

Addressing Infant and Toddler Behaviors That Challenge Adults

Sarah Lytle: Hello, everyone, and thank you for attending today's webinar, "Addressing Infant and Toddler Behaviors that Challenge Adults," as part of the BabyTalks webinar series. BabyTalks is a series of webinars for teachers, providers, and home visitors working with infants and toddlers, serving Early Head Start, Head Start, and child care programs. These webinars will introduce you to some of the research behind the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, the ELOF.

My name is Sarah Lytle, and I will be helping to facilitate today's session, along with my colleague, Beth Zack. We're from the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning and are based at the University of Washington's Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences, or I-LABS. I-LABS is a partner organization in the NCECDTL consortium and is one of the leading infant-research centers in the country.

Beth Zack: Thanks so much, Sarah, and hello, everyone. Today, we'll be talking about infant and toddler behaviors that may challenge us, and this is something that I'm experiencing firsthand as a mom to a toddler. So, what do we mean by infant and toddler behaviors that challenge adults? It's hard to define behavior. Children and adults express behaviors in different ways and for different reasons, and how we interpret and to react to behavior it's personal. A behavior you find challenging may not bother another adult at all.

We usually interpret behavior through the lens of our family, our values, cultures, beliefs, experiences, and expectations. All children use their behavior to express their feelings, wants, and needs. Today, I'm going to primarily focus on typical infant and toddler behaviors that are developmentally appropriate but that challenge us, not ones that go beyond typical development. Please keep in mind that children who act in a way that you find challenging do not necessarily have an identified disability, and children with an identified disability may not exhibit any behaviors that challenge you.

We all experience our own unique challenges with infant and toddler behaviors at some point. What infant or toddler behavior challenges you? Take a moment to think of an infant or toddler behavior that you find challenging, something that either really pushes your buttons or you find hard to deal with. So, now that you've thought about what challenges you personally, let's do a quick poll to see where we stand as a group. I'm curious, how often do you feel challenged by infant or toddler behaviors? Is it hourly, daily, weekly, monthly? You should be able to vote now, and I'll give you a few seconds, then we'll see where we stand as a group. All right, so most of you are falling in the daily to weekly. There are some hourly and also just some monthly.

And one of the reasons why I did this was — this poll was as a mom, I find it helpful to talk to other parents going through similar challenges with their toddlers, and in the same way, I think it's really helpful to see that all of us are experiencing a behavior that challenges us in some capacity. I mean, we're really all in this together. So here are our objectives for today, what you're going to get out of this webinar. By the end of this webinar, we hope you'll begin to view

challenging behavior in a new way. Instead of behavior that is challenging, you'll reframe it as behavior that has meaning and is a form of communication.

You'll be able to identify the development reasons why infants and toddlers exhibit behaviors that adults can find challenging, and with this knowledge, we'll explore strategies for how to respond and support children when they exhibit behaviors you find challenging, as well as responsive prevention practices to promote social-emotional competence in infants and toddlers. All infant and toddler behaviors have meanings even if we find some behaviors challenging at times. In this section, we'll start the process of reframing how we think about behaviors that challenge us.

Going forward, I want you to think about behavior as a form of communication. Everyone communicates through behavior during every moment of every day. Young children let us know their wants and needs through their behavior long before they have words. They give us these different cues to help us understand what they are trying to communicate. Pausing to try to figure out the meaning behind a child's behavior, instead of just reacting to the behavior, can change the way you see a child, change the way we respond to a child, change the way we teach a child.

For example, consider your mindset. Rather than a child who's trying to push your buttons, think of a child who needs more support because that child doesn't have the skills to express their wants, needs, and emotions in another way. Rather than thinking, "Children do well when they want," think, "Children do well when they can." Consider the meaning behind the behavior. Is the child dealing with other environmental or family stressors beyond their control? When we see a child through a positive lens, we can change our experience of challenging behavior. Every communicative behavior can be described by the form and function of the communication. Form refers to the behavior used to communicate. So ask yourself, "What is the behavior?"

