

Partnering with Families During Emergencies

Brandi Black Thacker: Hello, everyone, and welcome. We're so glad to be with you today. We're not going to get started until the top of the hour – a good 3 minutes. You know who we are. We're the relationship people. We can't be with you even in a virtual space without checking in and having a little conversation before we get going officially. If you would be so inclined, we'd love for you to take part with us in what you see on your screen. It's a lobby icebreaker.

You know that today we're here to talk about partnering with families in times of emergency. We want to know a little bit about what you've been doing, and some places where you found some real strategies that have worked for you in this time of pandemic, in the time of natural disaster. If you could, at your "Presenter View," in the bottom left-hand side of your screen, you have a little portion that reads "Questions." You can actually post any comments in there, tell us where you're dialing in from if you want to. Put in there some ideas that we can share for the greater good of everybody. Think about a time when you successfully navigated through a stressful situation. Tell us some things that have helped support you along the way. We're going to reflect some of those out to the larger group.

Hello! I see a lot of "Good afternoons." A lot of "Excited for the discussion." We love to see that. It's been a minute since we've been with you guys live. We're excited to be back together, virtually, of course. We're also looking forward to the days that we get to see each other in person again. Hey, Carrie! Carrie said, "Stayed calm." Isn't that more than enough. [Laughter] Yes, and sometimes that's like a muscle – it takes a little practice and a little building, for sure. Let me give you a couple of other things I see coming in. Things that have helped are "Families, hobbies, exercise." Angela, I love this. We're going to touch this a few times today. "Family support and community help."

"Make a plan," Tonya says. "Make a plan and follow the steps." It's like you guys have seen our PowerPoint. [Laughter] Are you peeping? Did you get a sneak preview? [Laughter] I love this one, too: "I've been taking deep breaths and counting to 10 slowly." It's amazing the magic and the power of the breath. We're actually going to think about that together today, too.

"Moral support from peers." We have "Prayers through stressful situations." "Mindfulness, positive self-talk, more connections." I love us in Head Start. It's all about these connections and the relationship. What we say is really true, isn't it? I see a lot of things about "I'm connecting to family and friends." "Making sure that you actually take time for yourself, and maybe out in nature." "More connections to others." "Being hopeful." "Focusing on breathing." Sonya, this is mine too. I love this: "Listening to music usually helps." I think music is so therapeutic that way.

Oh. Partnerships! Here is an actual partnership from Joan. They partnered with their Family Resource Center and churches to help the families through the pandemic. I have to say, I just need to acknowledge and celebrate our Head Start community across this country right now. You guys in all the days are incredible connections to your communities. You are the heartbeat of who we are and what we do. What's really incredible about this is you have found new and

innovative and incredibly inspiring ways to continue to be that face for and with your families. We just want to acknowledge straight away that we're grateful for you.

We're incredibly honored to have any of your time on any day, but especially today. We're going to be looking up a few more of these examples as we go forward in our discussion together today. Let me ... Since we are a little after the top of the hour, let's go ahead and jump in officially. We hope you are here today to join us for "Partnering with Families During Emergencies." I want you to take special note of the time that we have. Not only for those of you on the East Coast, we're going to be together from 3:00 to 4:45. What I love about this model is that we get to spend about 90 minutes together in conversation and sharing. Then we stay around for at least 15 minutes after we finish. If you guys have questions along the way that you want us to bring forward in real time, we're going to answer some of those.

We'll pick a few to answer during our conversation in the 90 minutes, and then we'll keep a few back so that we can keep thinking together in that 15 minutes, from about 4:30 to 4:45 Eastern. Hang around for the "After Chat" if you have a few minutes to do that. It's always a really great interaction.

The other thing that I want to give you a little quick tour about – a couple of things here. As I mentioned, you have off to the bottom left-hand side this Ask-a-Question Pod. You can put anything in there. You can certainly put your questions. We'd love to know where you're dialing in from, what's on your mind, if you want to share something for the greater good of our whole Head Start community across the country. We are so happy to be part of that dialogue. Let us know what you're thinking, what you want to know about, what you want to hear. We'll be listing a few of those up throughout the course of our conversation.

The other thing that is your favorite question to ask forever and always [Laughter] is about "Will we get this PowerPoint?" The answer is, "It is right there for you already." Under the Event Resources Pod, you can download the PowerPoint. You can download, also, a wonderful resource that has handouts. Anything that you hear us bring forward today during the course of the conversation will be there for you to download and click.

Alright. Now that you know that you're going to get the PowerPoint and all the goodies are going to be there for you, let's jump into the next set of goodies that you always want to ask about, which is, "Will I get a certificate." [Laughter] The answer is "We got you covered my friends, yes." At the end of our time together, we're going to have a link on the screen that you can click and fill out your evaluation in real time.

When you fill out that evaluation, as soon as you click "submit," you will get the certificate pop up on your screen so that you can save it in PDF, or you can actually print it from your laptop, desktop, wherever your situation takes you today. We will revisit that in a little bit, but we want you to know straightaway that you are going to have access to that and that you'll have that for your professional development files in honor of the time that you gifted us today.

With all of those things, we are going to be doing some official welcomes and introductions. I have to say ... I want to do ... Could you all give me a little virtual-chat drumroll? Let me see what kind of sounds you will make in the Chat. [Laughter] I feel like we really want to celebrate the fact that I have a couple of folks that you may have never met before, but I'm so excited to

bring them forward as one of our new partners at the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement.

Let me just introduce myself quickly and turn it right over to the two of them, because I want you to hear their voices straight away. Then actually, Helah is going to take off with us right into the content and the conversation. My name is Brandi Black Thacker. I'm so happy to be with you guys. I have the distinct honor and pleasure of being the director of integrated services for the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. I am so excited to turn over the mic, if you will, to Sarah, so that both she and Helah can say "Hello" from one of our newest partners, LIFT.

Sarah Spunt: Thanks, Brandi. Hi, everyone. My name is Sarah Spunt, and I am the Executive Director of LIFT Chicago. LIFT is a national nonprofit that focuses on family economic mobility through one-on-one support that we provide parents with young children to focus on their career and financial goals, and building up financial strength, personal well-being, and social connection. Now, I'm going to pass it on to my colleague, Helah.

Helah Robinson: Thank you, Sarah. My name is Helah Robinson. I'm a national senior program director at LIFT, with National. As Sarah mentioned, we're a national organization, and we work across the country. We're so excited to be here today, and we're so excited to be a new partner of the National Center. I'm going to take us into the presentation.

Before we dive in, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on the current public health crisis and cultural, racial equity. How families that we serve are likely being hardest hit right now, and how Head Start in particular has such a critical role to play.

We know that this crisis is disproportionately affecting the communities that we work with. Many of the families that we serve have probably experienced job loss, health crisis, and other challenges due to the pandemic. As a result, they might be struggling more to stay on track with paying bills, buying groceries, accessing health care, a particularly intensive emergency. These immediate challenges can compound greater instability, such as loss of housing, which we know will continue far after the pandemic passes.

We also know that we can't ignore the impact that this moment could be having on families and our own mental health, and the implications that that has on their well-being and their financial health. At the beginning of the pandemic, LIFT actually asked families that they serve what they're experiencing. While many shared concerns about financial stability, most also shared how the stress, anxiety, and crumbling social supports were impacting how they were navigating right now.

Of course, as Brandi was saying, on top of these extenuating circumstances, we are all also having to navigate new environments and ways of connecting with families as things have gone virtual. Given all of this, we know that families' situations and our situations, needs, and priorities have likely shifted, and we want to be as responsive and understanding of those changes as we possibly can.

With that in mind, we also know that you probably have been meeting with parents, families, and caregivers earlier this month in your January check-in on their goals. In light of the current

crisis, we wanted to review some engagement approaches and techniques that are valuable in any moment, but we believe will be particularly helpful this year.

Today, we want to cover just some approaches for, first, encouraging self-care and attending to yourself in this moment, assessing parents' strengths and needs while meeting them where they are, and then supporting families through challenging situations. For our first objective, around attending to yourself, I'm actually going to pass it back over to Sarah.

Sarah: Thank you, Helah. I'm so excited to launch this first section of our learning agenda – attending to self – because I think it's so important for us to recognize that attending to ourselves is an important part of the process of being in a helping profession and working with families. Before I dive into some of the content, I would like individual folks to use the chat, and just share, "What are some ways you are practicing self-care in this moment?" Brandi's going to summarize some of the answers for us as people fill in the chat.

Brandi: [Inaudible] The first way that people are supporting their own self-care is – by doing the drum-roll noise. Thank you, friend. [Laughter] I love the creativity of our early childhood community across this country. I have everything from "Ba-da-da-dum" to "Ta-ta-ta-ta-TA." [Laughter] It's like I can feel you guys.

One of the ones that's coming through straight away, Sarah, is meditation. I see that supported and high-fived virtually by Andrea, who says, "Daily meditation of gratitude," and a third-in-a-row meditation from Jody. This is something that really resonates with folks. "Exercise, taking the time to breathe, and taking walks on my break." That's a great idea. "Moving my body." "Walking." "I meditate on the word of God," Sherry says. "Taking breaks." More prayers.

