

Understanding Meaning in Behaviors That Challenge Us

Sangeeta Parikshak: Hello everyone, and welcome to the “Head Start Heals: Office Hours” series. My name is Sangeeta Parikshak, and I'm the behavioral health lead at the Office of Head Start. The focus of “Head Start Heals” is to discuss how early childhood programs can promote resilience and wellness for children and families. I believe this is the 12th installment of either a webinar or office hour that we have done for this series. Been very popular so far, and we hope that you get as much out of this office hour as you have out of previous ones. The office hours we are hosting are to help address questions staff and early childhood programs are asking related to addressing specific adversities the children and families they serve are facing. COVID-19 and re-entry back into Head Start programs has understandably raised concern regarding how children are coping and what types of behaviors we should expect to see. Today, we will be addressing your questions related to behaviors that challenge us as adults, specifically, focusing on the meaning behind behaviors and what we can do to address them. Before introducing you to our experts that will be helping to address those questions, we have a few housekeeping tips as well as some information. We really want to hear from you, so please use the “Ask a Question” feature to submit your questions.

We will try to answer as many questions as we can. You can also download a PDF copy of today's presentation by clicking on the “Event Resources” tab. A recording of this webinar will be posted on the Office of Head Start website, the ECLKC, on the “Head Start Heals” page. We will provide you with that website at the end of the presentation today. You can also use the webinar link that you used to join this broadcast to watch the recording again for up to a month. Participants will receive a certificate for attending this webinar at the end of either live or on-demand viewing. So, please stay on until the end to receive your certificate.

As this is such a hot topic, we brought in not just one, but three experts from our National Center on Development, Teaching, and Learning, and I will let them introduce themselves.

Jani Kozlowski: Thanks Sangeeta. Hi, everyone. My name is Jani Kozlowski, and I'm the inclusion and professional development systems coordinator at the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning.

Randi Hopper: All right. My name is Randi Hopper. I'm a senior training and technical assistance specialist and the home-based lead with DTL, and I'm really excited to share all my knowledge today along with colleagues.

Beth Vorhaus: Hi, I'm Beth Vorhaus, and I'm an educational consultant with the National Center as well, and my passion is social emotional development and helping educational staff see the behaviors that challenge them or learning opportunities.

Sangeeta: Wonderful. Thanks so much, Jani, Randi, and Beth for being with us today. Really excited. I'm looking forward to our discussion. So, Randi I'm going to turn it over to you to get us started today. The first question that we have, and just so our audience knows, these are

really common questions that have been coming in. So, we've prepared a variety of different questions and answers for you all today, but we will also be bringing in any questions that you have for us. So, please don't hesitate to ask us anything as we go along. But the first question, commonly asked question that we've been getting is, I'm noticing a lot of challenging behaviors now more than ever. How do I even begin to make sense of all of this and what can I do? Randi, can you help us out with this one?

Randi: Of course. Well, first, it's really important to remember that this is a challenging and uncertain time for everyone. So, acknowledging this really helps us understand our own feelings right now and identify that as children have their own ways of telling us how they feel about change too. So, all behavior is a form of communication and has meaning. So, children give us these cues to help us understand what they are trying to communicate long before they have the words to actually directly tell us what they're thinking. So, they practice how different behaviors communicate their message based on the response that they receive and the support that we provide to them within the context of the situation. So, for example, say Javan bites Blair because he wants the block she's playing with, and we respond by removing Javan from the situation. So, not only are we not responding to what he wants or needs, but we're also taking out of the context where he can learn to communicate his feelings in a way that doesn't hurt others. So, as we respond to children's efforts to really tell us what they want or need, they do begin to feel like competent and confident communicators, which does encourage them to continue to develop and refine their communication skills. And so, we've also included on the slide here, a link to the "Behavior Has Meaning" 15-minute in-service suite. And this one is really great. It's packed full of resources and handouts. It has a PowerPoint as well as home-based examples. And so, it's a great resource that we were able to really put together. So, thank you. Are there any other questions that we've seen to start us off today?

Sangeeta: Thanks, Randi. Yeah, we've been getting some questions, and mostly around concerns about behaviors that children may have learned during their time at home. So, one question that came in is, "Do you believe that behaviors are learned by looking at others in the home?"

Randi: Well, that is an interesting question. I think it's a couple of prongs that we have to take a look at is because children learn things through things that they've seen – modeled behavior, but not necessarily in the term of a behavior was specifically observed and therefore connected to a meaning. So, sometimes children take the form of communication – the form of behavior that they see from adults and they connect it to their own function. So, if they see that an adult maybe tosses something on the couch because that adult wants to say, "Put that over on the couch," they may take that and use it as a, "Oh, this is just a way to get rid of something." And so, they may toss a toy in the direction, but they may have a different purpose behind it. So, we can't necessarily always connect those to, say maybe in adverse behavior, but it may challenge us just in the way that we are perceiving that behavior. Jani, Beth, is there anything that you would like to add to that question?

