

Problem-solving and Relationship Skills in Preschool

Woman: Places, everyone. Are the lights ready? Three, two, one.

Saameh Solaimani: Hi, everyone. I'm Saameh Solaimani. Welcome to "Teacher Time." Thank you so much for being here with us today.

Gail Joseph: Hi, everyone. I'm Gail Joseph, and I'm so excited to be joining you on "Teacher Time" today. Now, Saameh, I always think it's better when we start with a song, so shall we?

All: [Singing] "Teacher Time." "Teacher Time." "Teacher Time." "Teacher Time." "Teacher Time." "Teacher Time."

Gail: Here we are. I love your puppet moves. You've got some really good moves.

Saameh: Thank you. I worked hard on this.

Gail: Well, hi, everyone, and welcome to our third preschool episode of "Teacher Time" this program year. I'm Gail Joseph.

Saameh: I'm Saameh Solaimani, and we're from the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning.

Gail: We are so excited to have you here with us today. We have been focusing on positive behavior supports this season of "Teacher Time." Hopefully, you've joined us for some of the previous episodes. So far, we've talked about the importance of relationships and how to support emotional literacy. And today, we're going to be focusing on problem-solving and relationships, and friendship skills in preschool.

I want to draw your attention to the viewer's guide. I've printed mine out here. It's beautiful. You can find it in the resource widget. If you haven't looked at our viewer's guide for a while, I strongly encourage you to. This season, our viewer's guide is a viewer's guide for birth to five, including specific age group information for infants and toddlers and preschool children. It is packed with information about development, about teaching practices. There are quick tips in here. There are reminders. There are things you can cut out and post and put up in your learning space. There are spaces for notetaking.

On the last page is just an extensive resource list that you are going to love. You can download the guide and use it throughout our time together for taking notes, for reflecting, planning how you might use some of the "Teacher Time" practices we're going to talk about in your own settings. And please share your viewer's guide with colleagues. Also, we want your ideas in the next issue of "Teacher Time." You can see on the back that we ask you to submit some of your own strategies and tips, and then you'll be published in the "Teacher Time" viewer's guide.

Saameh: That would be awesome. We always love to hear from you. Thank you so much, Gail. During our time together, we're going to be discussing teaching practices that support positive behavior. We're going to take some time to promote your wellness with our It's All About You segment. We're going to connect effective practice to brain development in our new segment, which some of you may have seen in our last episode's Neuroscience Nook.

We're going to discuss small change, big impact, and in our focus on equity segments, individualized strategies that build a sense of belonging and promote social and emotional skills with all children, including children who have a variety of learning characteristics. And we're going to wrap up our time together, as we always do, with our BookCASE, where we connect our topic to books that you can share with children and families.

Gail: We love the BookCASE and our "Teacher Time" librarian. Like we do at the beginning of most "Teacher Times," we want to check in with how you're feeling, such an important thing to do periodically throughout the day. Look at our "Teacher Time" feeling tree, find a feeling creature. They all have little numbers on them.

And post in the Q&A which number creature you most relate to at the moment and why. We want to hear from you. We have our amazing Q&A team there, ready to see your input. I'm going to go ahead and start. Now, every time I look at – what I love about our little "Teacher Time" tree here is that I always think a little bit differently about how these creatures are feeling, which is fun. It helps children do that, too.

Saameh: Right.

Gail: I think the little guy that is swinging from the tree there. I'm just pretty excited to be here. I've been on some travel. I'm excited to be back with you and back with our "Teacher Time" viewership. How are you feeling, Saameh?

Saameh: I actually was thinking about this. And I think number 12, sitting on the leaf, surrounded by friends, by community, by all of you. Yeah, I'm feeling very part of this learning community.

Gail: I love it. And our viewers are checking in. Five, a rough week. Some weeks are like that. I hope it gets better for you, Amy. We've got a 12. Somebody is feeling like you. One, five. Our viewers are all over the tree, checking in. I feel like number five, pretty rough afternoon. My goodness. We hope that spending some time today thinking about your own professional development might feel a little bit uplifting for you. But we definitely know how it feels when you're not having a great week, too. Just hanging in there. Thank you so much for sharing.

Saameh: Yes, yes.