Oh my gosh, Maria, I need to stop here. "Knowing it's OK to cry." "Just really acknowledging where you are and what you're feeling and being able to stand in that space of awareness." "Good sleep hygiene," Christine said. Lots more meditation, nature walks. Rebecca: "Long hot shower." [Laughter]

The clutter-free. OK, Carrie. I'm working on this part. "Clutter-free, clean home." I'm trying to come behind you on that one. [Laughter] I've got some growing to do there. Sarah, let me give you one more. I see, "Staying calm, laughter, finding happiness." I can't go forward without acknowledging a comment we got, actually, at the top of the hour, which was "validation." Validation of what I'm feeling and what others around me may be feeling. Just how much in that solidarity of "You're not alone." Sarah, what do you think about those?

Sarah: I'm so excited to hear that that is how people are caring for themselves and tending to themselves. Not just in the context of COVID and what we are facing as a country now, but just in general. I think those are great practices. I was really excited to hear a lot of them were rooted in caring for yourself through meditation, through giving yourself space to feel emotions, through giving yourself space to forgive yourself, for maybe feeling burnt out or things like that. Because that is what true self-care is, is being able to be in tune with what you need. It's not about checking off boxes.

While we all love a good spa day, or taking a bath, the long walks, and things like that, those are fantastic ways to tend to ourselves. The idea that we are worth the self-care and having the

time to invest, that is really the crucial point for that. [Dog barking] I do apologize to any listeners on the call right now who are hearing my dog bark in the background. [Dog barking] That's one of my forms of self-care is playing with my dog. Unfortunately, working from home and living in an apartment building, anytime someone moves outside, she barks, too. I hope it's not too distracting for folks, coming through the microphone.

Jumping into "attending to yourself during a time of crisis." Often, working with others can create emotional triggers for ourselves, your family, or you, or someone you're close to, can be going through a very similar situation as the family sitting right in front of you. It's important to recognize when these moments occur and practice ways that we can care for ourselves in the moment or before meeting with a family that's facing a challenging situation so we can focus on the family, while also making sure our personal needs are met.

If you look in the Resource Pod, you can find a tool, "Engaging with Families in Conversations Around Sensitive Topics." This document outlines strategies for checking in with yourself before the meeting, with some examples, including how to prepare a space for the meeting, how to check in with yourself, your knowledge of the family as in reviewing some of the notes from your previous meetings. What are the goals they are currently working on? Is there anything that you need to refresh on the top of your mind so you can be aware of what's going to maybe occur in this meeting?

It's important to recognize what causes emotional triggers for ourselves while we are meeting with families in order to attend to yourself in the moment, but also making sure you're not bringing your stress or your triggers to that meeting with the family. It's also important we understand how we tend to ourselves because we're often in one meeting and then jumping to a next. You could be in a staff meeting, and then you're meeting with a family, and then you get a random phone call from a different family. Your calendar is back to back to back, and rushing all around. Making sure that we take moments when we can to step back and breathe, or whatever it is that is best for you to recenter yourself so you can go on to the next meeting with a clear sense of mind.

Another resource I want to point out is a resource called "What About You." It's a workbook for those who work with others. It can be found in the "Family Coaching Manual" as part of "Engaging Families in Conversations about Sensitive Topics" on ECLKC. Within the "Engaging Families in the Conversations about Sensitive Topics," there's a specific section on focusing on you, the person who is the front-line staff who is working with the family, and how to tend to yourself while working on others. Prepping before a meeting and checking in with yourself is even more important now because we are all experiencing collective trauma through the times of COVID-19.

Going on to diving a little bit deeper into collective trauma, and what is the difference between "trauma" and "collective trauma." Oftentimes, when we hear about trauma, it impacts one specific person due to an incident, or an individual, or a few people. Collective trauma refers to the impact of a traumatic experience that affects and involves an entire group of people, an entire community, entire society, or, in the case right now of a global pandemic, our entire world.

To root us a little bit, I'd like to take us through a case study that looks at an example of someone who is in a family safety role. Let's take a look at an example of a woman named Yesenia to explore how collective trauma impacts people, particularly those in a helping profession. Since the pandemic hit in March, Yesenia hasn't felt herself. She always feels a bit out of it. As Yesenia has watched her clients lose their income, watched her family and friends battle illness, and is consumed by the news daily, describing not only a global pandemic but a call for racial equity, used to bring her so joy she has found herself feeling unmotivated and not wanting to work with others. It was a job that she once loved and a job that used to bring her so much joy.

Before, when Yesenia was feeling burnt out, she would reach out to her friends or colleagues to help her cope with stress, but now struggles to reach out to anyone via text or even a phone call. She finds herself being less empathetic when people share their feelings of stress or grief, when she used to be praised for her compassionate spirit. Yesenia wishes she could just snap out of her constant bad mood but does not see that happening anytime soon. I'm not going to ask people to share in the chat right now, but I am going to ask people to self-reflect a little bit if they have resonated with Yesenia's story.

As you self-reflect, I want to share with you, if you have resonated with Yesenia's story, you are not alone. I'm going to repeat that again. You are not alone. As our audience participant said, too, giving yourself permission to cry, giving yourself permission to feel the weight of what is going on right now, is OK. It's important for us to give ourselves that permission because we are often the ones who are supposed to hold it all together for people. Also know that it's OK for us to feel like we might not have it all together.

Many people in a helping profession experience burnout, which, if not tended to, can lead to compassion fatigue, which is what Yesenia was feeling when she felt like she couldn't feel the empathy for people when she heard their experience anymore. That is a sign of compassion fatigue. It's a condition characterized by emotional and physical exhaustion, leading to the diminished ability to empathize or feel compassion for others. It's often described as a negative cost for being in the caring profession. It's sometimes referenced to a secondary trauma, as well, as listening to other people's collective experience.

It's important to give ourselves compassion as we collectively feel the impact of a health and economic crisis. Coping strategies that we have used in the past may not be working, or may not be accessible now, as we are collectively trying to figure out different ways to tend to ourselves. I know, as we shared other ways to tend to ourselves, that one of the ones that we shared, that Brandi shared often was a lot of folks like to meditate. I am going to welcome you into a breath exercise right now. This is a tool that you can use to give yourself time to adjust as you transition into a new environment, and sometimes quickly, as we shared earlier, that oftentimes you're going from meeting to meeting to meeting. You may go from talking to your family in your Head Start program on from a staff meeting or a rough day at work and need to refocus before going home.

I'm going to invite you into this breath exercise as a way for us to tend to ourselves right now in this moment. If you are wanting to participate right now, please get comfortable in your chair.

Your hands can be folded on your stomach or resting on your knees, either facing down or upwards. If you want to close your eyes, you can do that right now as well.

First, I want you to start with just taking a few deep breaths. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. I want you to do that a couple of times, just recognizing your breath, feeling your stomach or your chest expand as you inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. As you take those breaths, I'm going to transition into a visualization. First, I'm going to explain what this visualization is, and then we're going to walk through it a couple of times together and do it a couple of times by ourselves.

For this visualization, I want you to picture drawing a square. You're going to start at the bottom left corner, and then you are going to inhale as you visualize drawing a line to the top. You're going to breathe in, drawing a line to the top. Then you're going to exhale while you draw a line across. Then inhale, drawing the line down, and exhale drawing the line across. We're going to do that a couple times, starting at the bottom left-hand corner.

Inhale up ... 2 ... 3 ... 4. Exhale across ... 2 ... 3 ... 4. Inhale down ... 2 ... 3 ... 4. Exhale across ... 2 ... 3 ... 4. Inhale up ... 2 ... 3 ... 4. Exhale across ... 2 ... 3 ... 4. Inhale down ... 2 ... 3 ... 4. Exhale across ... 2 ... 3 ... 4. Now, I'd like you to continue on with that visualization two or three more times at your own pace.

[Silence]

As you wrap up, I would like you to take a few more deep breaths, just inhaling and exhaling. When you're ready, bringing yourself back to the present moment and opening your eyes. Thank you for joining me in creating space for yourself. I'm going to turn it over to Brandi right now to share a few more resources that we highlighted, as well. Brandi, please take it away.

Brandi: Thank you, Sarah. I don't know about you guys, but every time – I've seen Sarah do this a couple of times now, and each time it's just like a completely different space for my body. You guys are great. I see a few things in the chat that are saying things like ... First of all, I can absolutely relate to Yesenia, as you asked earlier, Sarah. Things that folks are saying, even in your notion of collective trauma, like "That's what I've been feeling. I didn't have words for it." Thank you for bringing us through each of those experiences.

I wanted to remind you guys, because some of you found these back at the beginning of the pandemic. One of the things that we're going to do is take you through three major pieces today about how to really be alongside families in times of emergency. You guys know who we are. A lot of times, when we have a spirit of service – I call it "helpitude" [Laughter] – coming to a space, and you have a heart to serve. We tend to put our own selves on the back burner.

I'm really grateful that we were, Sarah, able to put this part at the top to just remind ourselves that we are valuable, that we need to take care of ourselves and each other. We have a couple of things that we wanted to remind you guys of.

On the left-hand side of the screen – you guys may have seen these back in the beginning of the pandemic – we have these social media messages that say things, not only for families but for those of you who work alongside families, like "You are enough." "You're strong." "You can do this." You'd be so surprised at what an outpouring of gratitude we got around these because

they were formatted – so if I’m a family worker, they’re formatted so I can put them in a text message to a family just as a way to stay connected. If I’m a family member, and I’m feeling overwhelmed, and I get a text from you that says, “You can do this,” that resonates with me.