Jani: Yeah, you know, I think children are learning everywhere: in the home, in the community, at school. Everywhere they go, they're learning. And so, when they see adults do things, they're going to make their own interpretations, just like you were saying, Randi. So, I think that example that you gave is a really good one, that we can't always make assumptions about what that behavior is trying to communicate. We have to dig a little deeper and try to learn more.

Sangeeta: Jani, this is Sangeeta. Just to piggyback on that point just a little bit more, there was one question that came in about, "Even if we can't determine exactly why a child is displaying challenging behaviors, are there some things that children might be trying to communicate through their challenging behaviors?"

Jani: Absolutely. [Inaudible]

Beth: I can take that on.

Sangeeta: Go ahead, Beth.

Beth: So, most definitely that every behavior – every form of behavior has a communication connected to it, and children communicate their behaviors through wanting to obtain something or access something, like gaining attention. On the flip side, they might be trying to avoid or state something. And so, when we look at behaviors, it's kind of being a detective and try to see what are they trying to do? Is it they don't want to do something, or they want something a lot? So, like an infant crawling up into a lap of an adult, or a young toddler crawling to the lap of adult, is a child that might be seeking attention or comfort. And on the flip side, if that child is running away, they might be escaping something. Maybe escaping an activity or maybe a food that they don't like. Those sorts of things. Randi, you're ... [Inaudible]

Sangeeta: Did you have another thing you wanted to add?

Beth: Yeah, I just was going to talk if one of my friends, if they had anything to add.

Jani: I think you covered it nicely, Beth.

Sangeeta: So, someone had pointed out that many children's routines, they've changed and now they may change again if they're getting ready to go back to a Head Start program. And one person asked, "Could this be the cause of many new behaviors? And if so, are there other types of behaviors that you could point out that would be related to COVID-19 and re-entry?"

Beth: I'll take it.

Randi: I think I can get us kicked off with that one. I was going to say that we really should take a look at how we prepare children for this transition, and that even goes to adults as well. How we react really tells people about our readiness to transition. So, I know for myself, I really like hearing why a transition is happening and how it's going to impact my life. And having that information really helps to settle me and center me to get me ready for ongoing. And it helps with children as well. So, giving them an information about what to expect especially moving

into a classroom, like is their classroom going to be the same? Is the classroom pet still OK in there? Are all my friends still going to be there? Is my teacher still going to be the same? All of those are really good information to provide in order to kind of jump ahead of some behaviors that may pop up. It's really important to also look at the fact that these children may not have seen their teacher or home visitor in a while. And so, they may need to kind of reestablish that relationship that they had in order to kind of move forward and be really easy with them. So, may see some behaviors that are popped up just to help them communicate that, you know, they might not be quite there to jump into an activity or to separate from their parents as easily as they were. So, Beth, I'm sorry. I kind of jumped over you, is there something else you wanted to say?

Beth: Yeah. I think that what you're saying is about that transition is it's preparing children to prevent some of the behaviors that might happen and realize that it's going to be hard for everybody, not just the children involved, but the education staff has a whole bunch of new procedures that they're going to have to go through and learn. And being comfortable with those before introducing them to children is going to be very important along the way. And so, there's just all sorts of steps that are going to be involved. But a key is prevention, is thinking about things beforehand that you can prepare families for. Even in the home visitor sense, that the home visitor hasn't visited in a while and shows up with a mask on, maybe send a picture of the home visitor with the mask on and with it off and allow the parents to have a conversation about that or virtual call so that they can see that this is the same person. It just is going to look a little different. I know we have several other questions. Sangeeta do you have some more for us?

Sangeeta: I think we're going to move along to the next slide here before we do. A lot of people are asking for resources. And just so you know, if you go to the "Event Resources" tab, in addition to the slides, you can also download a handout that has additional resources there for you. We will also be uploading more resources to "Head Start Heals" in the next few weeks focused specifically on COVID-19. So just letting you guys know those are coming. So, you've answered a lot of questions related to challenging behaviors and Jani, I was wondering if you could speak more to this question here. The question is, could you apply this knowledge to children of all ages and what about children with disabilities?