Some examples include crying, cooing, throwing a tantrum, biting, pointing. Function refers to the potential reason or purpose of the communicative behavior. So ask yourself, "What is the purpose of the behavior from the child's perspective? What is the child trying to communicate? What is the meaning of the behavior, and importantly, when did it occur?"

Now, think about the function or what some of the possible messages are that young children try to communicate to us. What is happening in this image? She would be saying, "I'm trying to tell you something to get my wants and needs met or to express my feelings and ideas." Maybe the child wants a toy, is feeling hungry or doesn't want to stop playing. A single form of behavior may serve multiple functions. The form in this photo is crying, but what is the function? What is this infant trying to tell us?

Well, the infant might be saying, "I'm tired," or, "I want my bottle. I'm wet. Somebody change me! I'm having trouble settling myself. I'm overwhelmed. It's too noisy in here." Maybe, "I want someone to hold me," or, "I'm too hot with this hat on!" What about this toddler? The form is also crying, but she might be saying, "I want you to hold me." Maybe, "Someone took my toy away," or, "You just told me no, and I don't like that," or, "I hurt myself. I don't want to put my

coat on." Maybe, "I'm tired," or, "I'm crying because I don't really know what I'm feeling," and different forms of behavior may serve one function.

For example, a child may want an object that is out of reach. This is the function, but they use different forms of behavior, such as crying, tantrums, whining, jumping up and down, pointing, or reaching for their caregiver to get it. Their behavior may change based on their age, how they feel that day, how adults have responded to their behavior in the past, or their cultural expectations. The meaning of behavior is greatly shaped by culture, family and the unique makeup and experiences of the individual child. For example, some cultures may express sadness by crying or by having a nonchalant facial expression.

Some cultures may express happiness by laughing and being exuberant while other cultures may expect more restrained behaviors. It's important to talk with families to get their ideas of acceptable behaviors that children can use to express themselves in a culturally respectful way. Let's look at one more example. Next, we'll watch a video of two toddlers playing in a classroom. As you watch, think about the form and the function of their behavior, in particular, the little boy wearing green shorts.

[Video begins]

[Boys squealing]

Andrew: Mine!

Woman No. 1: Andrew!

Andrew: No, mine!

Woman No. 1: Andrew!

Andrew: Mine! Boy No. 1: [Laughing] I got it.

Andrew: Mine.

Woman No.1: Andrew! Andrew, see, we share. Remember? Let's go get something else.

[Video ends]

Beth: There were a couple of different forms present in the video. The little boy in the green shorts bit the other child, then he took his toy. So, now I'd love to hear from you again. What do you think was the function of the behavior? Why did the boy in the green shorts bite the other child? So options include: he may want the toy; he may want to play with the other boy; he may not know how to communicate in another way; he may have learned that biting is an effective way to get what he wants; he's teething, or we can't tell from this video clip. Go ahead and vote now. So, we have responses for most of them, and this is somewhat of a trick question. So if you said, "We can't tell," you are right.

So the behavior could be due to any number of these reasons or to something that's not even listed. Given all the different forms and functions of behavior, it's really important to note that one size does not fit all. We can't say that if a child does this behavior, it means this thing, so you can do this, but wouldn't it be so great if we could? All of these examples are to show that there are many functions or reasons a child might be using specific behaviors. This is why it's

important for adults to carefully observe children, pay attention to their cues, and get to know them.

Learn about a child's temperament or how they approach the world. Pay attention to when they typically get tired, hungry, or fussy. Is there a time of day or a part of their routine when they often struggle? Observing and responding to children's behaviors is a part of what you do as a teacher, family child care provider, and home visitor. It's not an additional curriculum piece you have to add to your planning and practices. Learning the meaning of children's behaviors helps adults meet children's needs, wants, and understand their intentions and emotions, helping children feel valued and respected.

