

## Teacher Time: Supporting Initiative and Curiosity in Infants and Toddlers

Gail Joseph: Hi, everyone. Welcome to Teacher Time. We are so excited that you're here. I'm Gail Joseph.

Maria Alvarez: [Speaking Spanish] I am Maria Alvarez. Welcome. We welcome you.

And we are from the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning. We are so excited to have you here with us today for the third infant toddler episode of Teacher Time. I would also like to call your attention to the Viewer's Guide. You will find it in the resource widget as well. If you are new to Teacher Time, the Viewer's Guide is for you. Use it. You can download the guide and use it throughout our time together for taking notes, reflecting, and planning how you will use Teacher Time practices in your own setting. This month's Viewer Guide is full to the brim of reflections, printable resources, and information. OK, I think that's all for logistic scale. Let's get started.

Gail: Yes, let's get started. I love that Viewer's Guide, so make sure to get that Viewer's Guide. Now again, if you've joined us before, you know that we are very excited to be focusing this entire season of Teacher Time on supporting young children's self-regulation and learning. Supporting self-regulation and learning is also referred to as "approaches to learning," and sometimes you might hear us use the term "executive function." But you know, approaches to learning is one of the domains in the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, or as we call it, ELOF. So far this season, we've focused on emotional, behavioral, and cognitive self-regulation skills in some of our previous episodes. You can always find those on demand on Push Play by the way, and today we are focusing on initiative and curiosity. I love the picture of that child because they look like they're taking a lot of initiative and looking very curiously at that water meter.

Maria: Yes. Let's dive a little deeper and learn about the initiative and curiosity ELOF goals for infants and toddlers. This subdomain is made up of two goals. The goal that we will focus on today is the second one, the initiative and curiosity goal, the one that says, "Child shows interest in and curiosity about objects, materials, or events." But don't worry, we'll also touch base on that first goal on how we can support children's emerging initiative and independence in our basic section later on.

Gail: Absolutely. Now we are going to play the game Jeopardy. The answer is ... Now get your fingers ready because we want you to type things into the Q&A. Find the Q&A box there. Here it is: The answer is "It supports infants in learning about cause and effect. It's as important as intelligence in student achievement. It's as important as persistence in student achievement. It leads to better relationships. People with more of it have greater life satisfaction. It helps us live longer. It predicts leadership ability." What do you think it is? Put that in the Q&A box. We're already starting to see some things coming in. We're seeing some really great answers. Now

remember, we're playing Jeopardy, so you put it in the form of a question here. And I know we're building some interest here or otherwise known as ... Here it is the answer is, or the question is, what is curiosity? So many people already had that, but we saw some other great answers as well. But we're going to focus on curiosity because that is great. Decades of research have demonstrated that curiosity is related to so many positive life outcomes.

I didn't even realize that Maria. I did a lot of research as we were – I knew we were going to be talking about initiative and curiosity – I did a lot of reading, a lot of research into what we know about curiosity. I had no idea that it has been connected to so many of those positive life outcomes. And curiosity ... I know, isn't it? It's fascinating.

Maria: It makes sense, though. Once you research and you learn, it's like, "Oh, yep, it makes sense." And what you see in the classroom, it makes sense.

Gail: Right, so much is related to curiosity. And what's great about curiosity is that it can happen anywhere and everywhere. It's just always so fascinating to see that what we can teach young children in those early years, like really impacts things long term. Like, that list of things, who wouldn't want that list of things that we just covered? And you all, our Teacher Time viewership, you get to be a part every day of building this foundation for children's lifelong learning success, and a lot of that has to do with building some curiosity.

Maria: And can I just say, this picture is amazing. Look at the – look at his eyes. He's just wide eyed, looking at that – what looks like maybe a mirror, I believe that's a mirror – and then trying to reach at it. It's showing – it's like a great reflection of that initiative that he's showing and that curiosity about, "I want to look at myself. I want to explore this further."

Gail: And you can see, like, how developmental domains are connected right there too, right? So curious, you can see like some motor movement that's happening because he's curious and he wants to move closer. Here you already see this connection between approaches to learning and motor development. It's very, very exciting. My guess is that there's also some talking to the cute baby in the mirror too. We see like language. We can go on and on, we got to get back into our script. We're so excited about this.

All right, now as we've been doing all season long with Teacher Time, we've really been, first, turning our attention to ourselves with the topics. We're curious to know about what sparks your curiosity? How do you keep that fuel, that passion, that like fire lit for learning yourself? How do you keep yourself curious? Put those responses, what you do to keep yourself curious and always learning in the Q&A. We're looking at these responses. We know that our Q&A support team are pushing some of these out for everyone to see too. I see some people talk about listening to podcasts. That's one thing I do.

Maria: And that's so popular.

Gail: I love that because I'm always learning something that maybe is outside of my work that is interesting to me. Taking classes.

Maria: Yeah, talking to colleagues.

Gail: Yes, reading the paper. I mean, if anyone gets a paper anymore, but, like, reading probably the digital paper.

Maria: Right, digital journal.

Gail: Spending time in nature, that is – that's so interesting. We're going to talk about that later on. Yeah. Oh, watching documentaries. OK. What a great list, and that's so great because we know that curious teachers can really help support and develop curious children. Well done, keeping yourself curious.