Jani: Yeah, Sangeeta, we've talked a lot about how behavior has meaning, and it's the way that children communicate. And that's really true for children of all ages. They all use behavior to communicate especially before they have words to use, but even once they do, just as we do as adults, if you think about, for adults we call it body language. There's behaviors when we nod our heads or when we lean in or when we smile or even when we roll our eyes, those are all behaviors that we use to communicate. So, for instance, they might smile, they might cry, they might turn away, they might arch their back, all forms of communication. For toddlers, they're beginning to communicate with words, but they're also using facial expressions. They cry, they squeal, they giggle. They might even run away. All of those behaviors to communicate their wants and needs, just like that's mentioned. And preschoolers say words and use sentences often, but they also smile and scream and cry and kick and hit and laugh. The list goes on. So,

children are going to use certain behaviors until they learn new ways to communicate what they want and what they need. And the behaviors that they use depends on a lot of things not only their developmental stage and where they are with their verbal skills, but they also depend on things like their relationships with other people, their culture, their individual differences, including their temperament or health issues. So, all behaviors have meaning. And for children with disabilities that might have special communication needs, it's also important as educators that we work to figure out what those behaviors are intended to communicate. So, when we gain a better understanding of what the behavior means for the child, we can help as an adult develop some effective strategies to help meet those needs.

And so, the thing to do is when you observe the child's behavior, we should look for clues that indicate what that behavior means. And sometimes that meaning might be clear, like when the child smiles at us, oftentimes we know what that means. But over time, we can learn what that child's particular communication means by their behavior. And what we know is that when adults respond to children with warmth and support, children begin to learn that they can be understood and they start to express and regulate their own emotions and behaviors through that interaction over time.

Sangeeta: Thank you, Jani. And it sounds like also what you're saying is that different children will react differently to this situation. And partially, the home environment could be other things going on with them. Children with disabilities and special needs there may be something unique there, but in the end, there are these key elements to use with all children to help when it comes to challenging behaviors. Am I hearing you right?

Jani: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

Sangeeta: There's some questions that have been coming in. So, you listed a lot of things to kind of look for, Jani. One question that came in is, are there any helpful questions or things that folks who are listening in can explore with parents when attempting to dig deeper and be a detective regarding challenging behavior? Are there certain things that they should be talking about with parents to get a better understanding of maybe what has happened in the home, while they've been at home, and that kind of thing before they come?

Jani: Yeah, I think the first thing to do is to be really open with sharing what you're observing with the child and then asking the family to share what they're observing at home to kind of get a sense of, is this behavior unique to this new setting that the child is in? Or is this something that the family is also concerned about or is seeing some more kind of behavior at home? And so, asking those kinds of questions can be helpful. It's also helpful to use some specific tools so that, for children that aren't able to communicate with words, using visuals can be really helpful, especially for children with disabilities. Being able to choose pictures to point to can be a useful guide and then trying that out with families at home as well so that it's being reinforced in various environments is also really helpful. I don't know. What do you all think? Randi or Beth, do you have some ideas to share?

Randi: I know that we've been talking on the MyPeers home visiting community a lot about reconnecting with families, asking what they've been enjoying together, what the children have been really enjoying together. And then, also asking them about what they think that their child has been learning during this time and any changes in behavior or in language development, things like that. So, basic questions about really what they've been enjoying together. Really broaden that perspective of then being able to ask about specific behaviors, things that have happened in the home during this time, and transitioning back, whether it's back to a group socialization setting or back to center-based classroom.

Sangeeta: Thank you all. Going to move on to the next slide here. So, Beth, if you could help us with this question. What can you do if you cannot figure out the function of the behavior?

Beth: Sure. I can go after this one. This actually talks about a little bit, that we have to be a detective. We have to think about what's happening. And there's going to be times that we cannot figure out the function of behavior, and that's really OK. Children are trying to communicate something, and we just might not be able to pinpoint what that something is. So, you think about things if you're working in a center-based program, is using data to help you. Looking at when the behaviors are happening, when do they occur? When don't they occur? Are there adults that they occur around more than other adults? Are there peers that commonly have those behaviors that challenge you pop up? Kind of just looking at the whole big picture, but even if you still can't figure out what that function is, what they're trying to communicate, the key is you want to figure out things that can help that specific child, those skills that they can be taught to help prevent the behavior that's driving you a little nuts. Thinking about things like, for example, for a preschool child who is just in the middle of your circle time, getting up and moving about and not hanging in there with you; getting them a job, having them do something, or have every child have a job during a song for example. Having to figure out what they can have an action that they're doing along with the song.

So, having children engaged, because a lot of times behaviors pop up when children aren't really excited about what they're doing and engaged. And when children have jobs and actually have things in their hands, sometimes those challenging behaviors don't come up as much. For an in-home setting, if there's some sibling hitting going on and back and forth, making sure the family member is staying in close proximity, for example, to prevent the behavior from happening before knowing that it's going to happen. Sometimes you just aren't going to figure it out.

