

Strategies to Create Positive Learning Environments for Children and Staff

Amanda Bryans: Greetings, Head Start community. We are so excited that you can be here with us today. My name is Amanda Bryans. I work with the Office of Head Start on school readiness and researched practices. And you've joined us for the fourth month in our campaign to improve the health, safety, well-being and general thriving of children of children in Head Start.

The title of today's webinar is Strategies to Create Positive Learning Environments for Children and Staff. The work that people in our programs do with children and families every day is really hard work. And we want to talk to you a little bit about the kinds of things you need to put in place to ensure that most of the time children are getting positive -- having positive experiences. And so are your staff. We want to ensure that every child in Head Start and Early Head Start feels special, loved, and happy when they are in our care. We want to gather parent input about what works best for their children.

We want to make sure that we are including what parents know about their own children as we work to plan and deliver services. We want to make sure that parents know we see them as the primary experts in their children. And they're the most influential people in children's lives. We want to have intentional spaces in our, our programs so that parents can share what they know. And we don't just mean physical spaces. We mean things like opening a parent- teacher conference by saying, "Tell me about your child. What do you want me to know? What are his interests? What does she love? What is hard for her? What do you think we can be doing better in Head Start?" That's a way of creating space in the same -- just as important as having a coffee area, and some comfortable chairs.

We want to make sure we have systems for talking to families about what we're learning, that includes their insights about where children are and how they're progressing, and what their interactions look like. And how can we partner with parents to create supports that can be generalized and transferred across context so that children who come to our programs leave us feeling really, really confident and confident as they continue. So, the important next slide explains some logistic things that you need to know. We want to make sure that you know you can use the left sidebar on your screen to ask questions, submit comments, compliments would be fine, too, and to download -- that, that was a joke -- and to download handouts that we've provided, which I don't -- We have.

We've provided hand lights, handouts in the form of these slides. So, you can use these slides if you're representing your program, and this is information you want to share, we want to make sure you can get these slides so you can use them as you share this information with the parents and the staff that you work with. And we encourage you to ask questions and make comments throughout, throughout today's presentation. I'm delighted to be joined by my Office of Head Start colleague here, Sangeeta Parikshak who is the lead on mental health and disabilities in the Office. Jamie Sheehan, who is one of the federal project officers for the National Center on Development, Teaching, and Learning, and just a brilliant person. And Sarah Merrill who is the other project officer who specializes in infants and toddlers, but is a generally a whiz at everything across early childhood. So, I'm very glad to be here with them, and I would like to turn the presentation over to Jamie from the National Center on Development, Teaching, and Learning. And Jamie, you can introduce yourself.

Jamie Sheehan: Well thanks, Amanda. And hi, everyone, out there in the Head Start world. It's so nice to be able to, to be with you today, and to think about how we can all create an environment where every child feels good about coming to school. So, thanks so much. And I think, you know, just about as everything does in Head Start, we start with this, the Standards. And as you all know, the Head Start Performance -- Program Performance Standards have a section that specifically addresses the teaching and learning environment for group settings. That section begins that stating a center-based and family child care program must ensure teachers and other relevant staff provide responsive care, effective

teaching, and an organizational learning -- an organized learning environment that promotes healthy development.

So, the standards do address classroom materials and space, but as well as expectations for meals, rests, and activity. We also have standards in the area of child mental health and social well-being. Wellness promotion, expectations, so that we create a program-wide culture that promotes children's mental health, social-emotional well-being, and overall health in general. So, all of these standards really do provide the foundation for safe and healthy environments. And our role is to create a system that mixes these concepts together in a way that best fit the community that we serve. We need to take responsibility for creating that safe environment for all children, to create climates, as Amanda said, where families feel welcomed, and that we promote child engagement so that children can learn about expectations, routines and skills, and all the things that we need to be successful.

Now, while this webinar is primarily focused on group care settings, home-based programs can use these strategies and activities with families to promote this, the home, as a safe and nurturing, responsive, and language-rich learning environment. So, the strategies shared today may also be useful for socialization spaces, as well. So, most of you are familiar with the Framework for Effective Practices, also known as the House. And as you can see, the foundation of the House is built on nurturing, responsive, and effective interactions, and engaging learning environments. Children and families benefit interactions and environments that are culturally and linguistically responsive, and that meets the needs of children with suspected delays, or diagnosed disabilities, as well. So, that means when we respond to the cultures, languages, and abilities of the children and families in our programs, they benefit from the services we provide, and they feel included, valued, and respected. For home visitors, effective practices in the ways that they support parents to provide safe and learning environments in the home. They provide their child with social and emotional supports and interact with their children in ways that encourage growth and development.