Maria: Especially when you're modeling it in the classroom in front of them, that's really powerful. All right. Why is initiative and curiosity important? We're so glad to hear about so many ways that you're keeping yourself curious, because what you said, Gail, curious adults help foster curiosity in children. I've seen that firsthand in the classroom. And curiosity is very important for young children. Why? Because curiosity helps children be more observant and to think about things, and then try to figure them out, and you can see those facial expressions once they're trying to figure them out. Curiosity helps infants and toddlers discover, they can make things happen, and have an impact in the world. And just like you said before, Gail, curiosity also supports language development. When infants and toddlers explore, you'll hear some different sounds that they make. Some babies make higher pitch sound when they're really excited about something curious about something and want to attract that attention from you. And sometimes you may see raised eyebrows or a focus gaze. It's really cool to see their reaction when they're curious about anything around them, because that's what they're doing, they're exploring their whole space.

Gail: That's great. Now, we are so excited to learn about the curious types and find out what curious type you are. We're going to take a closer look at this. We promise we're not going to be spending all of our time on these things, we're going to get back to young children. But we wanted to show you how developmental scientists regard curiosity. I find this kind of interesting. Curiosity can be divided into what is called state and trait curiosity. Think about that, state and trait curiosity. State curiosity, the stuff that you see up there in the blue, is like a – it's like a spontaneous and short-term kind of curiosity, right? Like I'm in a curious state right now. The kind of curiosity is usually triggered by something outside of us. Something catches our interest. It provides little spark or some initiative. I want to explore the environment, an idea, or a topic.

And developmental psychologists divide this even further into what they call exploratory state curiosity and specific type. And we're not going to do any kind of quiz here, you don't have to keep all that in mind, but just to kind of think about like how this shows up for you. Exploratory curiosity is really just this – it's like a momentary impulse to learn, and it's something that, like I think about this as – this probably like is too limiting – but I think about this as kind of like the tabloid curiosity. Like when I'm waiting in line at the drugstore, at the supermarket, and I see a magazine and I'm like – and something on the front cover piques my interest. I'm curious to

find out about someone's relationship or blah, blah, blah, blah, those kinds of things that seems so silly, but perhaps other people have felt the same way. You can make me feel better by typing that in if you have. But it also might be that you are in a restaurant and you're overhearing a conversation, and you're so curious to hear more. That's this like, "I'm in a curious state right now. Something piqued my interest, and I just want to explore it a little bit more, listen a little bit more, turn a couple more pages and learn a little bit more."

The other type of state curiosity is this idea of specific or informational curiosity. And that really is a drive to understand something more deeply. And this is, I don't know if this happens to anybody else, but like, you just, you maybe see something or you learn something and you just want to learn a lot more about it. You almost want to like, kind of master that content. And I have this example I was in Austin, Texas a couple weeks ago. Shout out to all of our Austin Texas viewers if you're there, such a lovely place to be. And I was there for a conference, and I walked under the Congress Bridge, and if you've been to Austin or, certainly, if you live there, you know that there's a lot of signs you start seeing about bats and like how to handle bats. And that got me so curious, what is it about these bats? You learn that there's like, like tens of thousands of that actually live under this Congress Bridge during that summer months.

Anyways, I got so curious about bats migrating patterns and bats, like baby bats, what happens, all these things. That's just a really great example of specific state curiosity. I just wanted to learn so much more and I couldn't like fill my brain enough about bats, and then I got to where I felt like I was satiated, and it was done. That's this kind of like state curiosity, it's kind of short term it can be just fleeting exploratory, or it can be like specific, and I really learn and learn and learn a lot more. Whereas trait curiosity is on the other hand, trait curiosity, down in the green, is about being a curious person. You have inhabited this earth as a curious person, you have a hungry mind where you're always excited to learn more about many things. Trait curiosity can, you know, they also think about different types here, intellectual curiosity, which is this joyous exploration of all kinds of topics. It's about social curiosity, like some of us might be like socially curious people, we just want to know people, we want to know everything about them, we want to know about their families, we want to know about their backgrounds. That's social curiosity. There's problem solving, people that are always like, wow, there's got to be a different way that we can do X, Y, or Z. I'm always trying to solve a problem. That's this trait curiosity. There are those that are just really have a high tolerance for ambiguity to like, I'm just exploring but there is no known answer, but I'm OK with that, I like really want to kind of hold have multiple ideas in my mind. And then there's this idea of thrill seeking, being open to new novel thrilling experiences, people that are real adventures. Going out and trying out new places, new – trying new cuisine, that kind of – that "I'm just curious to know all about that." That's trait curiosity. And it sounds like, when we when we talk about state and trait, sometimes it makes it sound like we're talking about kind of nurturant in nature, that like trait is something maybe you're born with or without. But researchers, and they've been exploring this for decades and decades, researchers really only think that about 20% of that trait curiosity, that like being a curious person, actually comes from our genes, comes from nature. The rest of it, which is a whole lot more, is either fostered or squashed by the environment children live in. That's huge, that means we have so much to do with helping to keep those

hungry minds hungry, to keep people curious, to keep our infants and toddlers so curious about their environments. We know that what we do is so important, and now you know, it's even more important. Research shows that babies learn more when they have an attentive adult present, helping keep them curious. And we're going to talk about that a lot today, but first, we're going to take a look at some curiosity in action. I think we've, hopefully we've boosted people's curiosity about being here.