I worked with a classroom team, with a little one that behavior, even when we looked at it, looked really random. And even myself as an outside observer coming in and watching the behavior, we just couldn't pinpoint what was happening. At one moment, she would be in the lap of the teacher, standing next to the teacher or seeking attention and doing things to grab the teacher's attention. Other times she would be sitting in the corner and not want to interact with peers or adults, was just happy just being alone. And then other times, the behavior that really bothered probably the team the most was some aggressive behavior, and that was really the challenge. And we could see the form of the behavior, but we cannot figure out what the

child was trying to communicate. So, we went at it from a different direction. We went at it teaching some skills to the child so she could let us know that she was done with a group or she's wanted to interact. And it was really important for the team to build a relationship with that child knowing what reinforced behaviors – the positive behaviors they wanted. So, positive feedback when the child was doing something right. We learned that she loved to build things and take things apart, and she would actually sit in circle time with some big block Legos, building them and taking them apart, and she would join and participate in the circle, along with what was happening. So, it's really thinking about what you can do and really paying attention to the child's behavior for those prevention things. Teach them new skills and see if the behavior decreases. I know that was a long-winded answer, but it's nice to know the function, but if you can't figure it out, there's so many things you can do. Sangeeta, you have some more questions for us?

Sangeeta: Well, I think one person pointed out something really important. I know we're going to be talking about dual language learners in a few slides here, but one person pointed out the importance of making sure that we understand the difference in culture. And sometimes behaviors are different when different cultures come into play. Does anybody have any thoughts on that point? I thought it was good that this was pointed out to us.

Jani: Those are really good points. You know, I think we think a lot about our own culture's ideal emotion – how we express emotion. We look at that from our own particular cultural lens. And just because it's from our own cultural lens, doesn't mean that it's the right way. For example, in our Western culture, this sense of kind of an excited state of arousal, kind of, "I'm so excited to see you, how are you?" We admire and we consider that kind of excited state in a really positive way. But there are some other cultures where that excited state is not ideal state and rather a more calm and low key and less excited state is something that's more acceptable and more considered to be an ideal emotion. And so, that cultural difference right there can bring conflict to that relationship right from the start. If we're expecting a child to be a certain way, and that's not the kind of state of being that's valued at home, we're going to run into some problems there. So, I think it's just always important to kind of reflect on our own cultural lens and ask ourselves, "Is that somehow impacting the way that I'm viewing this child and the way that I'm viewing the behaviors that I'm seeing?"

Sangeeta: That's so important, Jani. I think often, I do believe that everyone who works in Head Start as a teacher, they're there, they love the kids. They're there for the right reasons, but you can't get away from your own home environment and kind of your own biases and maybe what triggers you, right?

Jani: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sangeeta: And so, I love what you're saying, that it's so important to take the time to understand yourself and how you're reacting before we step in and try to work with that child, especially if you know they're triggering you early on.

Jani: Exactly.

Beth: And I think, also, the other side of that is the relationship and partnership you have with the families. This is when questions come in asking parents what their goals and expectations for their child? What are their interests? What are things that they see in their child and the positive, exciting things their child is doing? So, we know having those conversations and being willing to hear what is the beliefs, the experiences, the values, and the culture are coming from home because as educators, we're not the only teacher, and we've got to work together.

Sangeeta: Wonderful. Thank you both. I'm going to move on to the next slide here, and Jani, hopefully you can start us off. We've actually been getting a lot of questions about aggressive and destructive behaviors, so it's all fine and good to pause and reflect, but sometimes it feels like it's not working, everything that we're throwing at the situation isn't working. How would you approach this type of behavior where staff often feel like maybe they're chasing a child who's running off, or the child is very aggressive and destructive towards other children or towards other staff? Can we talk a little bit about that?

Jani: Yeah. I think it's a stressful time for all of us and it's a stressful time for – for children as well. And so, I think we're going to see some more aggressive behaviors as programs reopen. It's just unfortunately part of this world that we're living in right now. It's just a very stressful time. And sure, you can't really pause and reflect all that away. But I think the most important thing is we need to work together as a team. Sometimes, certain behaviors really push our buttons, and they may not push the buttons of our team member as much. And so, if we can pull each other in to provide support for each other and maybe even deescalate the situation, you know, give us a chance to kind of catch our breath, take a moment while one of our team members can step in. And then, it's important to remember that sometimes behaviors are so intense that the child might need additional intensive help or support, but we really need to rely on our observation skills, like Beth was saying, our conversations with families about what's happening. And then, keeping in mind that we can always take next steps for further evaluation if needed. Every Head Start program is fortunate that we have access to mental health consultants.