We tried to create those in a way that you guys could pick them up. Some of you guys are using them in your private Facebook spaces with your families. Some of you have arranged a caseloads in your classroom in a way that families could stay in touch that way virtually. Just in case you haven’t seen those in a while, especially since we’re hearing from you guys in chat and in real time when we get to talk to you that the pandemic fatigue is real, take a peek at those again. You could find a new use for them in a way of staying connected with not only your colleagues but your families.

On the right-hand side of the screen, we created a whole set of five briefs that are about trauma-informed care, healing-centered practice – and you know who we are. We have to tie it all to the PFCE framework. [Laughter] There’s this series of five briefs around trauma-informed care, and the one that you see on the screen is really about understanding trauma and healing in adults, specifically with the focus on caring for ourselves. We wanted to make sure that you had that at the ready if it’s something that you haven’t discovered yet, because that one’s fairly new.

With all of that, I’m going to pop in every now and then and give you a couple of nudges toward resources that could help support where you are now and where you’re going in terms of partnering alongside families in times of emergency. I also want to make sure that Helah gets a chance to come in and talk to you a little bit now about the second part of what we want to think of in our time together today, which is really thinking with families about where they are right now in this moment.

Helah: Thank you so much, Brandi, and thank you, Sarah. [Inaudible] important and necessary to do that reflection and care for ourselves. I’m now going to transition to the second part of our session today, which is supporting families and how we can show up for families in this moment. First is relationships are key. At the top of this call, when Brandi was sharing some of your thoughts of what has helped you in this moment and deal with a stressful situation, a lot of what we saw resonated around relationship, connection, social supports. That very much resonates, and we know to be true in our work with family.

The goal of parent and family engagement is to work with families to build these strong and effective partnerships that can help children and families thrive. We know that these partnerships are grounded in positive, ongoing, and goal-oriented relationships; that they are based on mutual respect and trust; and that they are developed over time. We also know that successful relationships that can be very supportive and helpful are focused on family strength. They build on a shared commitment to families and children’s well-being and success. We know that this then contributes to lasting change for families and children.

Grounding these relationships in trust and a genuine belief in family’s knowledge and resilience, and acknowledging that parents and caregivers know what’s best for their families and what they need most to succeed, makes our support more effective, and families’ progress towards greater well-being and ultimately, economic mobility more possible. Strong and trusting

relationships are particularly critical in a time of crisis, which is what we've all been seeing populate in the chat box. I'll often note that it's not chat, it's the Q&A section, which is where we're seeing your chats as well.

We've seen that, and I've heard from what Brandi was sharing with us, that having someone in our corner, having someone that you can turn to for advice and support during difficult times, can often make all of the difference. This is when we need each other most, and that we need to be supporting each other on the things that matter most. At Head Start, we can play a very critical role in being the support for the families that we serve. Given the current crisis, the next time that you connect with a family, their circumstances may have changed, potentially pretty dramatically since the last time you met. Intentionally reflecting on the current circumstances in the family's life and discussing their current strengths and needs both demonstrate empathy and a genuine interest in their lives. It will also help make your support more effective and responsive.

There are many ways, and straightforward ways, but immensely effective techniques that you can do so intentionally. Today, we want to talk about just a few of these resources, a few of these techniques that you can use to assess families' strength and needs, and provide responsive support in ways that continue to build these very critical and important relationships. Of course, we're going to touch on a few today, but don't forget. There are many, many additional resources on ECLKC to help support building strong partnerships and relationships with families.

First, families' financial education and employment goals and needs may change during emergencies and natural disasters, like a global pandemic. In the second session about assessment, I'm going to refer to the "Partnering with Families During Emergencies" tip sheet. This is the first in a series of tip sheets that were designed for programs. In these tip sheets, program staff can learn how to partner with families to access important information, benefits, and tools that can strengthen families' economic security during crises.

You can use these resources to learn how to partner with families to access federal assistance, open a bank account, apply for unemployment insurance benefits, pursue their education and training goals, and a lot more. Also, there's a second set of tip sheets for family. Also in Head Start, we can use the Family Partnership Agreement process as an important opportunity to set and revisit family strengths and needs during emergencies. To that end, I'll also be referencing the goal-setting guide as a resource for these conversations with families.

Finally, I'm going to circle back to the document that Sarah mentioned earlier about engaging families in conversations around sensitive topics, because when you make intentional choices about language, especially in times of crisis, you help build those trusting and respectful relationships with families. These relationships can support families in reaching their goals for themselves and their children, in addition to offering a critical connection in times of emergency.

I'm going to start with identifying families and ... [Inaudible] I'm going to start digging into the first tip sheet. The first tip sheet is around partnering with families during times of emergency. In this tip sheet, it identifies three core steps that you can consider taking with families when

partnering with them in this moment. Those steps are, first, identifying immediate strengths and needs caused by the emergency. Then, planning concrete actions, the next step to take when you've identified what those immediate needs and those immediate strengths are. Then tracking progress to celebrate those successes. Let's start with identifying the immediate needs caused by the emergency.

You likely are already doing many, many things to check in on and assess families' current situations. Things like letting families know that Head Start and Early Head Start staff can assist them with their immediate financial needs and long-term goals; following the seven steps outlined in the Family Partnership goal-setting guide to help families set financial employment and education goals, a little hat tip to Brandi, there, going back to the center's frameworks; and then using the seven-steps worksheet template in helping families, in the goal-setting guide, helping families to ask questions that really help assess a family's current situation, strengths, and goals, and a whole lot more.

There are many, many ways that you can reflect and assess families' current context and needs. Today, we're going to focus on just a few of them, including checking in and creating space. Leveraging these two particular techniques can help you ground the conversation in meeting families where they are, versus coming to them with an opinion of where they should be.

Starting with the technique of checking in. When you use this technique of checking in with families, you make sure that you are on the right path. By checking in, you make sure that families stay in the driver's seat, and that your work together is truly responsive to their current needs, their current interest, and motivation. For example, you might be working with a family or an individual who was employed as a child care worker, and who may have set an original objective, a long-term objective, of getting a promotion at work or saving \$1,000 in an emergency fund. But due to the pandemic, they may have lost their job and now be acutely concerned about making this month's rent, let alone considering thinking about long-term savings.

As a result, their focus may need to shift to more short-term stability objectives – for example, enrolling in available benefits or accessing rental assistance. On your screen now, you see some helpful questions that you can consider using when checking in with families and assessing what their current strengths and what their current needs are in this moment. These are questions like, "Are we going in the right direction?" or "Does that sound right to you?" or "Are we missing anything?" before moving forward.

Checking in can be very straightforward, it can seem straightforward, but it can also be easily missed if we jump right into solutions-oriented work. Checking in and ensuring that you're on the same page before jumping into where you left off the last time allows you to unearth current circumstances, offer more responsive support, and really ground this relationship in what the parent needs and what is important for them at this moment.

In addition to creating space, another technique that you can use to really help assess and identify the immediate needs and strengths of a family is around creating space. Sometimes, people may come to a session upset or distracted, making it difficult to focus. It can be helpful to create a clear, dedicated space for them to share what's going on. Offer them a few minutes

to share, to vent about what's upsetting them, so you guys can move forward together. Creating a space can help get it out of the way temporarily. I also want to reflect back to where we were earlier around for ourselves and our own self-care, like knowing that it's OK to cry, and that we have the permission to feel. This is a technique that you can use to make that clear to families that they have that same permission and that same validation.

I wanted to ask, and you guys can put in the Ask the Question/Chat Box, why do you think this might be helpful and/or how have you, or how could you, create this kind of space without derailing the session? I'm going to lean on Brandi and Marie to elevate what we're seeing people say.

Brandi: Helah, I see a couple of things. I love what Marie has given us here because, well, let me say it first, and then I'm going to reflect, you know? [Laughter] She says, "Value, respect, and support." I love these words, and what I love the most about these words is they – and this is my little humble opinion, you all tell me if you agree – they themselves, give us the opportunity to come together in conversation.

When I say the word "value" – Helah, let's play this out – I'm guessing that might mean something a little different to me than it means to you, but part of the fun in our getting closer together in our relationship might be having that conversation. When we create space for each other, what does it mean to say that you're going to value me? For me, it might mean, "Girl, I just need somebody to sit back and listen for a second. I haven't seen an adult all day," you know? [Laughter]

Since we've all been home, these connections, even through virtual interactions, take on even a more significant importance, and having that chance to even come together in understanding about – now, I'm going to get scientific, Helah, are you ready? Are you properly prepared? [Laughter] "Squishy terms," that's my scientific contribution today. We work in a world of "all things human beings." That means that there are very few things that are black and white, and I can submit this to our littlest counterpart, to the kids, right? It's a very gray space. Often one of the biggest gifts that we can give each other is this creation of space, this technique that you're giving us, Helah, even in understanding the words that we say. Because we all bring ourselves to them,?

I'm going to pause on that, Helah. Here some a couple of other late-breaking submissions. [Laughter] We have from Mackenzie, "A parent might not be able to talk about something when they have bigger issues on their mind." I need to pause there, Helah, because I know you want to take that one.

Helah: Yes. Brandi. It's like you were saying, it's like people peeped behind the curtain and saw. [Laughter] I'll jump off of on that, and ... Show on the screen. It looks like people have been looking back at our PowerPoint, but that's exactly the point of creating that space, creating that permission, to allow some of that space to get it out and refocus to move forward. Certain ways to create that dedicated space; it either can be incredibly important and effective, but also it can be tricky, and one that is likely needed more than ever, and in particular, now and likely this full year.