One of the ways we can help all children be successful and be ready for school is to learn more about why they exhibit behaviors that challenge us. When we understand that these behaviors are often part of typical development, it can lessen our frustration and give us tools for helping children communicate their intentions, feelings, and emotions in developmentally appropriate ways. The challenges we experience are adult-based and personal to us. I'm going to say that again. The challenges we experience are adult-based and personal, so it's helpful to understand typically development to help us, the adults, reframe our thoughts and actions. In this next section, we'll take a closer look at the developmental reasons why children exhibit behaviors that can challenge us, and one of the first things we'll talk about is social and emotional development because all of these behaviors begin with the social-emotional development of the child.

As I talk about some of the developmental reasons why children exhibit behaviors that may challenge us, I'll also be referencing the developmental domains outlined in the ELOF, or Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. The ELOF provides language to help teachers, family child care providers, and home visitors understand child development and what children should know and be able to do to succeed in school. The ELOF has five central domains for infants and toddlers. They are: Approaches to Learning; Social and Emotional Development; Language and Communication Cognition; and Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development.

We don't have time to go through all of the developmental reasons why infants and toddlers act in ways that can challenge us, so I'll focus on three of the infant toddler domains today: Social and Emotional Development, Approaches to Learning, and Language and Communication. Let's look at some specific examples in research related to each of these areas. Our role as parents, teachers, home visitors, and family child care providers is to meet children's social-emotional needs. At the heart of this are relationships. One of the development reasons why children exhibit behaviors that can challenge us is they're still learning how and when adults will respond to their needs.

For example, infants and toddlers may react or become distressed when separated from a familiar adult. They're still learning to trust adults and that their primary caregivers always come back. When adults take the time to observe the child to figure out the possible meaning of their behavior, they're better able to help meet the child's needs. This is a goal in the Social and Emotional Development domain under the subdomain Relationships With Adults.

Let's watch a brief video clip of a toddler who is new to a classroom and experiencing separation anxiety. Listen to the teacher explain some of the ways she is trying to ease the transition.

[Video begins]

Muk Kulkcaw: Katie is new at our school, so she is having separation anxiety, and this has been about one or two weeks, I think, maybe two weeks that we kind of know a routine about her that when she first came in, she would cry and be very tight with both of her parents, either the father or the mother. When she's crying, she tends to hit too. I noticed that there were playtimes that she was attempting to hit me, and I told her that I was not happy that she hit me. I wished she would not hit me, but we're still working on the separation anxiety. I know from observing her that she likes fruits a lot, so one day, I invited her, while her mother was holding her, to our big tree at school and let her pick one of the fruits there, and we pretended that was an apple tree because Katie likes an apple.

So she enjoyed picking them, and still she would worry that her father would leave her or her mother would leave her. She would look around, and, you know, once the goodbye is said, I would carry her, and I would be the one who helped her pick the trees and then pick the apples, and, you know, we'd go over that routine over and over again. We both came from very similar backgrounds. She's Vietnamese, and I'm Thai, and we kind of know that, you know, lots of our parents hold our kids when they feel insecure, and that's the best way to make the child know that, you know, you are safe here with me. I'm going to take care of you. Thank you. There you go.

[Video ends]

Beth: It can be hard watching your child or another child experience separation anxiety. I know this all too well with my own toddler, but what I love about this video is that the teacher is responsive to the child's needs and interests. She's working to create a positive routine to reduce a behavior that's been a challenge. She involved the family, and she considers the child's culture and the type of care she is used to. Ultimately, she is trying to help the child feel safe and secure during a difficult transition period. The relationships we build with young children teach them, and us, so many things about security, caring for one another, and developing strong attachments to people in our lives and our communities.