Maria: I think we did. Let's watch this video and you can note in the Q&A, what the child is doing, how they demonstrate their curiosity. Make sure you're watching and sharing your thoughts with us in the Q&A. I love that video. Did you all see how interested and focused this child is? I see some answers in the Q&A coming in right now. Yeah, he is curious about how the containers are fitting together, and the sound Yeah, the sound, possibly the sound that it makes, and how, he took initiative to act on these materials. Just grab materials and see what to do with it and try to figure out what ways you can use it. That's the beauty of open-ended materials, that's the beauty of using those. All right, let's watch another example. I love videos. Let's watch another example of curiosity in action. How does this child demonstrate their curiosity? Go ahead and get ready to enter your thoughts in the Q&A as soon as you start watching this video.

[Video begins]

Girl: Oh!

Teacher: Oh, my goodness!

Teacher 2: Oh, got it!

Teacher: They go to Jagtar! Yay! Down, down, down. Yay!

Teacher 2: Green ball! You got a green ball now. You got another ball?

Teacher: Oh, pulled it closer, that's a good idea. Two balls, one for each hand.

Girl: Whoa!

Teacher: Oh, once it goes, it tends to go down the hill. Uh-oh, what happens? [Gasps] Yay! One helped the other one.

[Video ends]

Maria: I love it. They love ramps. I know – My son is a big fan of ramps and cars and balls and seeing where they go, and I noticed this teacher fostering curiosity, and I noticed some of you said in the Q&A that she had such an encouraging tone, such a warm affect, and that definitely makes them feel more comfortable to just keep exploring and keep sharing those wonderings with their teachers. She also gave immediate feedback to the child, which is so important. As we've known from research, feedback is never as relevant as when you give it in the moment in

real time. I know sometimes it's hard because of scheduling, but we try our best to provide it right when it's happening. And yeah, I saw a lot of you notice she was asking questions and commenting on what the child was doing. We know that when adults are close and present, responsive, just like in this video, and adding language for the child and encouraging the child's curiosity, that's also the language development piece, which is so important. This child was engaged in trial and error, sending ball after ball down the ramp, seeing where it was going to land, and curious to observe how the ramp works. And you could take it further and move the ramp around and see where it takes the balls then. I love ramps, I just think it's such a good activity for pre-engineering and STEM skills. Oh, I love it.

Gail: Absolutely. Those are great videos and I know we've got a few more throughout our episodes, so I'm so excited about that. I too, like the ramps, they're always so much fun to do, and the endless, a great open-ended activity, like you said, those open-ended activities so great for curiosity. I've, go ahead.

Maria: No, I totally agree, I'm a big fan of ramps.

Gail: Big fan of ramps. Here we are, ramp fan club. And now we want to get back to the – to the basics, and these are a collection of strategies that we've been highlighting in each webisode, so maybe they're familiar to you. I hope they are. They can be used in any setting interacting with infants and toddlers. The basics are teaching practices you can apply no matter what content you're trying to teach. We've talked about them and in different kind of curricula [inaudible], if you will. But you can talk about it, you can use the basics to teach math, to teach literacy, to teach social emotional skills. We just think it's always important to remember the BASICS because they're very helpful. Here is, it's a little acronym and this is what it stands for. B is for behavioral expectations in advance. A is to attend to and encourage appropriate behavior. S is to scaffold with cues and prompts. I is to increase engagement. C is to create or add challenge. And S is to provide specific feedback, something you already talked about, that was really great.

Today we're going to provide examples of how to apply the Teacher Time basics in a way that will foster young children's initiative and curiosity. We're going to start with B, the behavioral expectations in advance. Here, you can just read what's on the screen there. These are some examples of providing behavioral expectations in advance that support young children's learning. One way we can support infants and toddlers is engaging them fully in activities, routines, everyday routines, and experiences to let them know ahead of time what is going to happen. This lets them know what to expect and so that they aren't surprised by what's coming, but it also help them to anticipate the next step and join in and work together. Here, you see some of those examples. We're going to paint this morning. I have everything ready you see. Now we need to put on your schmuck, and your arm goes right in this hole. Really providing kind of the expectations of what is going to happen. The next one, it looks like you need a diaper change. You were so focused on your book. I'll get the changing table already and then come back to get you. Giving behavioral expectations in advance. "And let's wash our

hands before lunch. I'm going to turn the water on and then you put your hands under the water.”

Here you see, when it's infants and toddlers it's really a lot also about explaining what the adult will be doing in advance, right? That is one part of what that looks like. Now, behavioral expectations in advance also looks like talking with an infant about what's happening during a diaper change. We see a beautiful picture of that happening on the left. This really supports them and being a part of the process. Definitely great for language learning, but also it looks like the child's reaching out for the seek in this other picture during handwashing, that picture on the right, because the child has learned what it is to expect during handwashing time, so by providing those expectations in advance, keeping that consistent really helps develop a child's initiative, because we're talking about initiative and curiosity, initiative and independence since they're learning about the steps in a process or a routine. Again, what we want to kind of emphasize here is that behavioral expectations, what's happening or what's going to happen is told in advance, and what the expectations are for the child is in advance, right? I'm going to turn the sink on and you're going to put your hands under the sink to wash them.