Gail: Thank you. Keep it going. Keep it going.

Saameh: We're very excited to be focusing on positive behavior supports this season, as you know. And social and emotional development. As you may know, is one of the domains in the

Head Start ELOF, which stands for Early Learning Outcomes Framework. The practical strategies we're going to be discussing today are going to be focusing on the relationships with other children subdomain of social and emotional development. And you can see that highlighted here.

Gail: I love that. Now, like we said last month, this season of "Teacher Time" is focused on working our way through the Pyramid Model. Some of you might be really familiar with the Pyramid Model. Maybe your program is participating in a pyramid training. But if you're not familiar with it, the Pyramid Model is really a model or a framework of positive behavioral support for proactively addressing the social and emotional development. And for preventing and addressing challenging behaviors of young children. The framework offers a continuum of evidence-based teaching practices that are organized into four levels of support. And you can see those there.

At the foundation, it's all about nurturing and responsive relationships. Not only between the teacher, the educator, and the children but between children and between educators. It's all about these relationships. And we want them to be nurturing and responsive no matter what relationship they're in. That's the foundation. The next are high-quality supportive environments. How can we create both the physical and temporal structure of the environment to support positive behavior?

Then we level up and go to social and emotional teaching strategies. That's where we're at right now, is going to dig into some of those social and emotional teaching strategies. Then at the very top, when all of the bottom three pieces are in place, there might still be some children that have some behaviors that could require a little bit more intensive intervention. And we're going to talk about that in May. Be sure to come back.

But if you want to learn more about the Pyramid Model, you can check out the resource list in the back of your viewer's guide for a lot more information about it. Now, we would love to hear what strategies and practices you have in place to support young children's problem-solving and their friendship skills with children that you're working with.

Go ahead and start entering those in the Q&A. And our Q&A team, we've got, like, the star Q&A team today. They're going to start sending those out, too. We're going to be tracking them, but they're also going to be sent out so other people can see them as well when you share what strategies you're using. We always learn so much from our viewers. And there's always something that we're, like, a gem out there in how you're supporting young children's problem-solving.

Saameh: Such a wealth of resources out there.

Gail: Absolutely. Now, as a reminder, positive behavioral support, or sometimes called PBS, sometimes you might hear it called PBIS. Sometimes you might even hear it called a multi-tiered system of support. But positive behavioral support is a positive and proactive approach to preventing and addressing challenging behavior. It focuses on using very intentional teaching

strategies to proactively, that's such a big part of it, proactively build all social and emotional skills. And today we're specifically thinking about building problem-solving skills and relationship skills for young children. Now, positive behavioral support recognizes that all behavior communicates a message or a need. And some behaviors, as they're trying to get their needs across, we might find challenging.

Once an educator understands the meaning, what is the message that the child is trying to send with their behavior? What's the meaning? They want something. They want to get away from something. They're not sure how to play with their friends, but they're trying in the way that they can. Once you know what the meaning of that challenging behavior is, then we can figure out how to teach the child a more effective way to communicate their needs and problem-solve with support.

Saameh: So important to keep in mind. Now what we're going to do is we're going to turn our attention to you in our All About You segment. We know that we do our best caregiving and teaching when we feel well ourselves. Engaging in self-care practices can help educators build greater social and emotional capacity to work through problem-solving together. And our ability to support children with problem-solving and relationship skills starts with our ability to center ourselves by noticing and observing what's happening with as little judgment as possible.

We can help young children work through challenges with peers from a more grounded, soft, and objective place, naming what we see happening calmly without so many of the other things going on when we're feeling stressed and overwhelmed. What we're going to do is a little body scan. Before we can support the children in our care with problem-solving and relationship skills, it's important to find ways to regulate our own feelings throughout the day.

Taking a minute to do something like a body scan like we have here to notice what's happening in our own bodies is softening in the moment. We can slow down and center ourselves throughout the day. This practice supports our own well-being first, enabling us to hold a non-judgmental space, as we were saying, respond intentionally to children's cues, behaviors, and communications as we support them in building healthy relationships with each other.

Here we go. Start with a deep breath. Okay, I noticed as I was saying that I was holding my breath. Breathe. Okay, so we're going to start in a seated position or laying down, whatever is comfortable for you. And now you can bring your attention to your body, and you can close your eyes if that's comfortable for you. And you can notice your body wherever you are.