To jump on that point of not being able to focus because something serious might have just happened, using this technique allows you to acknowledge that something real is affecting the family that you're serving in this moment, and creates the space needed to air it out and to have someone be a listening ear for it – create the space or the ability to clear it away in order for you to refocus and move forward, even if it's just temporary.

Ways to think about, or ways to consider to do this, is you can create this dedicated space by inviting families to share freely, actively listening, not commenting on what they say. I was seeing this a little bit in the chat, not commenting, listening with a nonjudgmental ear. As described in the document that Sarah mentioned, the resource for “Engaging Families in Conversations about Sensitive Topics,” listening carefully and using silence. A phrase that's in there that really resonated with me is, “Offering an ear, not a word.” It's an effective strategy to use during an engagement with a family to continue building that relationship and being genuine and showing empathy in that moment.

Another thing that we found to be really useful is you can be transparent with families about what you're doing and why you're doing it. Naming it, explicitly sharing the language of creating space, to help them clear their mind. You then could even explicitly ask them, “Would it be helpful to create some space and spend time clearing your mind a bit?” Another useful or effective way of creating this space is also potentially setting a time limit so that you can even create boundaries around that space and allow both of you to respect that moment, share in it, but then move forward in the discussion. Also, of course, always remember that both of you have the latitude to reschedule the meeting if it's definitely not the right time. This is an important technique, but it's not the solution to all things.

That's just two of the techniques that we wanted to highlight on how to engage and assess the current context and the current circumstances of a family that you're serving. Then we wanted to move into returning to the staff tip sheet number one, is after you have identified and spent some time to assess a family's current context and current situation, identifying their immediate needs and their immediate strengths that they can use to help address those needs, you can then partner with them to plan concrete actions to help them move forward on addressing those needs.

Your programs, of course, are likely already doing many, many things to help families plan and take concrete actions. It could be things like providing families with resources and tools that can help them meet their financial needs and goals. Tools like, referencing the other resources that are accompanying this webinar, like the “Make a Budget” worksheet from the Federal Trade Commission website.

You are all likely probably identifying key partnerships and making referrals that can help families achieve their financial goals. Then, of course, referring to key topics in the “Economic Mobility Toolkit” to help families identify resources and take action, including things like accessing financial coaching or counseling in this moment, building credit or managing debt, and accessing state and federal benefits, because we know all of those things are also contributing and impacting families' both financial, economic, and emotional well-being at this moment.

Similarly, there are many, many ways to access and to do this work. Today, we're just going to focus on a couple. We're going to focus on two techniques for how you can effectively help families plan concrete action, and then define them in ways to make them more likely to be achieved, including making actions SMART and using open-ended questions.

It's a very sensitive next button on this webinar. Moving straight into the first technique of one way that you can help families plan concrete actions, one is "be SMART." Research suggests that making objectives and action steps SMART makes them more effective and more likely to be accomplished. I believe that many of you are already familiar with this technique. I wanted to return back to the Q&A comment chat box and ask, have you used this technique with families in the past, and have you found it helpful? How have you seen it play out in your work with families? I'm going to turn it back to Brandi for her eyes.

Brandi: Helah, I'm expecting a whole lot of activity right now around this because in Head Start, we were the inventors of the SMART. [Laughter] You guys know who we are. We used to say things like "SMART goals." What we have shifted ourselves to do is say "SMART objectives," because objectives really are the SMART part of how we do what we do. I'm looking to see you guys how ... Here we go, Helah, as predicted. [Laughter]

I'm getting a lot of [Inaudible] "We use this for my partnership goals." "We completely use the SMART technique, and it works very well." "Families are much more motivated to make goals that are achievable." Aren't we all [Inaudible]. I feel like we need a little "root-root" for that notion. [Laughter]. When you break it down – and somebody else, without even knowing they're agreeing with you is agreeing with you – when you break them down into those bite-sized steps, these little bitty steps, you get success. You feel momentum from that. It's a strategy that helps all of us to move forward in a meaningful way.

On a side note, I would say this – and tell me if you all agree – if you're moving, you're still moving. That's deep. Let it marinate. Let it marinate. [Laughter] If you're moving, you're still moving. Even if you have to take a step back for a second, and it's not forward momentum, it's still movement. I think in times like now, where we're supporting each other, we're walking alongside our families in times that have never been experienced by any of us, I think those kinds of things are critically important to give ourselves the permission to stay moving, but it might not look the same for each of us.

Helah, I'm seeing things over here like, "Yeah, we know the SMART. It allows us to break big goals into manageable pieces, and that way ..." Oh, it's the elephant idea. I see you. [Laughter] The only way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time. Lots of agreement around the breaking into manageable steps. A lot of shout-outs for our Head Start required Family Partnership Agreements.

We have another notion here about being able to ... Let me clear up a couple of things logistically, Helah, while we're pausing. You guys can download all the resources that we're mentioning. It's on the bottom left-hand side of your screen. There is a Resource Hub, but you have to scroll a little bit to see it. Also, for those of you who want to interact with us, there's a Questions Pod. We're taking your comments, your questions, your compliments. Did you see how I did that? [Laughter] Everything in the Question Pod, everything you want to say, we're

tracking it, because we're going to have some after-chat here in a little bit, too. We're collecting your questions so we can talk about some of those out loud at the very end.

Helah, one more thing that I wanted to recognize here. Not only do these SMART bits work in how you're giving us to them in terms of the objectives and our Family Partnership Agreement, and helping us to feel successful together. We've had professionals all across the country in Head Start even apply these on a more macro level, which is to their five-year project planning period and their program goals.

This has even been such a very – you know how we do – parallel process, not only for how we're doing what we do alongside our families, but taking these things, a set of skills and techniques that you're giving us, and applying them in a whole different way within the context of our programmatic operations, though, which is pretty cool. There's a lot of agreement here, Helah. What do you say? Bring us home. [Inaudible] [Laughter]

Helah: I was going to say that all of that just makes me so pleased, so happy. I also love that there's so much alignment, not just on the technique itself and how it can be useful in our day-to-day work, but also at the macro level for programs and the long-term visioning in the work that we do.

This is absolutely a review. The reason that we wanted to highlight it in this moment is around that idea of how facilitating a conversation with a family is making an action step SMART, makes it more possible to be more likely to be achieved. This phase, this step of planning concrete action, using this technique to help you do that by making it more likely to be achieved, allows you to then feel that momentum and to feel that progress.

Brandi, I love your note there of all movement. Movement is still moving. If you're moving you're still moving, even if it's a step backwards. One of the big values of planning concrete actions, as small as they are, is that if you set a long-term goal, that long-term goal can feel really big and really far away. If you're not clear, and if we don't work on making the smaller action steps, the smaller steps clear on the way towards that bigger end goal, it can also end up feeling demotivating if you don't feel it getting closer and closer. This is one seemingly small acronym technique, but it does really big things. I love that I'm seeing that resonate across the participants and in the Question plus Chat Box.

Quick review of what many of you have said and noted and are very familiar with – that SMART objectives are smart and measurable, attainable, or achievable – it can go back and forth – relevant, and time-based. I think being specific and time-bound – for example, like setting a deadline – can sometimes feel more straightforward. The M, the A, and the R can sometimes feel less clear. Just a few thoughts there that might make this technique easier to implement or more effective, some ideas to consider.

The first is to make something measurable, I often find it's helpful to ask families, "How will you know when you've succeeded?" We know that success, just like you were saying, Brandi, values look different to everyone. Being clear about what that measure of success is will make it that much more clear when a family can see that progress or see that success be accomplished. In a similar vein, "relevant" can refer to a family's vision, so that as you're studying these, as you're

planning these concrete actions, gut-checking to make sure that the action and the objective that you're defining is truly connected to something that motivates them.

The example that you can see on your screen is a SMARTer version of "I will apply for unemployment insurance" could be "I will check my eligibility for my state's updated pandemic emergency unemployment assistance benefits by the end of the week." That's a lot, but I also did not touch on A, on "attainable" or "achievable." That can often be one of the most challenging steps, is making an objective or making an action attainable. What does that really mean, and how can we do that?

There are lots of ways, but one way to do it is to use open-ended questions to unearth details and get specific about what has worked best and what can work best for families to make taking action easier and to make it more likely. I think we're running short on time, so I'm not going to ask the crew, I'm not going to ask the group, but think to yourself, between these two questions, option A and option B, which of these questions would you think is more effective?

First, option A is "Why didn't you complete your expense tracker?" Option B is "What got in the way when trying to complete your expense tracker?" Even if you – I might have weighed the scales here a little bit – but even if you hear the way that those questions come across, option B allows an open-ended, allows an open conversation, versus closing the conversation off.

Open-ended questions help families tap into their own inner knowledge and answers. For a question to be truly effective, you have to ask it from a place where you don't presume that you already know the answer. Open-ended questions help create this kind of awareness and confer to a family that you believe that they have their own answers. Typically, open-ended questions are short and simple and to the point. They are asked in true curiosity and typically start with "what," "who," "where," or "when." Open-ended questions usually don't start with "why," because asking someone "why" can elicit a defensive response, and thus is not as effective.

These kinds of questions help open a conversation and deepen a connection, versus closed-ended questions, which can close off that connection. This form of question will help and can help you support families to take action that you're helping them name as they plan and dig deeper into what tools and resources and other things might be helpful for them to take those steps, to take those actions, versus the closed-ended version of these questions that would not and might not elicit as detailed a response. Ultimately, the open-ended question can help you and families make those actions SMARTer, make them SMARTer.