Maria: That's right. We're moving on to the A in BASICS for attend and encourage appropriate behavior. And just like everything is really important here that we're discussing, but it turns out this is extremely important in fostering young children's curiosity. When children are exploring or engaging in independent play trial and error, like we saw in one of the videos, and acting on their curiosity in other ways, teachers can take a step back and just observe, let the child work through their thinking process, but if you see the child pause, you can comment on what they're doing and learning. Provide those encouraging words that you see on the screen, like it looks like you're really trying to figure out how to get your toes to your mouth. I wonder what they will taste like or what they'll feel like in your mouth.

When we take a moment to acknowledge out loud – I love those think alouds – what a child is doing, it lets them know that we see them and they're important to us, and so is what they're doing. And another way to support curiosity, independence, and initiative is to praise the process, not the product. There's so much that goes in the process to get to that goal that we, so there's so much treasure there. You could say something like, you are really thinking, when you see a child trying to figure out a problem or a different way to approach something. Like we mentioned earlier, more learning happens when the adult is there responsive, attentive, present to what the child is doing, and it sends them that powerful message of support and encouragement, and that's everything to motivate any child to explore further and be more curious. And remember to smile. Nonverbal encouragement is just as important as what we say.

Let's watch a video of a teacher supporting a child's curiosity with encouragement. And as we watch it, make sure to use that Q&A and write any thoughts or any questions you may have, but you can also use the viewers guide and just think about what the teacher is saying, write it down, maybe you want to use it in your classroom, and think about those encouraging words that she's using.

[Video begins]

Teacher: All right, Cam, you sat in the chair! Yay! You sat in the chair all by yourself!

[Video ends]

Maria: I love it. Oh! Notice the first thing I read in the Q&A, and I also noticed, is that she didn't do, "Good job, you sat in the chair," or just, "Good job," or "Great, you did it." But she was more specific, and she was – she was celebrating the child and she was saying specifically, "You sat in the chair." I could hear that encouragement, that specificity in her feedback, excitement in her voice. I also saw, used a warm tone, that's right. Yeah, and lots more specific comments, less general comments. You can, you notice when they see that you're so specific and you see through them and what they did, they opened their eyes like, "Whoa, yes, that's exactly what I did. Yes, I did it!" Instead of that general good job that really is – it doesn't really connect as much with what they just managed to do, all on their own, independently. And yeah, let the child take initiative in her exploration, she gave her space to explore, to figure it out on her own, she didn't intervene. And the child was celebrating too at the end of it. The child was so happy. That child clearly gets a sense that being curious and experimenting with that physical movement that she was doing is OK, and she's going to try it again in other contexts, in other things, she's going to get those milestones because she's so comfortable in her setting.

Gail: So great. And I want to just reiterate something you said, Maria, about the smiling. Remember to smile. There actually was this really fascinating study that I read about what created more curious classrooms? Now, that research was done with older children, but still, what was so fascinating to me is that the difference between classrooms where children felt like they could take initiative and be curious, and those that didn't feel that way, the major difference was the amount of smiling that the teacher did. That's why we can't underestimate how important it is to be smiling. And sometimes I think when I was teaching, it really helped to have somebody observed me or to like videotape myself and rewatch it, because maybe there were some moments where I was like, "Oh, my gosh, I look like I'm like upset, but I wasn't. I must have just been concentrating or thinking about something." But it's something that can kind of, like help you or, like – I had a teaching partner once that also was like not always the most smiley-est, but she really meant to be, so we put up some cues around the room so that she would remember to like, "Oh yeah, I should be smiling." I have to just like reinforce that.

All right, but let's talk about scaffolding. A very important part of helping a child learn is providing them with scaffolding. Now scaffolding is a term that we use that really just means it's providing just the right amount of assistance to help them reach the next level, right? It's like, it's just like a little support, it's temporary, it's there just to make sure that they're safe and getting to the next level of their learning, and then you don't need it anymore. Scaffolding children's curiosity can include the adult modeling, wondering aloud, for example, saying, I wonder why? Like that's such a powerful way to talk about it. My cat agrees, if you heard her. You can use questions to prompt thinking, you can use your questions, not to get a correct answer, that's actually not what we want. We want those questions that are really open ended that really prompt thinking. For example, you can say, I'm so curious about what is happening.



Why does the water stay in this bucket, but not in this one? What do you think the difference is? Really powerful questions that prompts that thinking. And you can see that scaffolding is for, that scaffolding for children to think more deeply, it's not necessarily to arrive at the right answer, right? What we're trying to do is ask questions that get them to just think more. And it's important with infants and toddlers to pause after you ask a question, to wait until you think you've waited long enough, and then wait a little bit more for them to respond in some way. You can look for verbal or nonverbal responses, and acknowledge their response. You can also scaffold curiosity by pointing out changes in patterns throughout the day and comment on what is the same and what is different. Here's another place where we are leaning on research because research suggests that when adults encouraged children's natural tendency to notice differences, they let children know that it's OK to make observations around the world. And this relates to children's later ability to use the scientific method, that cycle of inquiry and scientific reasoning. Scaffolding turns out is pretty important. And now we're going to watch a video of a teacher who is supporting curiosity by scaffolding. What you just learned about scaffolding and what you already know about scaffolding, write down your observations in the viewers guide about the behaviors you see the teacher using.

[Video begins]

Teacher: Whoa. Does that feel different? Does it feel different now?

[Girls shouting "Look!"]

Teacher: Whoa! Look at that. See, look at the difference. Look. This sand can go right through my fingers, but this sand can't. It's clumpy.