As you exhale, you have a sense of relaxing, and you can notice your feet or body on the floor. You can notice your back against the chair or maybe on the floor. Bring your attention into your stomach area. If it feels tight, let it soften. Notice your hands, arms, shoulders, and let them be soft. Let your jaw and facial muscles be soft. Notice your whole body present, and take one more deep breath. Okay.

Okay, we would love to hear how you were feeling during that or feel now or after the body scan. What do you notice? And let's see. And I noticed like I was saying, that I was holding my breath.

Gail: I feel like we should do that right before "Teacher Time." It would be really helpful.

Saameh: That's right.

Gail: I felt so calm and centered.

Saameh: We'd love to hear from you how that experience was. Thank you so much for taking the time to take time for yourself. Calm. Self-aware. Conscious. More relaxed.

Gail: It doesn't take very long too, and I know that when I was teaching on a regular basis, just having those moments where I could just feel that tension in my body, and it just takes a moment to take a breath before I interact.

Saameh: It is amazing how much one minute of breathing can do. Yes. It's not something that requires a lot of time, which I know we don't necessarily have as teachers sometimes.

Social competencies like self-regulation, empathy, perspective-taking, and problem-solving skills are key to foundational healthy social-emotional development. And these include positive interactions and friendships and relationships between peers, as we know. Educators can help children learn the skills necessary to develop healthy peer relationships and find ways to work through social conflicts with adult support.

And that's where we come in. And teaching and modeling problem-solving skills early on with preschool children builds a foundation of problem-solving and relationship skills that most children can access with adult support and start to use independently as they continue to develop. The more we can support young children in developing problem-solving skills in their learning environments, the less we'll see some of those challenging behaviors that oftentimes arise from not having the resources, the tools to work through the problem as they come up, which they will because that's life.

It's important to note that there might be some children in your care who don't readily learn these skills through foundational teaching strategies. This might include children with disabilities or suspected delays. It's important to be aware of the progress for all children and use more individualized practices to work on these skills with children who need a little more support. That's what we'll be doing today, sharing some strategies to do just that.

Gail: Some key ideas and practices for supporting problem-solving and peer relationship skills with preschool children are the first little slide that you see there or picture that you see there is about promoting healthy relationships. Preschoolers are increasingly interested, as our viewers know, in developing friendships with one or two preferred peers, like we see in the photo on the left. They're able to engage in group play and independently initiate interactions with peers, which is so fun to see develop.

Preschoolers might suggest something to do, like let's play a restaurant or let's build a swimming pool for our animals together or join in an existing activity. Hey, can I play too? Educators can support preschoolers in promoting healthy friendships in quite a few ways that I'm sure our viewers are already doing. But just to name a few, one is that you can help children plan what and how they will play together.

One thing that I always like to, I'm going to go off for a moment, is that one thing that I think about a lot as a preschool teacher is thinking about materials and resources and activities that require two children to play together so that you set the stage for children to interact with each other. Things like those teeter-totters or rowboats in classrooms is just one obvious idea that takes two children.

Another thing is providing suggestions for initiating interactions with other children. And a quick tip there too is right before children go to play, if there's a child that you think could use a little bit more support, is to do a little priming and say, "hey, point to two or three things that you could play with a friend," and you'll see that they can increase their initiations with other children.

Then, encouraging children to consider other ideas. I don't know if anybody out there is a big puppet user, but I used a lot of puppets when I was teaching at Head Start, and this was a great way to model like at a circle time, model with a puppet and other children role-play how I could consider somebody else's idea. Lots of ways to do that.

Saameh: This is a great time for us to pause and think about what value do I place on peer relationships, and how do I expect peers to act with each other? Sort of that, taking a moment to think about our own ideas because we're subjective beings, and we have our own experiences. It's really important to just take a moment. And awareness of our responses to these questions is supportive of our equitable practice. I do have to say I love what you said about puppets, and we're going to be seeing a little bit of puppet work later on in our episode today. I am also a fan of puppets.