Using these techniques – checking in, creating space, planning SMART actions, and then using open-ended questions to unearth what's going on in a family's life – can help you assess what support you can best provide in this moment. That support might require responding to moments in times of instability.

Given that, I did want to focus on that when you're assessing the immediate needs of a family and planning concrete actions for them to take next, families that you're working with might be facing some common challenges right now, many, but likely including or possibly including accessing their most recent stimulus payments, housing insecurity, or accessing other benefits, like unemployment insurance. Here and in the resources that are accompanying this webinar

are some resources that might be helpful for you and for you to share with families, if and when a family elevates these challenges. Of course, be sure to refer to state, tribe, and territory guidance for specific local regulations and allowances.

I wanted to just go through a few of them to put them on your radar, but of course you can go to the resource document going along with this webinar to find more details. First, you can help families track their recent economic stimulus payments if it haven't received it yet by going to "Get My Payment" under IRS.gov. Then, for your information and to share with families, for families that are facing housing insecurity, you can inform them, first, that the CDC Temporary Health and Residential Evictions Order, or the eviction moratorium, was extended until at least March 31st of 2021.

There was a \$25 billion authorization in Emergency Federal Assistance to be distributed by state and local governments. Note that these funds are targeted to families impacted by COVID and struggling to make rent or are past due; that they can be used on past-due, future rent, and utilities or energy bills; and that \$800 million dollars were reserved for Native American housing entities. Then, of course, you can reference the resources and actions on ECLKC around partnering with Head Start to build economic security during emergencies.

Then, of course, one last thing I think that I missed is that you can also inform families that the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation was restored through March 14, 2021. You can use the links in the document to access what the local regulations are for where you work. Also contact information for unemployment insurance offices. Of course, go to ECLKC for lots and lots of other resources on the resources and action page.

That is the first step or consideration in the tip sheet that was around identifying and assessing strengths and needs in a moment. Reflecting on that and taking that to plan concrete next steps, concrete actions. The third step to consider is then tracking progress toward those actions and celebrating those successes. Of course, we know that your programs are likely already helping families do this in a number of ways. We're going to review just a few techniques that you can consider using, as well. Those specifically are affirmations, reflection, and summarizing. Affirmations in particular, which we'll talk about in a minute, but really helps call out and resonates with what Sarah was talking about earlier, and what you all were elevating in the chat around validation – that being an important and critical piece of relationship building, but really, really important in this moment. First, affirmation.

Affirmation refers to acknowledging a family's values, shining a light on who they are and how they define success, not only on what they have achieved. This type of acknowledgment can be really, really powerful, and is an important part of celebrating families, especially, I think, as Brandi was mentioning about movement, and in what direction movement might be happening, especially in times of crisis when things might feel more chaotic than normal, and progress might feel less salient and might be less salient right now.

You can affirm – the way that I often like to think about it is – you can affirm who they are while you celebrate what they've done. For example, to affirm, you can say things like, "I appreciate your honesty," "I see you really value and take care of your family," and "What I know about you is that you are very courageous." As noted in the goal setting-guide, which Brandi shared –

a lot of you have been given access to in the chat – in that resource, we see that success can mean very different things to different people, especially in emergency.

When you understand what success means to a family, you can affirm a family's progress and help them to celebrate each time they meet their vision of success. Then also, part of tracking progress is also following up with families to see how they are doing on taking action, making progress on taking action, and how they are at addressing their immediate financial needs. Reflecting back what you're hearing from a family share ensures that, one, you've heard them correctly, but also that you were keeping your focus on them and their agenda. It better equips you to share more responsive support.

Some useful or helpful empowering language to help you reflect back can be things like starting a reflection or starting a statement with "It sounds like" or "I think you're saying" or "From your perspective," or ending a statement that you've made with "Did I get that right?" Ensuring that you're reflecting that back to families and keeping the conversation in their – keeping them in the driver's seat.

Finally, summarizing. Summarizing can help you and families really connect the dots between various things that a family has shared. Summarizing can help you transition to the next action or to the next topic for discussion. A few particular tips or ideas that you can consider: You can effectively summarize by using statements like, "So far you've told me," and then reflect back what you've heard'; or "That sounds a bit like what you told me earlier about ... ," and draw a connection to a previous thing that might have worked for families and bring that to light. Use that as a way to really elevate their strength and chart a way forward.

Summarizing statements can really help you and families draw connections between these successes and also to help you celebrate those successes, and then help you chart a course forward and next steps. These, again, are just like three useful techniques that you can consider when helping families track progress and celebrate successes as they make progress toward actions that you've work with them to name in this moment that are truly responsive to the context that they are experiencing right now. With that, I wanted to turn it back over to Brandi to do a reminder of some of the resources that we mentioned in this part of the call, and also answer any questions if they've come around.

Brandi: Thank you for elevating that, Helah. Oh, my goodness! I feel like I just want to go back to every slide and just hover [Laughter] for a quick second for all of these techniques. I know, Helah, I do. I'm going to plant a little seed here with you. There was a question about "affirm." I want you to go back to that, but I'm going to stall for you so you can recalibrate your thought process because a lot of folks are really resonating with the affirm technique. While you're getting that part together, I will go ahead and tell folks about some resource reminders and another reminder.

We're collecting questions right now because, as I mentioned at the top of our time together, we are going to hang out after we finish – on the East Coast, it'll be 4:30 – for some real-life Q&A that we've been collecting all along, for some questions that deserve more space, and that deserve a deeper reverence in terms of conversation. If you've asked a question and we haven't answered it yet, it's likely that were saving it to think together out loud after the official

presentation comes to an end. Don't be deterred by that, my friends. We're watching super close. The other thing I would offer is we're getting some really great ... Helah, you're inspiring some wanderings around, like, "What about tax prep?" It's that time of year y'all! [Laughter] Can you tell me a little bit about is there going to be assistance for that?

The one thing that I would like you guys to do, and in the resource handout, which, sidenote, my friend and colleague [Inaudible] is on the line, and she created that one handout for you guys that has all the hyperlinks all together in one place. We have a whole area on ECLKC. You all know how we do, depending on where you live, you say it different sometimes – "E-Click," "EC-Lick," or the "E-C-L-K-C." All of these resources are up for free for you guys over there any time you want to go find them. We have put those together for you in one document. That way if you go down to the Resource Pod on your bottom left, you can find those and download it, in addition to the PowerPoint, so that you can see how we put each of these together in the order in which Helah and Sarah have given them to us. You can revisit these techniques at any time.

If you find that you're intrigued by some, because there were a couple people that said "I've never tried the SMART part, Brandi, I think I'm going to give that a go." We can't wait to hear how it works for you, because I think you're going to be impressed. With that, Helah, can you take us back to "affirm"? Make sure that folks get to revisit a little bit of the gift that you were giving us in that reflection.

Helah: Absolutely, absolutely. I'm actually really happy that this is resonating, and someone has asked this, because it's one of my favorite techniques to think about, to use, to share. The way that I think about it is that I really draw distinction between two important but distinct techniques, which is affirmation and celebration.

Affirmation, you can affirm. I'll repeat, I think that was the question, you can affirm who they are; you celebrate what they do. Celebrating what they do is an accomplishment. Submitting a resume, or getting a job, or completing an interview, or making that savings payment. Let's even use our SMART example of checking their unemployment insurance eligibility, doing that, and letting you know that they've done that, and that they know what their eligibility is now, and they're going to take the next step of applying. That's celebrating. That's celebrating actions, and celebrating accomplishments.

Affirmation, is affirming ... It lives in the space of value, and honoring who a person is, which is also celebrating progress, and also celebrating the family and the person that you're serving, but doing it in a slightly different way that can resonate and feel different. Does that help, Brandi? Do you think that brings more clarity there?

Brandi: It did. I'm seeing people say, "Got it." Thank you for the repeat. [Laughter]

Helah: Great. OK.

Brandi: While we're here, Helah, I'm going to go back to this Resource Lab just to honor a couple of things that I alluded to, but I wanted to pause so you could address the will of the group, which was going back to affirmation. What you guys see on the screen, again all these things are available for you if you're on the ECLKC. The awesome part about this is we have a whole set of tip sheets for programs about how to partner with families during emergencies.

We have a whole set of tip sheets for families, about how to partner with us in emergencies, which is amazing.

They touch all kinds of topics like some of the techniques and ideas that Helah is taking us through today. She's used that first tip. She does almost a guidepost, or guardrail, if you will, to keep the frame for our conversation today. We have tip sheets on unemployment, on education. There's a whole mobility and "Economic Mobility Toolkit" over there for you guys, and all of this is in that resource handout, where you can actually go and walk through it with and for your program, to just do your own checks.

The document that you see in the middle is about having challenging conversations with families. It gives you a whole lot of information about what to do before you go into any kind of sensitive space with a family. Sarah alluded to a couple of those earlier, also, in even getting yourself centered, and then Helah, you brought it back to us in the creating space notions. The one on the right-hand side is about sensitive conversations. It takes off where the challenging conversations one left off and gives a little bit of view of the before, during that conversation, and after.

These are all up there for you guys to take a peek at to see if you find them helpful in all the work that you're doing today. We're really getting excited about how these things are being applied in virtual times, as well. With that, Helah, I know that we're going to transition over to the third and final portion of our time together, which is really leaning into this space and time with families as partners.

Helah: Great. Thank you so much, Brandi. With that, I'm going to hand it off to Sarah.