Building positive relationships also helps reduce the frequency of challenging behaviors and helps children develop good peer relationships. It's important to build these relationships early on rather than waiting until there's a problem. Researchers have found that strong teacher-child relationships are related to lower levels of aggression in young children, to higher levels of frustration tolerance, more positive interactions between peers, and better social skills, to name a few. Responsive, supportive relationships also help young children to regulate their emotions, behaviors, thoughts, actions, and attention. This is called self-regulation. In fact, research shows that the quality of the interactions between infant and caregiver are predictive of a child's self-regulation skills.

So, let's do a pulse check. I'm wondering, do you think children should be able to regulate their behaviors and emotions by the time they reach preschool? So I'm going to have you give a

thumb-up if you think children should be able to self-regulate, and a thumb-down if you think they aren't able to self-regulate by preschool. So let's see what people think. Go ahead and vote. Again, give a thumb-up if you think children should be able to self-regulate by preschool and a thumb-down if you think they aren't able to self-regulate by preschool. Pretty even split with about half saying they should and half saying they shouldn't, so I'm going to go ahead and end that pulse check now and talk a little bit more about which one it actually is. A baby's ability to self-regulate is limited, but you might be surprised to know that even young children can't yet control their emotions or their impulses. Why is self-regulation so hard for young children?

Well, they simply do not yet have the neural networks in place to self-regulate. They quite literally cannot, and we should not expect a child under 5 to be able to control any of their impulses on their own yet. A region of the brain called the prefrontal cortex plays a critical role in our self-regulation ability, but the connections and networks that form in this part of the brain are developed over the course of our entire childhood. It takes years to build these connections and response networks, and that also means years of experience with a responsive caregiver.

Children's ability to manage their feelings, emotions, actions and behaviors are primarily found in the Approaches to Learning domain, under the subdomain, Emotional and Behavioral Self-Regulation. Think about the behaviors that infants are born with. They cry and fuss, which draws our attention. These behaviors are a way that babies communicate their needs to familiar adults. Through supportive and responsive caregiving, adults help children learn to regulate their emotions and behaviors. By providing external regulation, we help children learn to self-regulate on their own later on. External regulation can come in many forms, like rocking or swaddling a baby when they're having trouble settling or providing a bottle when they are hungry.

Over time, we teach infants that we're there for them when we provide this external regulation. Infants also learn how they like to be soothed and may gain independence in soothing themselves. As self-regulation improves, children progress from crying or throwing a tantrum whenever they need something to developing different coping strategies to manage feelings and follow rules with the help of an adult. Rather than taking a toy from a peer, they take turns. They use words like, "Stop," or, "No," or, "I don't like that," instead of hitting a peer during conflict, and although they often act in the moment, they do become a bit more patient when their demands and needs aren't met the exact moment they express them.

Let's look at some recent research on the development of self-regulation skills in toddlers. Many of you are likely familiar with Walter Mischel's classic marshmallow test, where they measured whether 4- to 6-year-olds could delay gratification in order to get two marshmallows instead of one. One of the things they found was that children who used better strategies to distract themselves from the marshmallows showed more self-control. If you haven't seen these videos, you should check them out. They're pretty fun to watch, all these different strategies the kids use. What I want to talk about is, another group of researchers recently adapted this test for toddlers. In their version, called the Snack Delay Test, a female researcher gave 18-month-olds, who were sitting on their parent's lap, a treat under a clear cup on a table.

She told each toddler they could have the snack when she came back, and this was in 60 seconds. The same children participated in the Snack Delay Test again when they were 24 months old, only this time, they had to wait 90 seconds for the researcher to come back. So what did they find? They found the developmental progression in self-regulation skills. Twenty-three percent of children were able to wait the full 60 seconds at 18 months, and at 24 months, 55% waited 90 seconds. Researchers also measured what the toddlers were doing while they waited. They found that engaging in attention and movement behaviors, like looking around or touching their own body, like, picking at their clothes or their hair, was strongly related to children successfully waiting until the researcher came back.