So, as we work to provide those nurturing, responsive, and effective interactions, and engaging learning environments for children, it's important to remember that children often communicate their needs in ways that are different from adults. One important truth to remember is that all behavior has meaning. As children learn to communicate with language in the early years, they'll use behavior to communicate what they're feeling. It's our job to interpret what they're saying and how we can support their needs. Communication from children comes in a variety of forms, such as crying, biting, pointing, and tantrums, as well as with words and sentences as they get older. For children that aren't yet communicating with words, it can be helpful to remember that children are using other forms of communication because they don't yet have the ability to communicate verbally.

So, if we acknowledge that all behavior has meaning, and these are the forms of communication, what are some of the functions of communication? I'd like for us to use our Questions Box down at the bottom of your screen to share a little bit with each other. So, if you could, as you think of them, type in some of the things that you think children might be trying to communicate throughout these different forms of behavior. What might a child be trying to tell us through his tears? Now the way that you go to the, the way that you type in to the Q&A. Looks like some folks are getting the hang of it. And I think what you can do also is expand the Q&A Box. If you look over in the bottom right-hand of the screen, you can see a way to expand it, as well. So, great. I'm seeing all kinds of, of, of great suggestions.

We got -- they communicate their feelings. They communicate to seek attention. They don't feel good. That they're frustrated, upset, tired, overwhelmed. There's all kinds of assumptions of behavior. And many of you that, many of that what you have said -- sometimes they use it to request help, or even to initiate social interaction. They escape demand. They escape activity. Avoid a person. Lots of folks are putting in

that children communicate their needs, their needs for food, which is a really important one, or that they are sad or frustrated.

So, those are some of the functions, and our job is to observe and interpret the meaning being communicated by the behavior and try to respond with individualized support in children and work with families to develop consistent approaches between home and school. Now, that is definitely easier than it sounds, which I'm sure you all know. I remember when I first became a mother myself that the sound of my child crying gave me a lot of anxiety at first. You know, what am I doing wrong? Why is he crying every single day? Why is he so unhappy? And it really helped me to step back and to remember that he was too young to say, "Excuse me, mother. I'm hungry. Can you get me something?" That he was telling me that he was hungry in the only way that he could.

And so, just having that understanding can really help us relate to the children in our care. And during home visits and group socializations, home visitors can share those strategies with parents, as well, to understand the meaning behind their child's behavior and to not feel worried if their child is, is -- it's not always a, it's not a reflection on them as a person. It's just a way for the child to communicate his wants and needs. So, the title of this session is about creating positive learning environments. And we want to think about what exactly do we mean by positive learning environments. If positive learning environments were a cake, what would be the necessary ingredients? And what are the most important components for the children in our program? And if you would, type your answers in your Questions Box. What are the things that you think of when you're considering creating a positive learning environment? So, that the Q&A Box is down at the bottom. Looks like we're getting a lot of -- Comments. You can see some comments about biting. But Amanda, when you were in the, at the program level, what were the kinds of things that were important to you when you were creating a learning environment for children?

Amanda: Well thanks, Jamie. You know, I love talking about being in programs. And even since I was in a program in upstate New York, I've had lots of opportunities to visit classrooms and think about, think about this. I think one thing is I always tell people to be really careful about making any assumptions. Because sometimes children do things that almost seem personal. Like they're opposing us just to make our lives more challenging or difficult when really their behavior, reactions, and responses are often something just completely unrelated to, kind of, who you are and what you're doing. I think that it's really important to start with observation of what's going on for children.

Again, what are they interested in? When, when are the challenges occurring or, you know, things that are making the classroom feel less manageable. Seeing the world a little from their point of view. Trying to cultivate that understanding and empathy, and then think about a response that makes sense.

I remember once I had a child who, you know, had a lot going on in his life. I think he didn't have a lot of power around changing things that were really hard. And he wanted to rip all the art down from the wall and tear it up. And this was very upsetting to his peers who had worked really, really hard on those creations. And what I did was to fill a box with papers that I told him I needed to have shredded. And I said, "I understand that you really need to tear paper up. It hurts people's feeling when you tear up their work, but I could really use help tearing these papers up. And I'm going to keep this box here. You think if I put new papers in here every day, you could tear them up for me?" And I -- you know, he did. He loved tearing them up, his papers. And it was his box. And other children sometimes wanted to use that box and those papers, and I said, "You know, I can get you some paper to tear, too. But this is his box. This is his place for tearing papers." And that worked really well. I feel like if I had gotten kind of split in to the, you know, you can't, you can't tear down people's work, and disrespectful, it would have only contributed to what he was already really struggling with. And I had no fear that I was going to send him to Kindergarten as a child who ripped down people's work. And I didn't. He got over his need to tear up the papers pretty soon after we provided the box. And we kept working on words. But, you know, in that time, he didn't

have all the language he needed. And that's really typical of children at this young age, as well as many adults that I won't talk about. But, I think, so just trying to see, you know, do children -- Are they overwhelmed?