Sarah: Thank you, Helah. Now, we're going to jump into "Supporting Families Through Challenging Situations." As you may have experienced, different families have different levels of needs or experiences and a variety of challenges throughout their engagement with you. Crisis management or dealing with challenging situations, is an approach that addresses the present need with a short-term solution.

As Helah shared techniques for assessing families' current state or their current need, there are a few approaches that can be adapted to a variety of challenges, from a family facing eviction, to food insecurity, mental health support, or another traumatic event. A traumatic event can be a result in a person's inability to effectively problem-solve and/or cope. Also note that not all challenges involve a risk of danger, but it's important to assess a person's risk of danger if necessary. While this training will not cover more crisis management when it's a risk of danger or more intensive interventions, like self-harm, there are toolkits within the guide about how to address when a family is in danger to themselves or in danger to others. Like I said, we are not going through that in this training today.

A solution-focused approach does not mean you, as the worker, needs to fix the problem or provide all the answers. An approach where you partner with a family to develop a short-term plan, to address – develop a short-term plan to address an acute, an immediate need for the interest or the goal. A solution-focused plan does not mean you provide all the answers or fix all the problems, yourself as the family worker, even if you as the individual know the answer or

the resource directly. It's a strengths-based approach to partner with the family to develop a plan and brainstorm solutions together.

Before we jump into some of those techniques, I would like us to watch a video by Brené Brown and "The Power of Empathy." You may have seen this video in the past because it is a little bit of an older video. It's been around for about five or six years, but I love the way Brené Brown talks about empathy, and the way we can greet people with empathy.

With that, I'm going to ask that we play the video, and then we will come back for a discussion.

[Video begins]

[Music]

Brené Brown: What is empathy, and why is it very different than sympathy? Empathy fuels connection. Sympathy drives disconnection. Empathy. It's very interesting. Theresa Wiseman is a nursing scholar who studied professions, very diverse professions where empathy is relevant, and came up with four qualities of empathy.

Perspective taking, the ability to take the perspective of another person, or recognize their perspective is their truth; staying out of judgment – not easy when you enjoy it as much as most of us do. [Laughter] Recognizing emotion in other people, and then communicating that.

Empathy is feeling with people. To me, I always think of empathy as this sacred space, when someone is in a deep hole and they shout out from the bottom, and they say, "I'm stuck. It's dark. I'm overwhelmed." Then we look and we say "Hey," and climb down. "I know what it's like down here, and you're not alone."

Sympathy is "Oooh ... It's bad. Uh-huh? [Laughter] Uh no, you want a sandwich? [Laughter] Um..."

Empathy is a choice, and it's a vulnerable choice because in order to connect with you, I have to connect with something in myself that knows that feeling. Rarely, if ever, does an empathic response begin with "at least." [Laughter] I had a – yes, [Laughter] and we do it all the time. Because you know what? Someone just shared something with us that's incredibly painful, and we're trying to silver-line it. I don't think that's a verb, but I'm using it as one. We're trying to put the silver lining around it.

"I had a miscarriage." [Scoffs]

"At least you know you can get pregnant."

"I think my marriage is falling apart."

"At least you have a marriage." [Laughter]

"John's getting kicked out of school."

"At least Sarah is an A student."

One of the things we do sometimes in the face of very difficult conversations is we try to make things better. If I share something with you that's very difficult, I'd rather you say, "I don't even

know what to say right now. I'm just so glad you told me." Because the truth is, rarely can a response make something better. What makes something better is connection.

[Music]

[Video ends]

Sarah: All right. As we come back from watching that video, I want to address some things that were in the chat before we move on to our discussion question. I know there are a lot of challenging situations going on right now, with dealing with bereavement and grief and the loss of a child, or what was shared in the chat, the primary caretaker. I don't want to gloss over those very challenging situations that many of you are facing on a weekly basis. The team is going to be finding resources and handouts to share and upload on specifically addressing trauma and grief with families.

I just wanted to take a moment and acknowledge it, and just recognize that while we are talking about family economic mobility right now, and tools around family economic mobility, a lot of the same skills are transferable when dealing with a traumatic event, especially when we look at the power of empathy. Oftentimes, people aren't asking us to solve all the problems right away. Yes, they might need a resource or some form of support that we can provide, but sometimes, when they're first coming to us with the challenging situation, whatever it is, they want to be greeted with empathy. They want to be heard. They want to be affirmed.

Just know that while we're not diving deep into the crisis situations around grief and other traumatic events today that many of the families are addressing, a lot of these same techniques, like I said, can be transferable. Also know, while dealing with grief and working with families, grief often comes in waves. You never know when a family is going to be experiencing a loss and not experiencing a great deal of grief in that moment, and then something can happen, and something can trigger an emotion, or it just comes out of nowhere. Know that grief isn't a linear process.

I would encourage you to look at the resources that the team is going to upload from ECLKC and some other resources, and also if you have any bereavement or grief community partners in the communities that you are working and serving, to reach out to those community partners to see what the referral process would look like, and if they have any resources that is serving families in your area to address grief, even if it is in a virtual setting right now. There are many resources out there from the community partnership. Point two: I don't want you to feel like you as a family worker have to figure out all the answers for dealing with grief. Rely on your community partners and the resources that this team has for you.

With that, I know the discussion question says, "Let's put in the chat some challenging situations that families are facing right now." If you've already done that, great. Thank you for sharing those, but, like I said, there have been some other ones that have been put in the chat already that I'm going to reflect on in terms of dealing with a job loss, or dealing with the loss of a loved one or a family member, or balancing virtual learning in some aspects, working from home, or trying to find a job while students are e-learning and parents are becoming the teachers.

Probably many of you on this call have become not just a family worker, but a teacher for your own child. We're going to walk through some situations right now that families might be experiencing, particularly around family economic mobility. This first example is, "I lost my job when the county closed down indoor dining again. I was already struggling to pay rent, and I won't be able to make next month's rent." Before we dive into some strategies, how would you approach this conversation with a family? Brandi, if you can help with summarizing what's going on in the chat, that would be helpful.

Brandi: Sarah, I absolutely will. While folks are typing, I just want to acknowledge what you said earlier. I'm so grateful that you took the time to bring forward what we're seeing and hearing in the chat and holding space for each other as we bring forward some of the most difficult experiences that we've faced on behalf of our families and on behalf of ourselves. This has been a really hard time. I just really believe that the acknowledgment – so many of you were saying this in the chat – sometimes we just have to show the human side of ourselves. Sometimes we don't even know where our families are and what's going on because they are feeling so overwhelmed that they can't even offer us the energy of that connection.

What I love about you guys is – the feeling into that of that Dr. Brené Brown space that you gave us there. That's one my favorite videos of all time, by the way. Every time I watch it, I get more and more excited about really leaning into things. Like she said, "I just don't know what to say, but I'm so glad you shared with me." Like you trusted me to give me that, that what you're holding. That means that you're not by yourself, and we're going to do this, and we're going to do it together.

I think to me that's been the most important part of this experience. I'm grateful that you acknowledged it. I'm thankful that we have each other to lean not only in, for, and with each other, but as you said, to the community, and into some larger ideas around, right now specifically, grief. You know the old time-tested work, the stages of grief from Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and one of her colleagues, David Kessler, have even updated that now, to have a sixth stage of grief, which is "meaning-making." Like you said, Sarah, there are there so many things to consider as you travel that pathway and that journey of grief toward healing. It's not linear.

As I'm looking – because folks are just being so thoughtful with their answers – I have a few things to bring forward, a couple of things. In the real, Lindsey brings, "This is such a hard time for people, such a hard time that our families are experiencing. I want to acknowledge ..." Oh gosh, Lindsey. I've done so well not getting emotional, yet, but here we go. [Laughter] "... I want to acknowledge their willingness and trust in sharing what they are having troubles with. I would let them know that we're here for them to provide assistance, to be together in any way we can." I can't really follow that. That's real, and that shows, Lindsey, the level of connection that you have with your families and just being able to be. Sometimes isn't that all we need, just somebody to be with us?

I'm seeing a couple of other things, like, "I would respond by saying that I understand." This is powerful: "I understand. We would try to find any resources when the family is ready that could possibly help." I think that's a really important insertion here, Sarah. Sometimes we just need to be, and sometimes handing a resource ... You have to read the room, is what I want to say, if you let me say it like I want to, if you let the [Inaudible] come out there, Sarah. [Laughter]

Because the family might just need you to be there with them, and it may be not time to hand a resource. That could maybe even lessen the impact of your time together.

I love what she said because it was about “when the family is ready.” That couldn’t be more underlined, exclamation point, and bolded, because sometimes we just have to watch and listen, but we come with that heart to serve that we talked about. It’s very easy to go in, “I have a thing for you.” Sometimes that brings us closer together right away, and sometimes it’s just watching and listen. I love you guys so much for 10,000 bajillion reasons! I love that that intuitively is part of who you are and how you do your work.

Sarah: Exactly, Brandi. As this has happened so much in our presentation, it’s like they got a sneak peek into our slides. With the example of the parent losing her job and being concerned about rent, sometimes it’s really easy for us to – I can speak for myself and when I’m working with a family – to jump into sharing a resource. They’re telling us what’s going on, and you’re like, “OK.” In the back of our head I’m like, “Can I connect them here? Or maybe we can strategize around this.”

I really like what was shared, too, of just being present for people and showing up for people, and knowing that you are a trusted space and a safe space. Before jumping into solutions or referrals, affirm what they are going through. “I’m sorry to hear you lost your job.” “I’m sorry to hear ...” Even thanking them for sharing the difficult news, and thank them for trusting you with their personal information and their personal story.