Children's ability to shift their attention away from the snack may be a coping strategy that is an early form of self-regulation. Of course, a large percentage of children were not successful at either time point. There are a number of factors that affect how and when children develop self-regulation. A child's temperament or how they approach the world, their brain development, and opportunities to practice and learn from how others self-regulate also influenced their developing self-regulation skills. Research showed that strong self-regulation skills are related to better school readiness compared to children who have more trouble with these skills. Infants and toddlers have big emotions, right?

We all experience this. Emotions can be incredibly overwhelming to children and adults alike, but imagine if you had all these big feelings that you didn't understand and limited ability to use language to express them. When children feel overwhelmed by their emotions, which can result from anything from being overtired to feeling afraid to there being too big of a change to their routine, their big emotions can appear in the form of tantrums. An important part of social and emotional development is emotional literacy, which is defined as the ability to identify, understand, and express emotions in a healthy way. When children have a strong foundation in emotional literacy, they're able to tolerate frustration better. They get into fewer fights, engage in less destructive behavior, and exhibit less impulsivity. They are also able to focus more and show greater academic achievements.

Children are not born with emotional literacy. For example, children cannot label their emotions until they develop the language skills to do so. These are skills that children learn in the context of relationships with adults and peers. Emotional-literacy goals are related to many subdomains in the ELOF, including Emotional Functioning under the domain Social and Emotional Development, Emotional and Behavioral Self-Regulation in the Approaches to Learning domain, and Communication and Speaking in the Language and Communication domain. Research shows that differences in the way adults talk to and teach children about feelings, and problem-solving are related to children's abilities to label emotions. Let's look at one example. In one study, parents read wordless picture books with their 18- and 24-month-old children.

The pictures within the books included emotional content, but it also included random various scenes, events, and objects. The children also participated in a series of sharing tasks. Researchers measured the quantity and quality of emotion-related content during book-reading, such as whether adults provided emotion labels or explanations or they asked their child about their own emotions. The results showed that parents who asked children to label

and explain emotions in the book had children who were more likely to share more often and with a shorter delay to begin sharing. This research suggests that the quality or the type of emotional language that adults use is important in the early development of pro-social behavior.

All children engage in challenging behaviors sometimes. It's how we respond that truly matters. Children often use behavior we find challenging when they don't have skills to accomplish the same goal or to communicate the same message. This means that our focus has to be on teaching children new skills rather than trying to get them to stop using challenging behaviors. We need to teach children what to do rather than what not to do. In the next section, we'll talk about strategies for promoting children's social and emotional skills, as well as ways to address a challenging behavior when it occurs — because it will occur. The pyramid model is a multi-tiered framework of evidence-based practices for providing responses, prevention, and intervention practices to promote social-emotional competence in all infants, toddlers, and young children.

Let's take a quick look at the different tiers. The yellow tier is the foundation of the model. It represents national, regional, state, and program systems and policies that support quality practices for children, families, and all those who support them. The blue tiers describe key elements that are essential for all children. This tier connects to the language of the Head Start Program Performance Standards, sub-part C, regarding intentional teaching practices through the use of a well-organized learning environment and positive adult-child interactions. Nurturing and responsive relationships, and high-quality supportive environments, are instrumental for a child's well-being.

When these elements are in place, the social and emotional development needs of about 80% of children can be met. With a strong foundation, most children won't need more intensive intervention. The green tier adds targeted social-emotional supports for children who are at risk of a challenging behavior that may interfere with their development. I'll primarily focus on the blue tier as we talk about strategies, but I will touch on some of the strategies you use during intentional instruction of social skills and emotional literacy too. Children need to be taught across the day rather than in response to challenging behavior.

This level of intentional support can mean a significant shift in practices for some teachers and programs. The red tier is for children with persistent challenges that are beginning to or interfering with their development that requires intensive individualized treatment on top of the strategies in the other tiers. We don't have time to cover this today, but you can find more information and resources on each of the tiers of the Pyramid Model on the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundation for Early Learning's website. We also included the link in the resources widget.