We see a lot of classrooms that are so full of stuff. Things on the wall. Things on the shelves. Things on the floor. The ceiling. It is totally overwhelming sometimes for most children. And so, really, again, getting down to their level, seeing what it looks like, seeing that things are happening, is there a -- Maybe you need to put some things away, and do some alternating some of your materials, or change some of the displays in the room. So, I think that's what I would, I would think about, Jamie, when thinking about, you know, really planning a positive learning environment.

Sarah Merrill: Amanda, can I add that -- Jamie, I'm going to step over you for a second. I was thinking, the, the paper- ripping story reminds me that this is [Inaudible] because that's what they do whether or not they're happy or they have some control issues at home. It's still a developmental stage. And of course, as adults, it drove us nuts because we would take the papers -- the pictures up, and they would come along with their little fine fingers would want to take it down, and they were really good at it, and also pretty persistent at it. So, we had to come up with different ways of putting pictures up without [Inaudible] or down they could be put back up. And so, we had to reframe it as they're making us think and making us be curious, and problem solvers, too. While then, we had to use each other as, like, "Remember your power thinking capacity." And the other piece I had was we, we had larger spaces which were great. But for little kids, sometimes they need quiet little corners where they can, could get away from the group, or just have a quiet little space. So, that happy balance of spaces and niches. And so, we're happy to make us think about, positive happy people is the key ingredient. So, exactly.

Jamie: Yeah. I think -- I see several remarks that are kind of similar to what you both have been talking about. I see a quiet space. Reading space. Art space. Lots of comments about warmth and inviting, having at least one caregiver that a child can open up to. Being able to have staff that talk to children at their level, and adults who take time to listen. So, it's clear that we do share this understanding that the environment is not just about the toys and the space, but it's also about the social environments that, you know, the relationships that we provide. And I love your story, Amanda, of getting him a job so that he can do the paper tearing and still, and not cause other kids to be upset.

That's a great, a great example. What about staff? You know, what should we consider when we think about creating a positive learning environment for staff? Because if we want the learning environment to be positive for children, we need to make sure that, as some of you wrote in the Chat Box, that that staff are happy and supportive, as well. So, type in your thoughts about what are the necessary ingredients for positive environment for staff. And while everyone does that, Sarah, what are your thoughts about creating a positive learning environment for staff?

Sarah: Well, it's going to be shocking, I'm sure, is that for me, I wanted it to be functional and usable in a lot of ways that it makes sense to the kids and the adults. So, for the kids, especially the infants and toddlers, I'm going to go out on a limb and make, make an assumption that this probably good strategy for the preschoolers is having a lot of open-ended materials that can serve multiple purposes. So, if you have builders, they can take the Legos and build. And if you have dramatic play users, they can take the legos and make music, or do dump and fill, or whatever. And so, that it promotes a lot of interests, and a lot of use, and a lot of multi-purposes. So, context and curious kids are often happy and busy kids, as well.

So, you get them to do the behaviors and skills they want them to do rather than those that were trying to mitigate. And as an adult, wanting to make sure that the supplies are in the area where I need them, around the -- particularly around the routine, like libraries are set up so I can easily grab the gloves, the diapers, the cream, the change of clothes, and have it all ready so that when I'm diapering the child, I can

easily engage with them, with the baby and make it a real intimate, cozy moment. Practicality. My work in Boston when the weather turns cold and dry, my skin and my hands became chapped because I was washing them all day. So, I often made sure I had some heartier hand cream available by the sink and even bought some soap that wasn't like west oil, which is what the program -- sorry. My program. And it wasn't west oil. But it felt on my skin like it was west oil.

Amanda: Industrial grade. Right.

Sarah: Right. So, I would buy, you know, disinfectant soap, but it was a little softer on my hands, and it didn't mitigate that I had chapped hands and sore hands by Friday, but it helped before. So, the other pieces. Come to -- Being comfortable. You want to be physically comfortable, as well as just happy to be there. So, when I was sitting on the floor with a baby, granted I was 25, 30 years younger than what I am, I had a little more flexibility of getting down on the floor, but I often, often leaned against the wall or a bookcase. So, it's a matter of finding a position that supported my body as well as being able to see the babies. I had a supervisor who bought those cushions that have a back to them so we can move around and be in the middle of the floor and still have some support.