Then, ask permission. How would they like to proceed? “I am sorry to hear that you lost your job and that you were worried about making next month’s rent. Would it be OK if I shared some resources with you? Or walk you through some resources that we have?” You can also potentially explore some previous successful solutions with this family.

In this scenario, the parent said that they lost their job again, which means this family worker might have walked through the process of dealing with the situation with this family before. “Do you mind sharing what you did in the springtime when the restaurants were closed?” Or “I know you filed for unemployment in the spring. Would it be helpful to walk through those processes again?” Or even just asking, “Do you want help with strategies, or do you just want space for me to listen?” and figuring out how to map your conversation from there.

Going on to the next example, “All my community college classes are online, and I’m having a hard time focusing at home with my second grader and virtual learning, too. I think I should just drop out until this COVID-19 thing is over.” Jumping into some strategies again, affirming, going back to affirming. I think affirming and empathy are always top two ways to approach every interaction with a family. Just stating it, “It must be challenging juggling your own classes and your child’s learning.” Just acknowledge that you hear them, that you see them, that they are working hard, and that this is a very, very difficult time. Making these decisions is not lightly.

You can use a strengths-based statement. “It takes a lot of strength to recognize when you are overwhelmed” – very similar to what we were talking about when tending to ourselves, of giving ourselves permission to feel overwhelmed. It’s important that we recognize, give our parents permission to feel overwhelmed, and recognize that it does take a lot of courage for them to say, “I am overwhelmed right now, and I am struggling.”

“I know it’s a difficult choice. How can I support you? Do you want my support in making a decision?” That’s where the “ask permission” comes into play, like, “Do you want my support, or would it be helpful for us to discuss some of the challenges? If you decide you want to stay in school, do you want to help develop a plan from there?”

Brandi, I know there’s a lot of powerful things in the chat right now. I’m trying to catch up. As we transition, do you want to share maybe some other things in the chat as we go into some of the last resources, too?

Brandi: I absolutely do. There are a couple things I want to bring forward. Thank you for that, Sarah. I have to go back right away because Elissa might be my new best friend. She just taught me something I have never heard before, but I’m feeling it deep in my spirit. [Laughter] She said ... Are you guys ready for this? This is like a write-it-down. It’s like a write-it-down moment. Elissa said, “Feel it before you fix it.”

Sarah: That’s a good one.

Brandi: I really have to let that ... I feel it beating around in my mind. It’s almost haunting in the best possible way. Feel it before you fix it. I mean it’s standing in that empathic space and watching and listening. This is a whole set of skills, you all, like this is a whole ... It’s a very vulnerable place to be, right? Because you don’t know where this may take you. You just almost have to be in a place of trust and belief with the other person, even if you’re not there officially in your relationship. I love this, Elissa. “Feel it before you fix it.” I want to acknowledge one other thing that just came through the chat that I think is just a perfect explanation of what you might say. [Inaudible] This is the number one question we get across the country, “How do you say that? Tell me how to say that.”

If you’re in this sensitive, vulnerable space, sometimes my mind just freezes right on up, and you just cease to know what words to say. We loved so deeply that we shudder at the thought that we might hurt someone or offend them. Jessica gave us this whole set-up, this whole phrase, sentences, that say, “I’m so sorry this happened to you. I know things are really hard right now, but I’m here to help the best way I can. I’m going to do a referral with you for housing. Would that be OK with you?” Do you see how she’s asking?

Helah and Sarah, it’s like she was right there [Laughter] in your mind. These set of sentences illustrate in the best possible way the example of how to put these techniques to work. Then she goes on to say, “Please keep me posted if I can help you in any other way possible. I’ll follow up with you weekly, just in case.” Basically, she’s given them even the anticipatory guidance of, “I’m here, and if you’re not ready for me yet, that’s OK. I’m going to follow up, and if you’re ready then great. If not, that’s OK too.” It’s like, no stress or pressure, right? We’re here to relieve those things.

Let me pause there, Sarah, because, let me acknowledge something here, too. Speaking of anticipatory [Inaudible], we have now fluctuated into what we call our After Chat, so we’re going to wrap up one little thing here. Sarah, I don’t know if you want to touch the strategies now and I’ll do a real quick resource bump and wrap up. Or would you like me to go right to the resources?

Sarah: Brandi, I think I went through the strategies, and the slide clicked back because it was being sensitive again. We have gone through some of these. I did a voiceover to the strategies. I apologize. The slide, I clicked it over and then I must have clicked it back and did not realize it. To recap the strategies, affirm, as we've said, using strength-based statements, and asking permission. With everything, holding an empathetic space.

Brandi: Thank you for that, Sarah. You know me. I'll unpack so I have to hold it, touch it, feel it, caress it. [Laughter] Thank you.

Sarah: Absolutely.

Brandi: I just want to acknowledge that you do have this PowerPoint [Inaudible] that's in the bottom left-hand side of your screen. You may have to scroll down to see it. We have a handout for resources there. We have the PowerPoint there. Those things are there and available for you. Just to touch really quickly, the resources that I mentioned earlier are available both as a set of tip sheets for programs and how to partner alongside families in emergencies. The one we put on the screen this time, given Sarah's examples, were about unemployment. Just wanted to bring that forward so that you guys know that we have not only a tip sheet, the one on the left for staff and for programs, but also one on the right with the blue border that's for families.

With all that, before we open up the line to revisit some of the questions we've been collecting all along in the Question Pod, that's also on your bottom left, if you didn't get your question in, you still have plenty of time. We're going to hang out for at least 15 minutes, but we're going to follow your lead, kind of like the kids – we follow their interest. If you want to hang out a little longer, we're prepared to do that. We've been collecting questions all along. Before we get to that place, I want to give you some key takeaways here, because we've touched so much, guys. I can't believe how productive [Laughter] we've been in this short 90 minutes together.

What I want to offer is, these statements are not only key takeaways from what we have experienced together today during the course of our conversation, but these are also based in research from some of our partners at Child Trends put together for us. Some of these things, so not only – everybody, I want you to be walking away from here a little puffed up after we leave each other OK? Because we know the real. We live the real, and you have really inspired in your "real" over these months in how you do what you do. Also, what we've known and experienced is backed up by what folks have discovered in research.

A couple of things we hope that can do in terms of your takeaways for today: Make sure you and your colleagues have time for self-care – hello, everybody – during the work day. So many of you guys have taught us what you were doing with your self-care moments, with how you're doing that as a team, even virtually. We're hearing all kinds of stories about how you're coming together, and how you're doing those things, not only based on what you know and what you have found as an individual that is helpful, but what you as a team are doing for each other.

Build on trusting partnership with families. I feel a little vulnerable putting that one out there because I feel like this is just our way. [Laughter] It's just who we are and how we operate. That cannot be undersold. We've learned again and again that in this time of emergency that this is the only way forward. It's the only way forward. It's the relationship, and doing it together.

Make sure that we're still in family strengths – and let's be real here again – the ever-changing needs in this time of emergency. I don't know about you guys, but one day I can be plodding along, just OK as ever, and then tomorrow you might call me, and I will be in a heap because something has shifted or changed. It's just been so fluid.

One of the things that I love about what you guys have been telling us is that you've been staying in closer contact. That's what families allow us because, again, we're checking in always for their permission, and seeing if they're ready for that. We want to make sure that they have what they need, so we're staying in close contact to see if those things shift over time. Then certainly, last but not least, overlapping to that is – this is what I call, you guys – you are the true heartbeat of our communities. You are a place of safety, of serenity, of connection. Before I start getting emotional with myself again, [Laughter] I better stop there, but don't give up. Some of you have said to us over time that you reach out and sometimes the families don't reach back, and you're worried about that. You're wondering, just nervous to keep reaching. Don't stop reaching. You're making an impact.

We've heard many of you come back and say, "I am so glad I persevered because the family said, 'You were the only one who was checking on me in that moment. Even though I didn't have the energy or time or bandwidth to reach back, what you did for me was recognized and appreciated, even in just staying in contact.'" I just want to leave you with that. The other thing ... There are a couple of things. We can't ever leave each other without me gushing [Laughter] about how grateful we are for each of you. I have to say, you guys are being seen as an example across the country. I've seen all kinds of things coming up right now about how they're looking at Head Start, and what we've done, and what we've accomplished, and how we've really been able to walk, as we said earlier, forward, backward, to the side, with each other and our families in these times.

In wrap-up, I want to read you – and we always try to end these times together with a quote or a story, and I want to thank my friend and colleague Dr. Jhumur Saeed for sharing this one with me because I was, "Oh, my gosh. If this isn't the perfect closing to our webinar, [Laughter] I don't really know what is." I want you to just lean in and listen to my voice for a second.

A comment made by Bruce Channon on "Humans of New York" post about young women and her teacher's loving support. Here's the quote: "On the surface, stories appear to be about large, overwhelming topics, like substance misuse, failed parenting, homelessness, poverty, a lost childhood, a nearly lost education – topics that most of us understand but may not have experienced directly. On closer inspection, this story is really about something we can each aspire to. Bring alert to someone struggling. Showing patience, compassion, understanding. Rolling up our sleeves" – I got to pause – "rolling up our sleeves to actually lend a hand.