As you see, the second photo you see is representing teaching problem-solving steps, which is so important. Preschoolers are willing to try different strategies to solve problems and show flexibility in their actions and behavior, and they can plan ways to solve a problem and evaluate solutions with our support. In a minute, we're going to hear from Dr. Angel Fettig, Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Washington, who will share strategies to support problem-solving in preschool classrooms. She's going to talk about the steps.

Gail: That's great. Of course, another way that we can support children, which you probably feel like you're doing all the time, is teaching problem-solving in the moment. One is to proactively teach, which we're going to hear about strategies for doing that. But the other thing is then supporting that problem-solving as it occurs in the moment. There are a few steps that educators can do to work through that. One is anticipating that social conflicts are going to happen, and you try and anticipate it before they happen.

You might notice a child that's coming into the classroom or into the learning setting feeling a little bit tired, maybe something upsetting happened before, maybe you have some communication with the family and understand that something troubling has just happened at home, and the child is coming into the space. Maybe they're not usually having a difficult time with problem-solving, but today they might be.

But another thing that you can do is anticipate, did you introduce a new toy into your learning space? Maybe you introduced some new props in the dramatic play area, and you know that a lot of children are going to want to use them. You're anticipating that probably in that space, there's going to be a little bit more need to support problem-solving in the moment. You want to anticipate social conflicts before they happen.

Another thing that's so important is being close and helping children manage their feelings. If I'm anticipating that there might be some problem, maybe an individual child might need some more support, or there's an area in the classroom that I think, oh, I'm probably going to want to be close there, is to get close because children will, as they get excited or upset, that fight or flight comes in. You want to be there to support them to help remember some of the problem-solving steps that you've provided.

Now, providing support and reminders of problem-solving steps would be next. I'm going to be close with them, and then I'm going to provide support, and that support could be verbal like I could remind them of the problem-solving steps. It can also be visual, and we're going to talk about some of the visual supports you can have in your classrooms.

Some people in our Q&A have already talked about ways that they've used visuals with problem-solving solution kits, et cetera. We can encourage children to generate and evaluate multiple solutions. I'm going to say that this is really where it's at for preschool children, is to encourage them to generate as many different solutions to a problem as they can. When children have a restricted number of solutions they can try, they're bound to run out of things that are working for them. We want to encourage them to keep being really creative and generating so many different solutions.

Last but not least, when children do problem-solving, find some way to celebrate that. It might be a thumbs-up. It might be a high-five. It might be with a super friend cape or with some other type of big celebration because this is hard work, and it's really hard work when you're a young child just figuring it out. We want to make sure that we're celebrating that. We're going to remember that we always want to individualize the strategies that we're going to use to provide support based on the skills of the children that you're supporting.

Some children might need some additional amount of language that needs to be modified. Some children might need visual cues or gestures paired with verbal language. Some children might need some specific feedback on the consequences to help them learn the effect of their behavior on the environment. Stay tuned for BASICS where we're going to share about some more strategies for providing feedback.

Saameh: I love that. I love what you said about anticipation. I think it goes such a long way. Also, what you were saying about problem-solving and the children coming up with the solutions, generating the solutions, and I keep thinking about how problem-solving is also play in a way.

Gail: Yeah.

Saameh: It's exploration. It's play. In a way, it's fun. It's not necessarily a negative thing. Sometimes we think problem as negative, and it doesn't have to be.

Gail: It can be like a fun challenge. I would support children, and I'd say, "are they making it tough on you?"

Saameh: Exactly.

Gail: And they'd be like, yeah. But then they'd be encouraged to keep going. Sometimes I'd say, let me look. Let me look. I think you've got more solutions in there. I'd peer into their ear, and they'd think that was really fun. You can just really be fun and encourage them to be creative and think of more solutions.

Saameh: I love that one. We're going to hear from Dr. Angel Fettig, who we were talking about earlier, as she discusses strategies to teach problem-solving skills.

[Video begins]

Angel Fettig: I think in early childhood settings, I think the best thing is to think about simple steps to teach kids. So simple, concrete strategies they can use in the setting. My favorite is to really think about the four-step problem-solving technique. Step one is, what's my problem? Really being able to know that there's a problem here, and this is the problem. Being able to identify it.

Gail: Yeah.