And then for staff who had crackier knees, some lower seating or comfortable seating. But not only just for staff, but we mentioned the parents. We want to make sure they have cozy little spaces to be with their young ones, too. So, you know. Of course, I feel practical and comfortable, but I also it want homey. We're there for long hours and often times kids are there for even longer than we are. So, you want to make it a space that they feel that they see themselves -- It's kind of their home away from home, or homey way to break up the institutional feel and make it lighter and brighter. And I would say that comes with relationships, and laughter, and sort of a happy local buzz. Anything else my colleagues here want to add?

Sangeeta Parikshak: Yeah, Sarah, actually. This is Sangeeta. So, just from a mental health perspective, I'm really glad you took the example of lotion. Because I think, you know, when we're thinking about what makes staff feel comfortable, we really want to talk also about staff wellness. We've done a lot in our training with our Technical Assistance around mindfulness. And one of the things that a lot of people don't realize is that one of the key strategies around that is just taking a few minutes for yourself. You don't have to close your eyes and meditate, but one of the things that we did in our program where I was a mental health consultant is that we advocated for every classroom to have some kind of lotion in their, in their classroom. Something that the teachers picked out for themselves. And they actually after a month of having that in their classroom came back saying, "I feel more well. I feel like I'm actually am taking a few minutes every day to sit and to like think about myself for a few minutes. Not just, you know, I'm always thinking about lotioning the babies and changing their diapers. And I never thought that I needed that." And that, kind of, spurred them to think about what are some other things that I can integrate into the classroom. And the director even said, "What can I bring in for the staff? I hadn't really realized." But it is very stressful for you, and you need to think about yourself, as well.

Amanda: Yeah. A small ticket item can make a big difference.

Sangeeta: Yeah. Yeah.

Sarah: Yeah. Those little things can be so important. And it's, it's really a nice part of your story, Sangeeta, that the director was, was also interested in doing that. And, and making staff feel comfortable. And I see lots of comments about that in the chat box. About leadership and treating teachers with respect and value. Getting professional development that they need. And working together as a team, you know. So, I think we're right on track with the folks out there in the field. We're kind of thinking the same way about those important ingredients. And so, when we think about environments, as we said, it's not just about tables, and chairs, and toys. The physical space is certainly important. But just as important are those

relationships and interactions between and among staff. And it's not just interactions between and among children and staff, but also children and parents, home visitors and parents, and of course, staff and parents. And the environment also encourages all the activities, experiences, routines, and transitions that organize our day.

So, when we create a responsive environment in early childhood, we're talking about a lot of content here. And today we're going to think about how we can put together those, the engaging physical space with a positive emotional atmosphere. To really strengthen all of the connections between those different groups. So, the environment that we're speaking about today includes a physical environment. For example, space, equipment, and materials. The social environment, which include interactions with peers, siblings, adults, family, staff. And the temporal environment. And the temporal environment relates to the adjusting the sequence and lengths of routines, experiences, and activities. All three of these are important in our efforts to create positive learning experiences for children and families. But we're going to start with the physical environment. Need to be -- So, the physical environment can create some excitement about learning and it can also offer a peaceful place for a reflection and contemplation. You know, we talk about the cozy corner in our classrooms.

Where it's a place where children can kind of decompress. But the physical environment is also important that it can offer a space for children to feel free to move their bodies, express themselves through dance and movement. And ultimately, it should be a place where children feel safe and feel comfortable to express themselves. It should communicate to children that they are important and that their thoughts, and interests, and ideas matter to those around them. Sangeeta, you were speaking about your time in the classroom and how the hand lotion was really connected staff with wellness. What were, thinking back to that time, what was something that you remember about the physical environment in the program?

Sangeeta: So, Jamie, again I was a mental health consultant. And so, I had the opportunity to observe a variety of different classrooms in the program. You know, often times when teachers came to me with certain children, I would step back and look at kinds of ways that things were arranged in a classroom, and I would start with a morning routine and work our way throughout the day. Some of the things that really stood out for me that made the classroom a more welcoming space environment for both the child as well as the staff members was about making sure that the space was open. And, you know, we've talked a lot about how often times children really may be need a certain way because they want attention. But if you've created an open space where they can be easily seen and heard, and they don't have to act out a certain way to get your attention, I think that that can make all the difference. So, as Amanda mentioned, not having a lot of things on the wall, for over stimulation. But this is just so that they can feel like that they don't have to jump over hurdles in order to see you. Another thing that really stood out to me during that time was, you know, and Sarah mentioned this, is just making sure that there is a cozy corner or a cozy space.