Before I move on to talk more about the blue tier, so that features nurturing and responsive relationships and high-quality supportive environments, we'd like to do a quick poll. So I'd love to know, before today, how familiar were you with the Pyramid Model? You can begin voting now. So, you know it well, you've browsed some of the resources but would love to know more, you've only heard about it but don't know a lot about it, or this is your first time learning about it. All right, let's take a quick look. Kind of got people spread across the board. It's always really

helpful for us to know who is aware of some of the resources that we mention, so thank you all for taking the time to — to vote.

What do all infants and toddlers need for healthy social-emotional development? The universal tier of the Pyramid is all about relationships. Relationships between children, relationships between teachers and children, and relationships between education and home visiting staff and families. Establishing positive relationships with families is a good strategy to effectively address challenging behavior if it arises. Talk to families about their behavior expectations for their child, their cultural practices, and how to support their child's social-emotional development before there is a challenging behavior when it's possible. For example, in the top image, this baby wasn't napping.

The provider talked to the baby's grandpa and learned they use a cradleboard at home for sleep. She implemented this familiar routine at the center, and the baby is now napping well because she feels safe and secure. When children are successful at making friends, they have opportunities to learn and practice many social skills, such as cooperation, sharing, turn-taking, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. Let's look at some strategies to support the development of friendship skills. You can provide materials or structure routines that encourage children to interact and play together. You can read books about being a friend, helping one another, and playing together.

You can practice turn-taking and sharing. Even games like peek-a-boo are a great way to help young infants practice turn-taking. When playing games with toddlers, use language like, "My turn! Your turn!" Help children problem-solve when issues arise. When working with children who are dual language learners, encourage peer interaction to promote language development and learning. You might pair a child who is a dual language learner with a buddy who speaks English one day then pair them with a buddy who shares their home language another day, if that option exists.

Teaching children how to identify and express their emotions, particularly as they begin to use language to talk about what they need and how they are feeling, is a key strategy to helping with challenging behavior. Let's look at some specific strategies to support emotional literacy. Ask questions about the child's and other people's emotions, people that might be in their environment or even in books. For example, help children put their emotions into words by connecting their feelings with a picture in a book. Validate children's emotions and provide empathy. This is so important. Let children know it's OK to feel the way they are feeling, and you're there to help.

Provide options to help children manage emotions, like a quiet place to calm down. Show them how to take deep breaths. Count to 10 or provide physical comfort like a hug. You can teach gestures, such as sign language. They can help all children communicate their feelings and needs. For children who are dual language learners, teach children words they can use to ask for help in their home language and English. For children with identified development disabilities or suspected delays, you can use puppets to help children engage in back-and-forth interaction and demonstrate different emotions.

High-quality supportive environments is the other part of the blue universal tier in the Pyramid Model. This level of the Pyramid is about ensuring consistency and predictability in the daily schedule, designing activities that are engaging and developmentally appropriate, and teaching children behavior expectations. Children learn best when they feel safe and supported in environments that have predictable routines where their needs are met through responsive caregiving. Children are less likely to engage in challenging behavior when they know what to do, how to do it, and are given support to be engaged in the classroom or home. Children are also less likely to exhibit challenging behavior when they are involved in developmentally appropriate, engaging activities.

We'll focus on four areas that make up high-quality supportive environments today: physical design, schedules and routines, active learning, and teaching rules and expectations. Well-designed physical spaces are nurturing spaces that support the development of all children. Well-designed physical spaces are safe, and they're calm with space to engage. They are a "yes" environment. What is a "yes" environment? Well, it's one where children are free to explore, and you can reduce the amount of time you need to say, "No," or "Don't," or "Stop." Yes spaces promote independence. Get down to the child's level and look around your space. Can children access materials or engage in activities on their own? Like low hooks for hanging their coat or puzzles on a low shelf.