And so, I really think we need to reach out and use mental health consultants as a resource to help think through the issues together. There are so many unique circumstances. And so, it's hard to say, "OK, this is a behavior that's aggressive and destructive enough that the child should be referred or not," because it's so complex, and every child is so unique. Every situation is so unique. And so, bringing someone in that can help the educator problem solve and figure the situation out together, come up with next steps together along with the families is really important. And connecting with a family right away to find out, is this the kind of thing that's happening at home? Are their ideas that they have tried at home that have been effective? And just exploring more of that to get a sense of the whole picture.

When I was a preschool teacher, it was not during the time of the pandemic, so I don't have that experience. And I think that that has to be really, really challenging and difficult, and my hat goes off to all of the educators out there that are doing this work now in this difficult time. But I do remember a child in my classroom years ago that just kind of out of the blue started

exhibiting some very aggressive behaviors, and he was aggressive toward other children and it seemed very uncharacteristic. And so, it was really worrisome to me. And I remember I reached out to his mother right away and I asked if she had any ideas of things that we could try because it just seemed so out of the blue. And we learned that his parents were going through a divorce, and so, home life was really tense.

And so, we learned that those feelings of fear and anxiety that the child was feeling at home, started to show up as aggressive behaviors at school. And so, once we talk with the family and better understood the situation, at least from my perspective, it became easier for me to emphasize with him for one. And then, it also opened a real door for us and for the family because we also learned that the family was really open to community mental health services. And so, once we were able to refer the family to some of those services and have some conversation about how we best could work with them to support their child, it made a big difference. And so, we started to see a big difference in school, and that really only happened through that partnership with the family and some careful on our part. And so, I think having a good sense of what the total picture is – is going to be really important, as well as that teamwork. I don't know, Beth and Randi do you have ideas? Oh, go ahead.

Sangeeta: I was just going to say that I love that example that you gave, Jani. It really exemplifies what we've been talking about throughout the Head Start Heals campaign about incorporating a trauma informed approach. Such a big part of a trauma informed approach is it's not assuming that a child is traumatized, but understanding that adversities impact children and that the way that they tell you that it's impacting them is through their behavior. And so, you described a situation so well where you didn't use this language, but you came at it from a very empathic approach. You had empathy for the child, you were worried about the child, you investigated, and you luckily were able to find out what was going on. Often, the struggle is finding out what that meaning is. And so, I really appreciated that example that you gave. Randi or Beth ...

Jani: Well, thank you.

Sangeeta: ... do you have anything else to add?

Randi: You know what? I think that Jani's example is spot on. I worked with many teachers who thought children's behaviors, they didn't know what to do, or it had happened and they're like, "I've tried everything." But really that key is talking to the family and coming at it from a strength-based approach saying, "This is what I've seen. Have you seen this too?" Or "How does your child show excitement?" I had children in my classroom that they just didn't realize they were twice as big as other children. And so, they would get really excited and they would just kind of overwhelm a child that was smaller than them. So, we had to use it as a learning opportunity of, "OK, let's talk about the difference between how strong you need to be to do this, or how we should do gentle touches here." And when you use it as a learning opportunity, many times children, they get it. They're able to then take that behavior and communicate really what they want to communicate in a way that is not going to hurt others. But then also is just a learning opportunity for them.

Sangeeta: Thank you. Yes. I totally agree with those points. Appreciate you expanding a little on that. One of the questions that have been coming in around aggressive and destructive behaviors is that some people are seeing these behaviors the most during times of transition. And I was wondering if some of you could talk a little bit about maybe why that's happening during times of transition and give some tips as to how to manage it.

Beth: I'll jump in on transitions. So, during transitions if they're not quick and easy and children don't know what to do, they tend to find something to do, and that's when behaviors increase. So, when we're talking about moving from one place to another, whether it's from your program – from your classroom out to the playground, having children wait with nothing to do ends up meaning children might be pushing and shoving in line, and then it kind of explodes from there and those challenges increase. So, thinking about classroom-based activities – and I'll throw it to Randi for some home-based, in-home visitor type conversations I had with families about transitions with families – in the classroom, it's important to look at the transitions. How many do you have? Can you decrease some of the transitions? Can you have shorter times and transitions? Perhaps, half your class could get ready to go outside and then the other half could be splitting up cleaning up duties and things like that. Making sure it's important children know what to do, how to do it, how much it's going to take them to finish it, how do they know when they're done, and then what comes next? So, when children are prepared for those transitions and giving them the warning and know the expectations, these are things that make those transitions go smoother and decrease challenging behaviors. So, it's, really, the prevention piece of this is being prepared and children know the steps of the routine and know what's going to happen.