Girl: It's clumpy.

Teacher: Ew! No, thank you. Do you want more?

Girl 2: No.

Teacher: All right.

[Video ends]

Gail: Oh my gosh. I love that. I love the "Whoa!" Like that teacher was really exaggerating that, like, "Whoa," like, "Wow, that's so cool." What did other people notice? Oh, yep, asked questions about the difference in the sand and talked about what was different, that, "Clumpy, this one can run through my hands, this one can't." Definitely had a warm tone of voice. Encouraged the child who asked for more. Very responsive, right? Wanted more of the water to squirt on it because that's what was making it a clumpy there. And we saw a nice little redirect too, right? When the child was going for the water bottle and it was like a redirective, "No, thank you." Well, definitely the children are very engaged and seemed excited to explore, that could have gone on for many more minutes for sure. And they were really curious about the

changes in the sand and their – and then they took some initiative there to put some more water in it.

Maria: That's right. The I is for increase active engagement, and another way we can support curiosity is to do just that, increase the children's active engagement. Active engagement is a very important strategy to support curiosity. One strategy to increase active engagement and curiosities to provide diverse experiences. Babies, for example, spend 1/5 of their waking hours in focus gazing, just looking and taking everything in, just curious about everything, exploring, you know, they explore through their senses and that visual. Just open wide, those eyes opened wide, I can just picture it in my head. Another way is to set up the environment with new experiences and materials. Maybe some children will have a sensory, you know, some sensory differences that you could say, well, he, or she, or they, don't like to touch sand. This is where that diverse experience comes into play and you're respecting that child's needs and providing diverse experiences and activities that can still get them to foster that initiative, independence, curiosity. Setup different experiences, different materials, lay on your tummy to get a toddler's perspective or a babies perspective, are a toddler, or go down to toddler height and look around the room to see what items you can put at their height, at their level, so that they can show that initiative. Crawl over there, walk over there and get them on their own, show that initiative, show that independence. Moving those materials a little bit lower.

And try setting up different experiences for the children, like Play-Doh, tools that are on the table, bringing things from outside, pinecones, leaves, go with different seasons, if you have some different seasons. Florida doesn't have a lot of different seasons, but we certainly have some differences and some leaves do fall from the trees at some point in the year. Or bring new books, rotate the toys that you're using. It's always a good thing to give new things out to explore and keep that rotating going, based on what you know your children like and love and would like to explore further. Another strategy is to follow a child's lead, that is super important, and sometimes that diverts us from our plans, and sometimes that's even more, that's even more of a treasure, of something that can, we can get more out of them if we just follow their lead, and they can get so much more language and learning because they are showing initiative on what they want to do. Supporting that initiative and independence by setting up that environment so that infants and toddlers can explore those materials on their own, create some open baskets of containers on the floor, put in some toys, but also some other things around there that you can find around the house or you can, maybe some things that are reflective of their culture that you can put in those containers too, bring in those important materials so that they can see themselves represented as well and explore those further. Observe also how a child plays with those materials.

Wait before jumping in just like we said, just take a step back and observe, and show them, if you see that that they've done whatever they need to do or pause during their exploration, you can jump in and show them how to play with it or what the material is used for. Follow the child's lead and let them show you the endless possibilities of ways to explore a material, because you will be blown away by the things they can do with random objects and toys. And when it's time to transition, when possible, I know it's not always possible, wait for the child to

pause in their play. If it's time for the child to get a diaper change or have a bottle, try putting the materials they were playing with up so they can use it again, after the care routine is over. You may ask, you may say something like, "I'm going to put the book right here, so that when we are done changing your diaper, you can look at it again. I know you weren't done. I can tell you weren't done."

Now, we are going to watch a video of a teacher supporting a child's curiosity by providing that new experience. Again, use that Viewers Guide, write about your thoughts or behaviors that you see the teacher use that increase the children's engagement.

[Video begins]

Teacher: Can we make a discovery? Shall we check and see what's inside the avocado? Huh? What do you think is in here? What do you think is inside? Inside the avocado? Andrew, are you working on getting inside the avocado? Look, Andrew's opening up his avocado. Let me see, friends. Oh. You are experimenting with rolling your avocado because it's so round. You too, Mia? You're going to roll it around the table?

[Video ends]

Gail: I love – That's one of my favorite videos.

Maria: I love that avocado video. Let's see what's coming up in my Q&A. Oh yeah, she was definitely asking questions. Her tone was very warm as well, yes. And they were, she let the children explore freely. And she was kind of doing like a sportscaster thing, where she's just narrating what the children are doing, "Oh, you're rolling it because it's circular and it rolls. I love that, let's roll." And she was asking those questions, what do you think is inside the avocado? Yeah. And the children seemed very interested in the avocados and all its properties. I would be interested too.

Gail: So great. Like, it makes me want to have some guacamole later on, and some of those looked like they were heading to maybe be some smashed avocados pretty soon. I love that she said, are you, I think she says something like, do you want to make a discovery or are you ready to make a discovery? What a great, like, language to set up curiosity, and she used that word experimenting? I love it so much. OK, now, I don't know about you, Maria, were you big into messy play when you were an infant toddler teacher or were you like, I don't want to get messy?

Maria: I did it, but I wasn't really big on it. It was outside of my comfort zone, but I did do it.