Well-designed spaces also offer developmentally appropriate opportunities for choice, play, exploration, and experimentation. They reflect the home cultures and languages of the children, and they are acceptable to children with developmental disabilities or suspected delays. Consistent routines and schedules help create a predictable structure in a world that children are already working so hard to figure out. When children know what to expect, it's easier for them to practice regulating their behaviors. Keep in mind that even when children know what to expect, transitions can be hard.

Giving children a five-minute warning before a transition is about to happen can help reduce challenging behavior during transition times. In my house, we also need a three-minute warning and a one-minute warning. You just figure out what works best for you and the child. Predictable schedules and routines can be especially helpful for children who are dual language learners or children with identified disabilities or suspected delays. Children typically feel more comfortable and secure when they know what is going to happen next. Another strategy that can be helpful for all children is to make a picture board about what happens during circle time or to fix the schedule for the day in the classroom or home.

Home visitors can look for opportunities to help families build and improve their routines to support consistency. For example, if a child often struggles with nap time, you might suggest starting naps with a predictable cozy, quiet time that includes reading from a selection of favorite books. For infants and toddlers, routine care experiences provide a great opportunity to build and strengthen relationships. Research shows that engagement is a key part of preventing challenging behavior. Children are less likely to act out or exhibit other challenging behavior when they are engaged in meaningful hands-on activities that they have fun doing. Think about how hard it can be for you to sit through a meeting sometimes.

Now imagine how wiggly toddlers feel during circle time if they're required to sit still and listen. Make time for movement. You can still do a short circle time, but make it interactive and fun, and have children get up and move. To teach, we also need to listen and observe. Remember to look for the meaning behind a child's behavior. Set age-appropriate limits. A good strategy is to focus on what children can do. Remember that children are still learning what the rules are and how to follow them. For example, if a child is throwing rocks, rather than just saying, "No," or, "Don't do that," teach them what they are able to throw. You might say, "We don't throw rocks because it could hurt someone, but you can count, sort, or stack them," or, "You can throw those balls outside instead."

Define expectations for how an activity or the day will go. Children need to learn what is expected in order to meet our expectations. Model the behavior you want to see. If a child hits their dog during a home visit or another child in the classroom, say, "Let's be gentle," and model a gentle patting motion rather than just simply saying, "Don't hit," with no other information. Be sure to comment on children's positive behavior too. This goes a long way and shows them that you're paying attention. Offer choices. Toddlers want to assert their independence, so let them make choices between two things, both of which you, the adult, would be happy with them choosing. It helps them feel in control and shows them you are confident in their ability to make a decision.

I want to return to the beginning of the webinar, when I introduced the idea that behavior has meaning and is a form of communication. Challenging behaviors are going to arise, even with supportive, nurturing relationships and high-quality environments. For better or worse, they are part of infant and toddler development. Understanding the purpose behind a behavior can help you be responsive in the moment and give you information that will help you support the child moving forward.

This pause, ask, respond strategy can be helpful when you are about to react to a behavior that is challenging to you. So, pause. Before you respond or react to a child's behavior, pause to think about the possible meaning of the child's behavior. Think about what happened before the behavior. Ask. Use your detective skills by asking yourself, "What do I think this child is trying to tell me through this behavior? Do they want something? Do they need something? What do I know about this child that might help me figure out the reason that led to the behavior?" Respond. Figuring out the meaning of the behavior can help you respond in ways that meet the wants or needs that a child is trying to express. This response helps the child feel listened to, understood, and safe.

You can also use these steps on a home visit or with the families of children in your care to help them identify the possible meaning of their child's behavior. It takes time and effort for parents to understand the intent of their child's communication, but the payoff is worth it. So, I'd love to hear from you one last time before we wrap up today. This is also a chance to learn from each other. This time, you'll share your thoughts live through the question and answer widget. So, I'd love to know, what strategies do you think will be most helpful in your own work with infants and toddlers, and are there other strategies that we haven't mentioned that you have found work well for responding to challenging behavior? So open up the question and answer widget, and let's chat.