Randi: And you said Beth, actually everything that you said, it echoes in the home-based program option. Really, you're talking about routines in the home. So, you may not necessarily be creating those routines, but you can absolutely talk to parents about transitions. They go through a lot of transitions too. And so, taking a look at how long you're having a child wait. So if you set them up at the table, but then they have to wait for you to make lunch, there's all that time right there where children will find something to do and let you know through their behavior how they feel about having to wait. And so, even transitions from in-home to the car, from the car to the grocery store, all of those little bits in there are opportunities for you to provide information to children about why that transition is happening, what you're doing moving forward, and to give them lots and lots of descriptive language about what they can learn during that time. And it's a good opportunity to use things like group socialization to model transitions and also to talk to families about, "OK, so let's line up," and it doesn't necessarily need to be a straight line, depending on the age of the children. It just needs to be a place where we can stop, we can pause, we can count as part of our transition and then we can move out the door.

Another thing I wanted to add is, also, that as we transitioned back into center-based to group socialization, and to think about how we've talked to children during this time about physical distancing, what they've heard adults saying about physical distancing. And so, to kind of maybe even have that expectation as we do things like lining up, as we do things like sitting

with our friends ... It's really to kind of anticipate that and talk to children about that, because if you have them stand, say in line, and somebody comes a little too close to another child that they may want their behavior – they may want to push them away because they've heard that they really should be away from them. And so, we want to make sure that we're providing that information of, "OK, you know what, let's use our words to tell our friends to step another step away from us," and things like that. Just to be able to kind of have that proactive approach to providing information to children.

Sangeeta: Yeah. It sounds like helping children to be prepared for what's coming next goes a long way. I appreciate those tips as well. We've been getting a lot of questions in, specifically about children who have a diagnosis of autism and the aggressive behaviors that they may be displaying at home and as well in the classroom. Jani, do you think you could help us by giving some suggestions, both for what we can do in the classroom to address those behaviors for those population and also what tips we can give for parents as well?

Jani: Well, you know, I think things have been challenging for children with disabilities, in particular, through all of this because there's so much uncertainty about services and how they will provide it, and when and where. So, the first thing that I would say is that it's really important that as programs reopen up and as programs provide services at a distance for children with disabilities, that we make that connection with our early intervention and special education partners. Now, they are the ones that have that expertise that can really help us with some of these situations. And so, a child, like for example, that has a diagnosis of autism that may have an IEP, there may be pieces or strategies within the IEP or some additional supplemental support that could be accessed. And so, to first find out what is in the IEP and are there specific supports available that the child could get some one-on-one care, if needed, or additional supports in the classroom. I think that some of the things that we know work really well for children with autism, in particular, are the use of social stories and visual cues, and because there is a less of ability to understand emotions, to kind of to be able to read people's faces and to understand what the behaviors of other people means, you know, "What does that at facial expression mean when I see it on someone else's face?" And so, using those other tools that you can find on headstartinclusion.org, can be really helpful in that specific situation. But, again, I think it's really important to connect with our early intervention and special education partners when you have situations like that that are so individualized.

Sangeeta: Thank you, Jani. I think we could talk about this topic for the rest of the time, but I'm going to move us along. I know we have some other questions that we want to address. So, this next one, Randi, if you could kick us off here, the question is, "I work with a child who is a dual language learner. How can I tell if the function of a child's behavior is a result of language differences or something more?"

Randi: Oh, absolutely, and I think this kind of goes off of what we were saying earlier that it's really important to talk to the family to discuss how the child's kind of behavior in similar situations in the home and how they express their expectations for their child. And so, as much as possible, we do want to align the expectations just so that there's a consistency for the child

across these environments, where they have trusted adults that are going to help them to guide their behavior. And so, working with a family to identify some of those common words or phrases that can connect those home routines with the classroom routines, and taking the time to observe the child's responses to things like verbal guidance. So, taking a look at that receptive language, as well as how they communicate with others – expressive language. And this is really important also in how they communicate with children versus adults. So, if they come into say, if they're new to a classroom and they're exhibiting behaviors, and they're very communicative to children, but not so much to adults, that's something that you want to talk to their parents. They may just be shy of other adults. And so, that means we need to build that relationship a little bit more, maybe have the parent come in and volunteer to show that this is a place where they belong in their state.

Also, providing those visual aids and guidance, like Jani said, really helps to support those expectations, the language development, and even cognitive development across the board. I know that when I was a home visitor, I had a Vietnamese family that I worked with where I knew absolutely no Vietnamese, and this son and this mother that I did visits with knew very little English. And so, we worked together over time to build our communication skills, which meant I learned Vietnamese and she learns English, and we would use things like Google Translate and my program services and also getting books in both English and Vietnamese so that we could compare and say things together. And we talked many times about the child's behavior over the two years that I worked with the family because that child went from an infant to an older toddler. And so, we talked many times about behavior, but a lot of it became very apparent that the parenting expectations play a huge role in how the children use their behavior to communicate. And I think that this resource we have on the side, which is “Dual Language Learners with Challenging Behaviors,” is a great resource because it has additional consideration, and also, an understanding of language and behavior differences when it comes to just diverse culture and language that goes into it. So, I think that working with the parents and taking a look at your own culture and expectations is a good place to start. So, Jani, do you have anything, or Beth, to add?