Gail: OK, well, this is kind of exciting to know. I mean, messy play is a really great way to increase active engagement, especially in this like idea of initiative and curiosity, but messy play is really about exploring and playing and experimenting. It doesn't actually necessarily need to be messy, like getting things on you, because like for some, that's like really what it's about. But the idea of messy play is really it's about making discoveries, just like that teacher was saying,

that brilliant teacher, who wants to make a discovery? And you can make a discovery like by experimenting with puzzle pieces, like this child who was playing with puzzle pieces is engaging in some kind of form of messy play. She was able to explore the puzzle pieces in multiple areas of the environment, instead of just being limited to the puzzle boards, was kind of like moving these puzzle pieces around. They were able to mess about with the pieces and discover, you know, multiple possibilities of how to use them. And many, messy play, not many play, messy play is really beneficial because it harnesses children's, they're spontaneous exploration, to help them learn.

Children develop curiosity, initiative, focus, and persistence, all through this, like, open-ended, messy play. And if you want to know more about it, check out the research on the "Go Podcast: The Benefits of Messy Play for Infants and Toddlers," and we have that in the resources for you. Now, another way to increase active engagement is uninterrupted exploration time. It's just another great way to support children's curiosity, their independence, their initiative, that gives them this, you know, uninterrupted time to explore. And if you notice that children are really engaged when possible, if you can be flexible but still predictable in your schedule, but if you can be a little bit flexible to encourage, to allow that extra exploration time to accommodate their curiosity, it's really encouraged. Now, let's watch a video of uninterrupted messy play in action. And as you're watching, let us know in the Q&A how this child's curiosity is being supported.

[Women speaking indistinctly]

It sounds like the sand is mic'd. It's like really great sand sound effects there. But what are people saying here? People are noticing that the environment is set up with multiple tools. That's – What an astute observation, right? That there's multiple things that that child can explore with different ways to scrape, different ways to move it through the sand, and you could tell that that child was very curious about how these different tools were going to kind of move the sand differently around. And again, you could see, she kind of wiped her hands off, but she doesn't have to get super messy in messy play, but the idea of messy play is allowing children to mess around with things and explore them in many, many ways. Now, one go to place for building curiosity, and we actually even had someone talk about this in the opening about how they kept themselves curious by going out in nature, and that is the same for young children. Going out in nature is a really great way to foster children's natural curiosity. There's so many great ways that it just, you can create that sense of awe and wonder in the outdoors. We're going to now watch a video and notice in the Q&A how children are responding in this outdoor active engagement.

[Video begins]

Teacher: What's in the spider web?

Boy: Don't touch it.

Teacher: Don't touch it? OK, don't touch it.

Boy: There's a spider in there.

Teacher: Is there a spider? I don't see it. Do you see it? Do you see it?

Boy 2: Maybe it's in the cave.

Teacher: Maybe it's way down there? Maybe, because that's a big web. That's a big web.

Boy 2: Maybe it's in the cave.

Teacher: Maybe. Somebody put ...

Teacher 2: Do you want to put it on the fence?

Teacher: He doesn't want it. Are you sure you don't want your coat? Do you see it? Where is it?

Marco: Right there, in there.

Teacher: Oh! Look! Did you guys notice, Marco said there's a tiny, little web right up here. Did you guys see that? There's a big web and a tiny, teeny, tiny, little web right there. Do you see it?

Boy: Big!

Teacher: Big and little. Oops, I touched it. There's big, a big web.

[Boy speaking indistinctly]

[Video ends]

Gail: Oh, my gosh. People are writing some things, but you know, just initial reactions, and I can see people are writing joy in there, right? Like just, like the children are so joyous and curious about the spider web. That teacher is so intent, just right there with them matching their curious affect and excitement. And someone said, following the children's lead, definitely saw, following the children's lead, checking out the spider web, and acknowledging children's comments and ideas, lots of language building happening there. Pointing out what the teachers noticing. It's really great.

Maria: I would totally bank on that moment and then just bring in some books about spiders and spider webs, show them more pictures, get that language going since they're so already curious about spiders. All right, we are at C for create or add a challenge. We can create or add challenge by asking those open-ended questions, which we have touched upon many times so far. Those wonderings, those open-ended whys and hows. Think of these as higher order questions that really challenged children to think more deeply about their observations and experiences, like what the child playing with the sand or the children that were looking at the spider web, think about questions you could ask. I wonder what would happen if, or let's find

out, where would the spider go? Or where does it live? Or are there more spider webs? Or how do they make the spider webs? Could we do this this way? Or why do you think?

And there's so many moments where we can ask these questions in so many ways and so many, with books and during free play, during that active engagement period, during nature walks, so many powerful moments where we can use these open-ended questions. And remember to pause long enough to give the child time to respond, because these are questions that make them think, they take time to process. It might feel different asking such big questions to infants and toddlers, but if asking high order questions is part of your daily routine, then they'll learn to expect these types of questions and anticipate them. Let's watch a teacher that shows, let's watch a video that shows the teacher asking questions to get children to think, and she creates this challenge through that questioning. In the Q&A, make sure to write down your observations, write down what you notice about the kinds of questions the adult in the video is asking, and share it with us.

[Video begins]

Teacher: Hey, how come those rocks aren't going through?

Boy: This is the powerful one.

Teacher: That's the powerful one? It looks like they are not going through the holes. What makes it powerful? And Sullivan wants to check it out. What do you think makes those rocks so powerful?

