is difficult, nonetheless. But, it's not horrible. I mean, you get used to it; you know? You wake up in the night, you don't get to go out as much, but it – it becomes a routine. And, like I said, it – it can be better, you know, because who knows where I would be right now if I didn't have a baby who makes me stay in the house and take care of her; you know?

Mom 4: I really didn't see the need for a lot of things. Like, I didn't understand, like, okay, you know, what's the whole point of graduating? I'm not doing anything. And when I got pregnant, I kind of, like, realized, like, oh, wait a minute, I need to do what's best for me and what's best for my son. So, I kind of turned my life around. I graduated, even after I'd been out of school for almost half of a year. I managed to graduate on time. It took me a while, though. I had to do a lot of things to get done, but I did it. And there's some people that say, "Oh, you're not going to graduate; you're not going to graduate." You just got to put your mind to it. You just got to – if you want to do it, you could do it; honestly. That's how I look at it. But you just got to set your mind to it.

Dad 1: To me, being a teen parent is, like, basically like being unique. Because it's not – it's not you would call, like, traditional. Like, because usually, like, having a baby, you're probably, like, a little bit of age, you know – an adult. And it just – I think about being a teen parent as just – it gives you a little bit more – I don't know – maybe a little bit more determination, a little bit. Because it's like, you're a teen parent and you have to, like, work a little bit harder than – to, you know, just, like, survive and to provide for your child. And just – I don't know – after that long process, I think it makes you stronger, you know, because of all the stuff you kind of go through with all – by being a teen parent. So – I mean, it – it's a unique thing to me.

Mom 1: I am – I am proud of him. I'm proud of me. I have, you know, [inaudible] right now. I have done – I think I have done a good job as a mom, as a teenager still, and as a parent. That's – I think, that's what I have done good so far. [Laughter] And I'm still – you know, I'm still trying to do more, if I can. I know I can. I'm still – I'm still young. [Laughter] Yeah.

Mom/Teacher: I wasn't going to school and I became pregnant, and so I came here. I believe I was three or four months pregnant, living house to house, just kind of lost. And this program and the school, just

as an atmosphere, really provided, you know, the support I needed to get back in school and graduate. I graduated with my graduating class, so I didn't lose any time there, and got scholarships to go to college. So, they just kind of pick you up when you – when you're not sure where you're at. [Laughter] And they helped – helped get me to where I am today.

♪ Music ♪