Jani: I think those are a really good points. I think that Randi, learning a few words in the child's home language can really go a long way in terms of reaching out to the family as well as to the child. I think that was a great example.

Randi: Sangeeta, do we have any other questions?

Sangeeta: We do have so many questions coming in, but I think you're going to be able to address some of them the next slide. So, let's move on, and then if we have time at the end, I'll ask some more questions. We have been getting a lot of comments and questions around children having tantrums during new routines, concern about how children are going to behave when they really want to be at home with their parents. They're so used to being with their families, that separation anxiety piece. So, how can we ease the anxiety and stress of drop-off changes, new requirements, and other new routines, such as wearing masks for example, during this time? And, Beth, if you could help us out with this question.

Beth: If I'm going to start off, but we've also talked some of these before, and I think the bottom line is patience and taking your time that. And yes, this is incredibly stressful and children have spent a lot of time at home and there's going to be challenges with that drop off and pick up, and that's just the start, seeing what that looks like. Having adults – maybe adults that the children don't know helping get children into buildings, and they're going to be totally messed up, and this could be very scary.

And it's going to be important that adults know their role as well as even practicing having a mask on and talking. I don't know about everybody else, but I have a hard time articulating sometimes with a mask, especially when I'm talking to somebody back with a mask and trying to hear, and that's going to be something adults we have to work on. And then in turn, making our facial expressions soft and gentle and empathetic as we greet children that we might not know and helping them come into the building. But it's teaching those children and the families, what this is going to look like. So, any preview beforehand; what is the drop off and pickup going to look like? What are the expectations? So, they know the program's policies and those pickups. And realizing, and it's OK if a drop off and pick up takes longer that we can just stop and console the child. And even though we might have to be at six feet, we can talk to the child and be ready for what that looks like. Beforehand, social stories to show what it looks like, sending pictures, as I said earlier, teachers in math so they realize what it looks like. One program that I work with actually set it up so at least every other day, actual classroom teacher could be out helping with the drop-off so that they could see, they had a [Inaudible] in the classroom that the children would actually see a teacher that they knew.

I do want to share a resource that I discovered because I had notes from this presentation from one of my colleagues on the presentation, but it's autismresourcecentral.org, and it has social stories for young and old and all the way on COVID-19, and then it has mask stories, as well as stories about new routines and things. And it kind of goes back to what we were talking about transitions. It's teaching the routine, helping the children to know what to expect before they stop. I'm going to stop because I'm sure Randi and Jani have some more tips that they could share as well.

Jani: Yeah, you know, Beth, we have the resources handout that you can download from the webinar platform. We've included the resources that are on these slides, but we also have a bunch of resources in addition to those. And so, I think that in that resource's handout, we've included a bunch of links to places where you can access social stories and other social stories related to COVID. And so, if we don't have it on our handout, we'll make sure that we send those out because given the questions that we're getting, it does seem like there's a real interest in those resources and they could be really helpful.

Sangeeta: Thank you so much. So, our last question here is a big question, and we have been talking about partnering with families throughout the “Head Start Heals” campaign in various ways. But could you talk Randi or start us off a little bit about what are ways to partner with families to support children with new routines and rules? Sorry, before you jump into your answer, I just want to point out that we've been getting a lot of comments and questions

specifically about concerns related to family; concerns that families may dismiss the behaviors that are being seen in the program; concerns about maybe at home the parent may have been using corporal punishment as a way to handle challenging behaviors, which we don't do in the program. So, what are some ways to partner with families so that you can have this kind of open discretion to support children in this new environment?

Randi: Oh, absolutely. I think this is kind of a two-prong approach, because when you think about center-based and the teachers creating these new routines or reminding families as they transition back of the routines that existed, it's all about encouraging families to talk to especially their older toddlers and preschoolers about what changes are going to occur, allowing the teachers to also provide that information to kind of allow children and families to have a sense of security as they transition back to say, "OK, so this is either a new routine, it's an existing routine. We know this one," or "Here are some other rules that we have such as potentially wearing masks." What does that look like? What are the rules around that? Washing our hands ... All of those kinds of things that we may have in a classroom that we want to reiterate.