Boy: Right there. This is the powerful one.

Teacher: Oh, yeah. I notice that one's bigger than the others. I wonder if that's why it can't fit through the hole.

[Video ends]

Maria: Great video. So many, so many, so many great questions that she asked, so many open-ended questions. I'm noticing some of you saying, adult is asking open-ended questions. "How come those rocks aren't going through?" Oh, yeah. "I like that she gave him wait time to respond," so she paused and gave them time to think. And I noticed too that she said kind of like a little – she set up a little scaffold, because she did say before, "I noticed these rocks aren't going through," to kind of set that groundwork for, "How come these rocks aren't going through?" Yeah, I see, "What makes it powerful?" She asked that open-ended question, "What makes it powerful?"

So many different answers can come from these questions, and that's the beauty of it. I wonder why they don't fit through the hole? Yes. Yeah, these are excellent questions and a great example of that, of creating that challenge. We can also challenge and support a child's curiosity by bringing nature, like Gail said, into the indoors, and nature can spark adult and children's curiosity, and bringing it indoors can help children explore the natural materials

deeper than just going through a walk, we can bring them indoors, keep exploring them, collect them outside, bring them in, or think differently about how to use these, the indoor materials. Some possible ideas are to place leaves on the light table, if you have a light table, that's always a great idea. If you don't, that's also cool. I used to remember, I used to use a white paper and put a leaf below the white paper and then kind of trace it over and we could explore the patterns of each leaves, and we could see the differences in similarities between our traces, and it's really simple enough that they don't have to have exact fine motor, they can just scribble, like they usually do at this age, and they'll get that nice trace of the leaf, and also some sensory input too. Some other possible ideas is to put snow in a sensory table, if you live anywhere that's cold and snowy, and have a collection of pinecones or different gourds or squash, so they can get all that. They touch it, they could break it and see what's inside. What's that, the video that the teacher said, What's that Discovery? What are we discovering? Right? Those are all great questions.

Gail: So great. I'm going to go kind of quickly. I'm so curious about curiosity I've been taking a lot of time. Curious teachers help support curious children. I think we've said that and it's just incredibly true. When we you can create or add challenge is to challenge yourself as an educator, so get curious about what the infants and toddlers in your care or learning. Take pictures, videos, notes of what children are learning. Try focusing on something that's just intriguing to you that you're really excited about or interested in. Narrow your observation to one topic, like how children play with materials at the water table, as an example that's a picture that's shown. And once you've gathered your documentation and information about what the children are learning, ask yourself, how, what, and why questions about your own observations. Take some time to process the information you gathered and connect with co-teachers or colleagues about it and use the information to create new experiences for infants and toddlers.

Maria: And finally, we're at the second S in BASICS is to provide specific feedback, which we've talked about. In this slide, you can go ahead and read it, a few different, it provides a few different ways to provide that specific feedback, while encouraging curiosity. Be sure to name and acknowledge children's curiosity, their independence, their initiative. And when you see it happening, let the child know that you see them, again, acknowledge what the child is doing, let them know that you see them, they're important, and what they're doing is important. Offer wait time, like we said before, like we've mentioned before, wait time, until you can't wait anymore, because obviously we have a schedule to follow. And then maybe continue the conversation, give the child time to respond in whichever way they choose and are able to. And finally, when the child expresses curiosity before providing, when a child expresses curiosity, before providing what you think, ask them what they think. That always works wonders. Let's keep going. And there you have it, the BASICS.

Gail: We're going to jump right into the next section because we're so short on time, so we're just going to, we're going to jump right in and try and get a few more little things in. Thanks, people, for hanging with us a little bit longer. And now, this is our segment Small Changes with a Big Impact, and here we highlight curriculum modifications or adaptations that can help a

child who needs a little more assistance to fully participate in the learning or activity. And the one that we want to talk about is integrating child preference.

This is such an easy one, I love this one. It's really about watching a child and noticing what's really interesting to them, what they have a preference for – maybe it's a certain color or a shape, a toy, a movement, a person – and then integrating that preference into multiple things. For example, maybe the child really loves a red ball and they're kind of like that's all they would play with if you let them play with that red ball. And while we want to extend that curiosity about the red ball, maybe we can use that red ball in multiple ways. We can put that red ball into different learning centers, we could put the red ball on a ramp, so it did something different. We could have the red ball roll through paint so that they got maybe interested in art. It's a great way to integrate a child's preference, and we're going to put some more information about that over in MyPeers, so you can see that over there. And now we also want to spend a little bit of time talking about focusing on equity and, or a lot of time but we're just have a little bit of time left, and in this segment we lift up the value of equity and consider how we can make our teaching practices more equitable.

And as we've heard throughout our webisode today, pointing out similarities and differences is one way to really encourage a child's curiosity. And in today's focus on equity, we want to talk about the importance of representation and talking about it in the learning environment. Research suggests that as early as six months, babies notice race-based differences, and infants actually show preferences towards the race of their caregivers. And between the ages of two and four, children start to internalize and play with racial biases. Children start noticing race and internalizing biases in the infant and toddler years, so it's critical that the learning environment show many different cultures in positive ways, and the educator talk about the similarities and differences. And there's some resources in your Viewers Guide.