I hesitate to use the word corner because we want to make sure that the space in a part of the classroom that doesn't exclude the child from the environment. We don't want to look like it was a timeout for them, but really a place that they want to go to calm down, or to think, or to just spend some time on their own. I think that's that, you know, that really -- in order to feel safe enough in order to do that is really makes all the difference, I think. Other things that I noticed was just having the pictures on the doors that say these are the things that we're going to do throughout the day, almost like a visual schedule that's really helpful. So, when they walked in the door, they were like, "Oh. These are -- this is predictable. I know exactly what I'm going to be doing.

These are the things that I always do. If something changes, they're not shocked by it because they see it as they walk in and they are told about that. And other things were just, you know, we've already alluded

to, is just looking around and making sure that -- the toys that they are going to be using throughout the day are easily accessible for them, and you know, that kind of thing. And I think Amanda has a couple of thoughts, as well.

Amanda: I just had one thought. And I, I don't want to take very long. But I want to give a shout out to my friend "Art." Art, children have, human beings have not that many forms of expression. And art is a form of expression that's available even to the youngest children. There are those that, you know, it's pretty much as soon as a toddler can pick up a crayon and realize it can make a mark thing on it, they want to do that. And there can be sometimes a tendency to focus kind of on the product, or the craft, and that sort of forgets that the art, art can be an expressive form for young children who are still earning language. And so having the opportunity to engage with art materials in ways that are comfortable for children. And by art material, I mean folk beads, PlayDoh, PlayDoh, things that be called Whizz. It can be sand, water. It can be, you know, painting with water on all of the kinds of interactions with materials, as well as the more conventional painting and drawing are critically important. There's a time to focus on what we might think of as a craft imitating the teacher and assembling something. But, that shouldn't be most of the time, even though I know it's cute, and people love it. That's different than expression.

Jamie: Yeah, it's a process that's really what we want to get to. Because that's the fun part. I mean, if you think about yourself and I know many of you out there might have hobbies. Maybe you paint in your spare time. I've been doing some jewelry making, and it's calming, and it gets at your creative side. And so, having those materials around where children can express themselves is really important. I think Sangeeta and Sarah mentioned, the cozy spaces -- we also want to think about music and peaceful sound. Those are -- That's a dimension of the environment that we don't always pay attention to. And also the outdoor environment is so important to keep in mind. That there are space outdoor. Equipment that children can play with. That there's also natural elements, as well. We get a lot of peace and serenity through just being out in nature.

And so, that's an environment we can provide for children. So, so thanks, Amanda, and Sangeeta. For those of you out in the Head Start world, what are some of the things that you think this environment, in particular, is communicating? Because the environment can really be a powerful communicator all on its own. It can communicate expectations, rules, and desired behavior. And it can communicate if it's a safe place to play or not. And it can communicate how much of this environment belongs to you and how much does it belong to the adult. So, this environment that we have a picture of, what are some of the things that you would think this environment communicates? You see an open space that we had mentioned before. And there are cubbies on the wall.

So, type your thoughts into the Questions Box. You know, I want to make a point that while we're looking at this indoor physical space, and we want to think about the outdoor space as well, it's important that when you're -- for those of you that work with teachers or art in classroom with teachers, that each kind of look at the environment with fresh eyes. And as Amanda was speaking about earlier, thinking about the environment through the eyes of the children, as what they're going to see as they walk into the classroom. And I see that there's some comments here that -- some folks are thinking that this environment means that it's okay to run around, that, that it's open and running is okay.

But then there's also a communication about order with the cubbies on the side. And some folks thought, think that this environment is too busy. Some folks think that this is the place where you can pick things up and throw them on the floor. I have tons of room for them, to run. So, it does seem a little busy and overwhelming, but I think, for the most part, this environment communicates that it is okay to move around and to run. And in some cases, that's okay. But here's a, here's a very different environment. Type your thoughts about what you think this environment communicates.

Amanda: Hey Jamie, while we're waiting for that to type their thoughts, I thought I would mention a few things that have kind of come up in the comments. One is someone said we should be careful when using any kind of scented soap or lotion, because it may be an irritant for children. And we all looked at each other and said, "You know. That's right. That's right." We would probably go with a heavy duty, really good quality non-scented lotion to combat the really kind of terrible chapping that you can get. I mean, I've seen people's hands bleeding, and that's a concern. So, you do need something. But go with non-scented. And thank you very much for that comment.

And another comment, I think, was related to that last space we were looking at that was so open. And one big important thing would be what does the rest of that classroom look like. So, is this part of the room, we use it for children to do dancing and movement, self-regulation is something we want children to learn? Opportunities. We know from I am Moving I am Learning, opportunities for moderate to vigorous activity without colliding into each other, or into each other are possible and desirable. The more we can help children, you know, have those kinds of experiences throughout the day and keep their bodies moving but under control, the better. But that room would need to be balanced with some other kind of space work. A teacher could work in small groups, or with individual children. Or children could be working on their own incentive. So, it might be okay, or it might be kind of a runway that, where there are lots of other things going on. So.