Sarah: Beth, some of the responses are starting to come in. Andy says that she thinks it's best to regulate ourselves before addressing the child.

Beth: Yes, self-care and thinking about yourself, too, is very — is very important. Sometimes you need to take that — take that moment or moments, and that's part of the pause too, right, before you respond.

Sarah: Yep, and a lot of people are talking about the pause, ask, respond model, and both saying that it is helpful and that they think it will be helpful as they take this information back.

Beth: Oh, fantastic. I find it helpful, as well, when my toddler is exhibiting a behavior that I find challenging.

[Both laughing]

Sarah: Some of you are ... A couple people are talking about naming emotions and offering different outlets and coping mechanisms for kids.

Beth: Yes, naming emotions is so important for children's emotional literacy. Not just immediately, but down the line too. It's really an important way to help teach children about emotions by giving them words to name how they're — how they're feeling, and then when their language skills develop, they can use those words to replace, sometimes, some of those behaviors that are challenging us.

Sarah: Mm-hmm. Yes, so naming those emotions. Diana talked about getting down at children's eye level when speaking to them.

Beth: Yes, and really yes. Showing them that you are — you are there for them and listening and — and — and feel the things. You know, they're acting that way for a reason, right? And you're there to support them.

Sarah: Mm-hmm, and Jessica talks about breathing being something that's helped her a lot, so perhaps part of that pause component as well. Kendra mentions telling or asking children what to do, not what not to do.

Beth: Right, yes. Really giving children that — that redirection, like, "Here is — here is a more appropriate behavior," rather than just, "Don't do that," with no other information, like we talked about because they're not learning from that if you just say, "Don't do it," because they don't understand the why or they still want to do something, so giving them that outlet to do something else is so helpful.

Sarah: Mm-hmm. Alicia says that her takeaway is sort of a reframe of challenging behaviors, this idea that the role of the adult is to give the toddler or infant skills to cope with their emotion instead of saying, "No," or becoming angry as our first path. And that's certainly something that's hard to do in the moment, but if you kind of reframe, you know, what your job is as an adult, that's kind of an interesting idea.

Beth: Yes, the reframing, that's a great comment. Definitely something to keep in mind, even as you reflect back on maybe how you responded to a situation, even if you didn't handle it possibly the best way in the moment or give enough pause, you know, taking a step back after

it and thinking, "OK, what could I have done differently next time?" or really thinking about why the child acted that way.

Sarah: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Jessica is talking about using five-point timers with transitions at home visits, so setting that timer before it's time to clean up toys and leave. Again, focusing on transitions there.

Beth: Super helpful for both, yeah, parents and, yeah, in classrooms and home visits and — and just family — family life as well. I think just probably time for one or two more before we wrap up.

Sarah: Sure. I'm looking for some ones that are a little bit different than ones we've already talked about. Somebody is mentioning here using two choices and the child is actually propelled to stop the behavior because they're thinking about what their choice is.

Beth: OK.

[Laughing]

And the two choices I've heard that's really important because if you give them too many choices, they're just going to be overwhelmed by all the options, so really and again, giving them the choices that you, as an adult, are OK with.

Sarah: Yeah, so I think we really have hit a lot of those themes there, but lots of great responses here.

Beth: Yes, thank you all so much for — for all of your — your comments. These — these have been fantastic. And so with that, final parting words. Remember, behavior has meaning. Remember to pause and reflect instead of reacting. It takes time and effort to understand the intent of a child's communication, but the payoff is worth it because children will feel valued and important. They're learn that we will hang in there and try to understand what they are communicating through their behavior, and children will learn to communicate their intentions and feelings and emotions in developmentally appropriate ways.

Sarah: So thank you all so much for listening. We hope this information will be valuable to you as you navigate the infant and toddler years and all the behaviors that you may find challenging that this developmental period brings.