These small gestures can be stabilizing, a whole stabilizing force, when someone is experiencing hurricane winds, their shelter when someone is totally exposed. The magnitude of someone's issues doesn't impede the importance of a small, manageable gesture. In fact, it may be the foundation stone in rebuilding of their life." [Laughter] That's what you guys have the honor to do. Every single day. We leave you with that overarching sentiment of standing in the importance of small, manageable gestures, for and with each other, and for and with our families.

With that, I want to tell you one more thing before we look at some questions together and take some things forward. You guys have asked, so I want to make sure to answer here. Yes, you get a certificate. We're going to leave this up on the screen – you can actually touch that hyperlink that's on your screen. It's going to pull up on your laptop or desktop, an actual survey. When you finish that survey, you're going to have a certificate populate straight away so that you'll have it for your professional development files.

We did have a question earlier. If more than one of you are sitting together, you can print it twice. Several times, I know back when I was a Head Start director, we would all gather around one little TV. [Laughter] Back when we were doing the TVs, you know? We would watch together these kinds of webcasts. You can print those more than once. We'll leave this link up as we're moving into After Chat so that you can have it there. You can take it in real time, so you don't even have to go away with any homework. How's that? [Laughter]

All right, Sarah and Helah, I'm going to lean to you. I'm going to click over to this slide just for one second to say, "We have officially entered, everybody, [Vocal drum roll] the After Chat!" Let's talk. [Laughter] We're going to hang out for a little bit and answer your real-life questions that we've collected today, that we've been preparing all along. Sarah and Helah, I'm going to lean to you to see where you want to go first.

Helah: I can name one thing. We saw when someone elevated a question around sharing resources for local bill help. We can share out a link to USA.gov for help with those. Then also I was going to reference the accompanying resource sheet that we attached with this webinar that references the rental assistance, the \$25 billion in rental assistance, some of which can be used for utility and energy bills. Again, that will vary state by state and territory, so to check on local regulations. That was one of the questions that came through.

Sarah: To jump into there, Helah, to a strategy I like to use with the families that we work with and with our team of front-line staff is registering for email lists from state and local government, local officials, your city, or counties. Email list is oftentimes the county or the local city or local government will be the people who send out very localized information for bill assistance. While there is federal funds that are filtered through the state and then go to local municipalities, oftentimes the municipalities will send out information on how to assess that, too. Any list that you can sign up for within the local context might be helpful when dealing with very specific, localized issues around rental assistance, paying bills, and things like that.

Helah: I can ... [Inaudible] I'm seeing another question that said, "How to support families open up? Perhaps explore SMART objectives when they feel overwhelmed by their day-to-day pressures. They have trouble sort of swimming to the surface to see past those challenges." I can very much understand and that can resonate with me and with what I've heard a lot with the individuals that we work with and that we serve.

One of the immediate things that come to mind from this webinar is making sure that there is that space, creating that space and offering space to listen, because often that can be – and I think also the Brené Brown video – often that can be the thing that creates that moment to open up, of just simply saying, "Man, I hear that. I really don't know what to say." Creating that space to make it OK.

Oftentimes, but not always, but oftentimes that can be the thing that creates some calm and creates the space that is separate from everything else that is going around outside. That's another way that I also often think about and talk about these interactions and these relationships that we have with families, that naming it and building the relationship in an ongoing way with a family that paints and means the time that you spend with them as special and as separate, and as aside from everything else that's going on.

We know that time, that space to just sit and breathe and think about the long-term, or think about the thing that's most important for you right now, is not a luxury that the families that we serve have. The work that we do with them and the moments that we have with them is trying to create that space, trying to create that luxury, and be that partner for them. It might be simple, but acknowledging that you are the person who can be that listening ear, and you are the person who can be that space where they can take a moment to breathe. That's one of my first reactions to hearing that. I don't know, Sarah, if you have any other thoughts.

Sarah: No. I don't have any other thoughts particularly to answering the question that you just said. I noticed a series of comments or questions around a little bit of hesitation to creating SMART actions plans or action steps with families, because they seem overwhelming, or don't want to burden the family.

I think using the technique that Helah shared, of having the family define what success looks like, takes the burden off of you as an individual, but also gives the parents the autonomy to define what success looks like, because success and values look different for everyone, like we have said. I think one way to approach the burden or maybe even the time is asking them to define what does success look like, and how would we know, and by what time.

If the goal seems really big – and it might be difficult to define what success looks like outside of the end-goal, the big goal, that could take months or years to complete – breaking it down. Being like, “OK. What is the first step you need to do to become a nurse, or find this job, or make this purchase?” Say, “purchasing a car,” and they need to address a couple of different things, their savings, credit, things like that. What is the goal that they want to tackle first? Is it credit? Is it savings? How does that work? Then develop a plan from there so it's not just, “I want to purchase a car.” It's “I would like to increase my credit score.” That's your first goal, then the steps to purchasing a car, making the goals a little bit more tangible in that aspect, as well.

I know we are at time, but I think some of us are able to stick around and answer more questions, too. Brandi, I'm actually going to kick it over to you to filter through this Q&A, and Helah and I can chime in. I just want to be mindful of people's time and what we are doing, how we are doing it, and all those things. I'm leaning on you.

Brandi: Of course. Yes. Happy to. First thing, I can't stand it. I have to acknowledge [Laughter], you were just all in our Head Start ease with this goal-setting business. One of the things that we do is, and I'll say that we've come to do, is actually celebrate even the family being in the program. Let me just say, now we [Inaudible] come in chat, is it or isn't a more than a notion for the families to even get in the program? Don't we have a few papers, checks, and boxes? [Laughter] Twirling and twirling that we have to do to even get all those things aligned for the

family to be with us in the program. One of the things that we try to do is celebrate that first and foremost.

I love what you're giving us. One of the resources we lifted up today is the goal-setting guide. Some of you have discovered it. It gives this notion for you to partner alongside families and say, "Well, what can I bring your goal, and what could you bring to your goal?" Let's back up. One of our colleagues on the line said – and hello, somebody – "What if the family says, 'I don't have a goal, don't want to see a goal, don't want to breathe around a goal, don't want to look at a goal. Thank you. No, thank you.'"

That happens. Have any of you had that come before you? I know I did. What we offer is, "That's OK." If it's not time to be in that dreamscaping space, that's not a problem. "We're here, and would it be OK, again, with the permission, would it be OK to check in as we discover things together? Maybe with your child in mind. Things that we want to look toward, or things that we want to come to hold hands on, or need a partner around."

We have all kinds of great tips, tricks, and strategies. I have to say, Sarah and Helah, this has been so uplifting for me today. I know that a lot of our colleagues in the chat have said the same thing. I want to go back to a couple of other quick logistical bits because I don't want you guys to feel any worries about making sure you have what you need.

The PowerPoint is available for you in the Resource Pod, which is the bottom left-hand side of your screen. You might have to scroll to find it. The PowerPoint is there. There's a resource handout there. We've actually even uploaded – Hello! – a whole new document since we started based on your questions. You might have to refresh your screen to see that one. There's even a brand-new document up there for you guys based on where you've taken us today. Make sure to check that out.

For your certificate, there's that helpful link handout has the survey link in it, as well. If it's not working for you on the screen, because a few of you have said you've run into problems, you can get it from the handout, and it will still pop up for you on your screen. For those of you that might not be printing for, you can do the old-fashioned trick in the "control-P," and sometimes that works if your machine isn't allowing you to print by command. "Control-P" will sometimes get around that. Give that a go.

Let's see. We've got the survey. The survey will get you your certificate. You have your downloads, and our deep gratitude. [Laughter] Sarah and Helah, I'm going to pause one quick second so you can offer the group closing comments. Then I'll come back and wrap it up before we leave each other.

Helah: I'll jump in, I can ... [Inaudible] [Laughter] I think we're both chomping at the bit to say how much we appreciate people's time and the discussion back and forth. I'm so grateful to have had this time with you. I'm so excited to be a part of this community now, as we said at the top.

Sarah and I, LIFT, our new partner to the National Center. I'm just very, very appreciative to be a part of this community and to continue working with everyone who joined us today, the National Center. Thank you so much. Thank you for all of the thoughtful engagement and

thoughtful questions, and sharing the experiences that you've had, because I know that a lot of that is also not easy. It's not easy to share. I want to express my appreciation for that, and I'm excited for the next one.

Sarah: Thank you for that, Helah, and ditto to everything you said. I just wanted to close up with a moment of just gratitude for each and every one of you, not just for attending this webinar today to listen to us and meet us as we partner in this new center, but to really applaud you all for all the hard work that you are doing, and just want to reiterate, please, please, please, tend to yourself.

Give yourself space to feel what you need to feel, and also know you are not in this alone, and encourage you to reflect and practice gratitude, tend to yourself, and reach out to your support system because we all need the support, whether we are a parent, a frontline worker, an administrator, a community partner. All of us, like I said, we're all in this together and just grateful for our time that we have been able to share today. We're looking forward to speaking with you all more. Brandi, as we wrap up, is there any last-minute question that you are wanting us to answer directly or resources that we need to follow up with?

Brandi: [Inaudible] You're great. I was just looking at the chat again, just to make sure that everybody had what they needed. We have a lot of affirmation techniques we learned today. Hello! [Laughter] We have a lot of gratitude. I'll just close out by saying, thank you all for spending many moments of your day with us. We know how much you're holding. All the time that we get with you is such a gift. We thank you. We can't wait to be back together again. We appreciate, as everybody else has said, all the things that you bring forward in your community. We can't wait to be back together. Guys, stay healthy, stay kind, stay safe, and stay connected. See you next time.