Jamie: I think that's a really important point that, you know, we do have to look at the, the whole classroom. And this is just a little one, one particular view. And I think it's interesting. We're seeing this kind of in the responses, as well, is that we can each have a very different perspective on what these environments are saying. And for example, in this picture, we had some comments that this is a space that's getting ready, that's getting children ready to go outside and play. That it provides some structure. That it's a way to help children know where they need to stand in order to get in line. But for others that looks like overly regimented, or making too structured. So, we all have our own personal view about how we see the environment around us. And we want to try to reflect the needs of the children in the classroom. And maybe or this teacher, having children line up and stand on those footprints on the floor was helpful to her or him. And that may be a way for her to have some organization when, when she's trying to get kids to line up. So. Let's look at the two of them together.

And so, we, you know, we can see that environments can help children understand what they're expected to do in certain areas. And so, in the top picture shows that running is probably okay. But then also, the cubbies communicate that there's a space for you and that you're important, and your personal items belong here in the classroom. And just the layout of the classroom alone can communicate to children and have an impact on their behavior. So, we want to make sure that our environments are safe. But we also want to make sure that the environments reflect the needs of the children of the classroom, and also the families and the culture, and all of the richness that, that brings to the classroom. And the other thing that I'd like to mention is that we want to make sure that classrooms communicate a sense of self, security. You know, we can have a physically safe environment that just doesn't feel so safe to a child. I think some of you remarked on that in your Questions Box -- of making sure that things feel homie. I remember visiting a program years ago. And the toddler room just felt really sterile. It was there. So, I think you can go to the other extreme where classrooms feeling too busy. But in this example, it really felt bare.

And the teachers were, were very proud to show me that all the electrical outlets had covers on them, and there was proper hand-washing practices, and all of that is really important. But it just didn't feel like a cozy space to me, or like a space that you would want to hang out. And I couldn't imagine that parents would necessarily want to linger there with their children. But it didn't take much, you know. I made some remarks about that, and we talked about what we could do to hang some child artwork, and include family photographs, plants, and soft cushions in the corner, and make this space much more inviting. And the

teacher that I was working with really got into that transformation, and she taught me a lot about how we can make our environments more homey. And one of the things that she did was, and I know it sounds like sense, or not a good, a good idea, because of the allergies.

But she did spray a very light lavender scent around the door frame because she felt like when the children came into the classroom, they would recognize that calming scent, and this would be a place of safety for them. So, it was a pleasant way for for them to be greeted in the morning. Here's another example of an environment. This is actually a family child care living room, and this space is set aside for reading and exploring books. and the two chairs help to reinforce how many children might fit in the space. So, that's a way to communicate about how many children you would expect to have there. You can see the books are available at children's eye level, and they can explore them freely.

And it looks like a space that would be initing for families, as well. They could ring materials into that space and use the book, include books in the child's language which should be a great addition to that reading area. I used to use the reading area and the book area as a place for reflection, as well, for children in my classroom. I know that it can be very helpful when children are, are stressed out, to have that as a place where they can relax and reflect, and take a few deep breaths. The idea of including children's artwork and family photographs is so important because want children to know that this is your place and that your family belongs here. I'm wondering if those of you out there in Head Start world, if you have any special strategies of your own that you use to communicate through the environments in your program.

So, if you could type in your thoughts in the Questions Box about what kinds of things do you do to communicate into the environment. And I see some of you have remarked that you like to use bright color. Bright colors make the room feel inviting to you, while others have said not many colors. We've heard a lot about art materials, and keeping things at the child's eye level. Oh and I see someone wrote, I want to go there. I think she's thinking about the family child care. So, a family picture wall. There's all sorts of things to make your environment one that feels inviting to families.

This is another example. This is a bulletin board that shows the months of the year with the photos of children holding up their birthday number. And it really gives away for each child to feel valued and recognized, and the teacher begins the activity at the beginning of the year, taking pictures of the children together that shared a birthday month, and that really helped them to build friendships with each other and pointed out commonalities, you know. Things that are similar between us. So, that activity alone gave a sense of community in the classroom, and a feeling of being at home. Let's see here. Are there other comments that have come in? I'm having a hard time toggling back and forth.

Okay. Here's another example. This is a way that a teacher used the circle time rug to make the room inviting, and also to get children to spend that this is a place for them, that you are important. Okay. So, the second type of environment is the social environment. And this is the, the part of the environment that has a huge role in creating positive experiences for young children because it's all about relationships. We need relationships to feel safe, valued, special, happy, and loved. And our families are more likely to engage with the program once they have an ongoing relationship with the program staff. Think back to the time, to the image of the house that we saw in the beginning. And that the foundation of the house was about a nurturing, responsive, and effective interactions.