Maria: Yeah, and just to piggyback and add more on what you're saying, it's, do we have mirrors in your classroom where children see themselves represented? And also, do you have anything that they can explore further other cultures, so you have windows, they can see beyond themselves. Those are all very important things to keep in mind. And the most important part about providing windows and mirrors in the classroom is talking about them. Just like Gail said, pointing out differences and similarities is one way to foster curiosity in children. Being curious about cultures is a great thing and can help children see race and cultural differences with wonder, instead of bias. Get in the habit of talking about race and cultural differences, just as much as you would talk about differences in the weather. Talking about differences will help infants and toddlers, will give them the words to describe how people are the same and how they're different.

And one way you could also do this is to have some laminated pictures of other families, families that are represented in your classroom, but also people outside of the childcare community. And just remember, we know this from research, differences do not create bias. Children learn prejudice, from prejudice, not from learning about human diversity. Let that sink in a little bit and think about that, because I think that's powerful. Let's take a minute to reflect.



In your Viewers Guide, reflect on your own observations from this activity. Think about what you might do to ensure you are providing those windows and mirrors in their environment and talking about them. Think about how you would respond to a child who notices a race or a cultural difference. Challenge yourself to take a thoughtful pause and engage in conversation with the child. And remember, modeling curiosity fosters children's curiosity as well. We want to make sure to keep doing that. If you don't know the answer, it is OK, model you're wondering out loud with a child and ask them what they think, and you can always do research on your own, which is something that sparks my curiosity too, and that's what drives me. If you're comfortable, go ahead and share your ideas in the Q&A. And we will move it along as we continue on the bookcase.

Gail: Yes, we're going to talk about the bookcase really quickly and we are going to make sure to capture things and move them over to MyPeers too. I know we're rushing through this last part. We don't mean to, we just ran out of time. We wish we had more time for Teacher Time, but we'll pick the conversation up in MyPeers. We just have a few books that are really spectacular, we want to highlight on the bookcase, and these are also in your viewers guide. *Whose Toes Are Those?* Just getting children curious about whose toes are they seeing? That is very curious. *"Peekaboo Morning"* by Rachel Isadora. I love this one, it's about a child peeking and there's little cues about what she's picking at that you can see. Great one to build curiosity.

This is a beautiful book. This was actually an Ezra Jack Keats honor book, this is called *Windows*. And throughout this book there's lots of different windows and you can get curious about peeking in, what's in each of those windows. And then we always like to build a case for a book, and case means that we're picking books really intentionally to think about the connection to the early learning objective we want to continue to expand upon, that we want to find the advanced vocabulary that we can teach children from a book, support their engagement while we're reading the book, and then extend the learning beyond the book. And really quickly we're going to make the case for as fast as we can for this incredible book called *"Tracks in the Snow"* by Wong Herbert Yee. This is an adorable, lovely book, I highly recommend that you get a hold of this one for your book collection. This is again called *Tracks in the Snow*. Beautiful, almost like color pencil drawings. I'm so curious about the illustration of it, it's just gorgeous.

And then throughout the book, it is written with just a few words on each page in a kind of rhyming texts that we love, and it's just about these tracks that a child sees in the snow and so curious about them. Again, curiosity and initiative is what we're talking about. And you could talk about, you can support children's active engagement with that by expanding their predictions on what, whose tracks they think that they are seeing in the snow. You can, clearly we've made the connection to curiosity, but you could also emphasize lots of great advanced vocabulary, like tracks, squeeze, beyond, wood chuck, peek, stamped, so many great big words that you can help build children's vocabulary. Asking children some open-ended questions, making predictions like I've talked about, is a great way to support their engagement, and then it's just begging for you to do some really cool things to extend the learning outside of the book. You could take little animal characters, toys, and make footprints in Play-Doh or through paint to guess. You can have children make some footprints with paint on the floor. Be sure –

that can be very – you can slip, so make sure you're very stable when you do that. And you could also even put some tracks on the floor for children to follow and maybe make some different types of tracks that children can be curious about. In a rapid time, that was our book on the bookcase. And we just want to spend a second talking about you.

Maria: Just for a second, continuing with our theme of curiosity, we're going to talk about a strategy where curious can help you adjust negative and unhelpful thinking. Think about it as preventative medicine for your mental health. Curiosity can help us find the joy of discovery and help us question on our own negative feelings and cognitive distortions. Having that openness to experience engaging in personal growth and responding to life's unexpected twists and turns with grace and humor can make even painful experiences more bearable when we were able to say to ourselves, OK, so what happened and what should I learn from that? What might I be telling myself that's not only untrue, but also contributing to my unhappiness? Is this belief true? And many of the other questions that you see in the slide deck right here. What is the evidence for this belief? Does this belief help me feel the way you want? Ask yourself these questions, take a minute for your own mental health and promote, just turn that negative thought into something productive.

Gail: I love that, being curious. And again, you can explore the resources in the resource guide. We want to end with Mae Jemison. Thank you for staying with us. We want to end with astronaut Mae Jemison's quote, don't let anyone rob you of your imagination, your creativity, or your curiosity. It's your place in the world; it's your life. Go on and do all you can with it and make it the life you want to live. Thank you for joining us. You can see past episodes, or if you want to watch this one again, you can see it on Push Play On Demand. Our next episode will be May 5 on Creativity for Preschoolers. And then Maria will join us again on June 2 for Creativity for Infants and Toddlers. Bye everyone. Thank you so much for joining us. See you over on MyPeers. Bye.

Maria: Adios!