So, providing that information ahead of time, as well as just reinforcing, it means flexible over time is a big thing. And when we think about this in terms of home-based, you're going into a family's home or engaging with them virtually, and we're talking about the family's established routine. And so, this is where we're talking to families about how do you introduce this new rule or this new routine or this new expectation to your child, and then also being flexible during this process of change? And so, we also have to think back to providing families with their knowledge of child development and also helping them to acknowledge those behaviors that do press their buttons. That really are the ones that really are just like, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe that your 2-year-old is definitely not out to get you, I promise."

So, it really is talking about routines and rules that are age appropriate, that represent learning opportunities that are based on their child's development, but then also taking a look at how you can support parents over time. Providing that open relationship with them, that positive atmosphere that allows them to ask a vulnerable question and to be vulnerable with you so that you can then have that open relationship to talk about what does it mean for a rule or a consequence to be put in place. Offering those visuals, those guidance polls are reinforcements for just an alignment between the expectations, the strategies that you use, the information that you share, all of that. But I would definitely hand it off to you, Jani and Beth, I know they probably have wonderful strategies about partnering with families about routines and rules.

Jani: Randi, I think you covered it really well. I think it's tough, and I think it's so important to us to remember that as stressful as this time is for us and it's for children, it also is for families, and we really need to keep our expectations as realistic as possible because we have families that are really struggling out there now with job loss or even food insecurity, health concerns of loved ones, the list goes on and on. And so, I think now is really the time that we extend grace and kindness to the families that we serve and to each other in general just because it's a difficult time for all of us, and that kindness is the one thing that we can give to each other.

Beth: I just want to jump in and one resource from the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovation. They have a resource called "Helping Calming Down," and there's an adult person and a child version when challenging behavior occurs. And it's just a one page handout flyer, or kind of infographic, if you may, and it really does a nice job helping families first, having the adult be able to kind of calm down in the situation, take a step back, as well as ways to help children learn to calm down and kind of take a step back and use some language and teach this skill of using language to communicate. And NCPMI has a COVID-19 page on their front, and then challengingbehavior.org that has a lot of resources, but that's just one that sticks out that could be a really good conversation starter for families and home visitors to talk about, and even just classroom teachers, education staff as well.

Sangeeta: Thank you guys so much.

Jani Kozlowski: Thank you, Beth. I'm really glad you mentioned that. And Sangeeta, if it's OK, I'd like to share a little bit about this webinar that we have coming up on July 7th, and we will be sharing some of those NCPMI resources. At this time, it's a special edition webinar as part of our inclusion series, and it's called "Resources and Strategies to Support Children with Disabilities and Their Families During COVID-19." And so, please mark your calendar. You'll get these slides, and the link to register is right in there. But we have wrote some real concrete strategies to share about supporting families, and we do have a bunch of resources as well. And we've learned that we can share some additional resources as links following this webinar. And so, the resources you mentioned, in particular, I think will be really good to share as an add on. So, with that commercial announcement, I'll turn it back over to you, Sangeeta.

Sangeeta: Thank you, Jani. And I was just going to say that we touched on services to children with disabilities, but we didn't get to go into it as much. And it's so important that we spend more time really talking about how to support not only the children with disabilities, but also their families as well. So, I'm so excited that the National Center for Development, Teaching and Learning is going to be providing us with that special webinar. So, if you all want to stay connected with us, which I really, really hope that you do, please join MyPeers, if you have not already. We have ... If you don't know what MyPeers is, it's a collaborative platform for ECL programs to ask questions and share resources, and our national centers regularly post information in the mental health community and the disability inclusion community, and many other communities on MyPeers.

And if you are not a member of MyPeers, there is a link on the ECLKC, on the front page, where you can go and set up an account. And we have been providing throughout the "Head Start Heals campaign" a variety of different national hotlines that are very important, particularly during this time of increased social isolation and increase in a variety of different mental health problems that people are reporting and experiencing. So, we want to make sure that as you're talking with parents and thinking about your own wellbeing, that you're aware of the different hotlines that are available for you. There's a parent support one, one related to domestic violence, and there's a special SAMHSA one on "Disaster Distress Helpline."

Nobody is going to know that you're calling in, and it's just really important that if you're concerned about yourself or others, that you avail yourself of the resources that are available. There's one here related to child abuse and neglect. We did have some questions related to child welfare that came in during this webinar that we weren't able to ...

Jani: I just wanted to thank everyone for joining us, and if you have additional questions, please post them on MyPeers. Again, we are so appreciative of all that you all are doing out there to support children and families. We really are a Head Start community that is here for each other. So, please check out the "Head Start Heals" campaign. There are additional webinars that you can listen to and lots and lots of resources to check out. So, thanks everyone so much and have a great afternoon. Be well.