Children use those experiences with familiar adults, and they build on those experiences to develop relationships with other adults. And over time, children learn that adults are there to help them, and they can seek out adults as a resource. We all share that responsibility to get children that experience, that they're safe and they're actually learning in the environment. When adults yell, or get wound up, angry, or frustrated, children know it and sense it, even very, very young children. Even babies. And so, as teachers, your child's secure, safe, when that child is away from their family, the teachers and the staff in

the program are their rocks, you know. That's the person that they can rely on to help them feel safe. Fostering relationships and friendships with other children is also critical.

There's positive peer relationships provide children with a sense of security, and another safe relationship to manage that time away from home. And there's lots of ways that we can promote relationships with other children. You can point out common interests between children. You can let children know when you recognize friend-making behaviors. For instance, "I saw you in the sandbox when you offered that shovel to Carlo. That was really kind. You're being a good friend." So, those friendship skills are things that we can teach. We're not born knowing how to make friends. I remember when my son was younger, and we would go to the playground, he would, in the beginning, would ask me if I would introduce him.

And so, I would go up to the group of kids and introduce him to kids. Because that's so important. Connections are so important. And we really can be the adults that help children to make those connections. And these are all of the skills that children achieve through social-emotional confidence. You know, really able to manage their own emotions better. And you'll see them engage in less challenging behaviors. So, as we grow, and as the social-emotional development skills improve, increase, we start to see these kinds of behaviors among children, and teachers can play such a great role in making that happen. And part of that is thinking about feelings, and understanding where feelings come from, what feelings look like. This teacher has been teaching about feelings.

And she wanted to, the kids to know what the feeling looks like on their faces. What does your face look like when you feel angry? Or what does it look like when you feel sad? And what does that look like on other people's faces? So, taking that time to step back and teach about feelings helps children to learn to identify emotions in themselves, what it feels like in their own body, what it looks like on their own face. And then, eventually, what that looks like on other people's faces. It's pretty complex when you break it all down. So, I think I'm going to have to skip this video where -- We're running short on time. We also wanted to make the point about when you're thinking about the social environment, we really can't understate the importance of our relationships with families. They have so much to share with us, and they know their children the best. And we find that when families are supported, they can be in a much better position to support their own child.

So, let's think about how we can make that happen. Here are some ways that we can connect with families. Around culture, routines, stories, and books. Culture influences every aspect of our development, including adult roles and what our expectations are for young children. There are different concepts of preferred child behaviors from culture to culture. There's different child caregiving and teaching practices used by parents and caregivers. And there's our different routines, and family routines, and just asking families about those routines can be really enlightening and helpful. I just recently came back from a trip from Argentina where I met with family I hadn't seen in a really long time. And one of the rituals in Argentina, family ritual, is to share a drink that's called Mate.

And it's a tea that is, you drink it in a gourd, and you use a special metal straw, and the family gathering usually includes passing the Mate around in a communal sort of way. And I experienced that for the first time on this trip, it felt so comforting to me, and it really helped to feel connected with my family. And so, if we can take the time to learn about some of those family cultural routines that we can share with other children, as well, as they're comfortable doing so, we can really build some strong connections that will only benefit the child. So, the last environment that we're going to touch on is the temporal environment. And again, that's the environment that is referred to as the [Inaudible] and links the routines and activities. So, one of the things that we talked about earlier, as well, is this idea of a schedule. You know, often times, children have difficulty knowing what to expect, and what activity is coming next. So, we want to give them a lot of ways to give them that sense of that routine so that they develop a sense of control over their own environments. This is the first-then-later strategy. And so, this photo is an example of an

individual schedule that the teacher created so that children can manipulate the activities of the day, and better understand what comes first, and then what comes later. And we also want to spend time helping children with understanding time, in general, and taking turns.

So, this teacher used a, the, a timer so that in the photograph with Brenden, so he could see how much time he had left on the computer. We want to make sure that children get cues when there are transitions coming, that we let them know about that transition in a lot of different ways. There are some children with just a transition cue for the whole group, and they will move on to the next activity. But other children might need a personal cue that they come, as a teacher you might come and put your hand on his shoulder to let them know that the next planned activity is coming. And that may be really helpful if there is challenging behavior. Someone also considering the child's perspective, as we indicated earlier.

Children communicate through their behavior. And so, if they're feeling frustrated, bored, angry, or unhappy, we might see some behaviors that are challenging as the response to that. And finally, thinking about the temporal environments for staff. The environment, staff certainly need a place for, a quiet time or themselves. You need regular break time. I remember when I was a teacher that I went to the dentist, and I was lying back in the dental chair thinking, "Oh, this is so relaxing." And that's not okay, that a teacher feels, looks forward to a trip to the dentist because it's a chance to relax. We really want to find ways to give staff time to relax during work, to network with their peers, and to get that needed professional development. So, with that, I'm going to turn it back over to Amanda and the team at OHS to answer any questions and help us put it all together.

Amanda: Okay, well thank you, Jamie. That's been a lot of content, a lot of ideas in an hour, and we're really so happy about seeing people who wrote in with their comments and gave us their input and feedback. I think that we're going to definitely make a -- there were two videos that we were unable to show you, but we are going to make those available to you through MyPeers so you'll be able to watch those. I would say for me, the key points, they really have to do with intention, you know, sitting back. Maybe it's in the dentist chair, but wherever you can, just take a deep breath and think about your, your, your children and why you do what you do with them. How you respond, and whether that response is effective. What does the room look like, why does it look like that? And is it healthy, provides the kind of support you want? I always talk about joy. I think most early childhood, most classrooms for children of all ages and adults should contain a great deal of joy. Most of the time, when you walk in there, there should be evidence of happiness and feelings of satisfaction and well-being, and, and joy amongst teachers and staff. And I think you don't laugh at children, but children are really funny.

The things they say and do are funny. You need somebody to share that humor with, including parents. I think curiosity is critical to everyone's well-being. Children are driven learners because they have innate curiosity, and so are adults. Sometimes we just need to get in touch with our curiosity a little bit, and what we're doing, in the end, is fostering independence so that we have a generation of young children who are so excited to seize the world that they're unstoppable. And so, those classrooms need to be kind of the incubators for unstoppability for children and for the incredible staff throughout our programs and throughout the nation.

Jamie: Yes, so we're really excited to show you the next slide, and we hope that you are, too, to see it. We think that the next slide will embody everything that you do, and we want to make sure that you see this and that this is how we feel about Head Start teachers, that you are superheroes. That you are our superheroes. That you have super sight, and super speed, and super strength, and we hope that you wear your cape proudly. For everyone who are teachers, your work with children as Amanda has said certainly changes the way you see your world, it changes the way that parents see their child's world, and it changes the way that children see their own world with the joy, their curiosity, their persistence, lots of ways that they are exploring their very big feelings and very big emotions, and I think, one of the things that I

certainly take away as I will now have a 3-year-old on Friday, is to not take their behavior personally. One of the things I'm going to walk away with today. Because sometimes you really feel that that behavior was personal to you. So, I'd just like to remind myself and to everyone else that it's not. So, yeah, you work with children and you save the world.

Amanda: And teachers are, include teacher assistants and home visitors, as well as the people who are called teachers. Mentor teachers. Lead teachers. Teacher teachers. Assistant teachers. Home visitors. All of the people who work with children in Head Start and Early Head Start.

Jamie: So, we had a few questions. We had one some in around biting. So, we wanted to make sure that we have a resource on the ECLKC, and we will post that into MyPeers around biting. We've also had some questions around identify -- helping children identify their feelings. We think you saw some of those before your question came in, that was before we got around to the ones around the feelings, with the mirror, and some pictures, and some picture charts. But we also have another resource on the ECLKC around discovering feelings. And so, we'll be happy to post those into MyPeers, as well as the videos that we had to skip over will also b in MyPeers.

Amanda: With the slide, regarding MyPeers.

Jamie: And here's the MyPeers slide.

Amanda: And Jamie, biting and feelings are really connected. Right?

Jamie: They certainly are!

Amanda: When they're struggling with feelings, and overwhelmed, and lack language sometimes, and biting is not unexpected or unusual, and there's lots of things in the resources that we'll provide that can help programs help children manage their own feelings, and help program keep everybody safe. So, we want to close out today, again, by thanking you. We have, we just accomplished November 14 webinar, Strategies to Create Positive Learning Environments for Children and Staff. We want to remind you that this effort is not limited to webinars. And in December, we're not going to have a webinar. But we will have many resources available. You'll find tips on social media and on the ECLKC. We have a page on the ECLKC where you can find many of the resources that are included in this. We're trying to provide a kind of coherent, comprehensive approach to improving the health, and safety, and well-being of the children in all of your programs. We'd love to hear where we're getting it right and where we're missing the mark. The MyPeers community is another place you can go to get much of this information and to communicate with each other about what's working and what's not. Thanks, everybody.

Jamie: Thanks, everyone.

Sangeeta: Thank you! [End video]