Angel: And then step two is helping them brainstorm. What are some things I can do to solve this problem? Guiding them in understanding, How do you brainstorm for solutions?

Gail: Okay.

Angel: And then the next step, step three, is to think about evaluating the solutions you came up with. Do I think using this step is going to be fair for my friends? Is it a safe solution?

Gail: Right.

Angel: Am I going to feel good? Is my friend going to feel good?

Gail: Right.

Angel: And then step four is guiding them to try it out.

Gail: Right.

Angel: You try it, see if it works.

Gail: Okay.

Angel: If it doesn't work, then encourage them to try a different strategy, try a different skill. Those are the four steps. And it's really important that we teach those steps systematically and with visuals, just like how we will typically teach any content in early childhood classrooms.

Gail: Okay.

Angel: I think as early childhood educators, we need to plan these into our curriculum in teaching problem-solving skills.

Gail: Great.

[Video ends]

Saameh: So wonderful. As we saw, Dr. Fettig outlines four important steps to go through with preschool children to help teach problem-solving skills. First of all, helping children identify what the problem is in the first place. Next, inviting children to generate and evaluate multiple solutions through brainstorming, as you were sharing, Gail, and then evaluate the solutions. How are these solutions working out? Lastly, we can help children select a solution and try it out and see how it works. We'd love to hear from you in the chat. What are some ways that you support problem-solving with children in your care? Please share in the chat.

As you're doing that, I wanted to share something I remember being surprised to learn early on in my career as an early childhood educator. It was just, like, what a big part of our job supporting children and problem-solving is. It's a huge part. I mean, it was most of the day. It was really doing that, and I was in for a surprise. But, getting down on the children's level, taking the time to be present and understand what's happening, how we can support children to work through the problem in that moment, which I'm sure you all experience many times a day. And the solution kit. We will be talking about that.

Gail: That's right. Owl's Pals, that's a great social and emotional curriculum. I see that one coming up. Tucker the Turtle, we know about that. That's a great one. Trying to hang in there. Sarah, yes, that is so important. It's just that trying to hang in there, taking those deep breaths, getting centered, and getting back into it and knowing that this is part of the job.

Saameh: It truly is.

Gail: What a great job it is to help build this, like, social and emotional foundation for young children so that when they're entering into even larger group settings, they're going to be really successful. Yes, trying to hang in there but knowing you've got a great purpose.

Saameh: Absolutely. What we're going to do now is we're going to take another moment to pause and reflect, a reflective moment, on questions that will support equitable teaching practices. We're going to invite you to reflect on the following questions. How do I expect peers to act with each other? How do I feel about conflict? Do I listen openly to all children when there is a problem? To just take a moment and think about those things. We're going to revisit these questions in our Focus on Equity segment. We thought it would be nice this time to weave throughout.

Gail: I love it. Those are such good questions. I'm just thinking about it myself, like, what was I expecting?

Saameh: Right. Now for our Neuroscience Nook segment. Research tells us that the early years are foundational for brain development. And adults play an important role in supporting healthy brain development connections and architecture.

In this segment, our Neuroscience Nook, we are excited to connect this research to everyday teaching practices. I'm going to just take a moment for this side note. As questions are coming up for you, we want to hear them. Please put them in the Q&A or post them in the "Teacher Time" Community in MyPeers. Just wanted to say that.

What we're going to do is we're going to shift our focus. We're going to talk a little bit about executive functioning, which is a very important brain function. The prefrontal cortex begins to develop very early in life. This area of the brain is responsible for what are called executive functioning skills, which some of you may have heard of. They're essential for development of strong and healthy relationships.

This is a really great graphic here, as you can see. It includes what are some of the main functions of executive functioning and executive functioning skills. What are they? Attention, that would be being able to stay focused on a task. Working memory, which is being able to remember rules and procedures. Self-regulation and the ability to control impulses.

Right there, you can see how important that would be for developing strong and healthy relationships. Organization, things like switching between tasks, that would be called flexible thinking. Problem-solving, planning, behavior, decision-making, and motivation. As you can see, hopefully, you're convinced that executive functioning skills are very important indeed. You can see how all these skills are important.

Gail: Absolutely.

Saameh: Also are interrelated in a lot of ways. What we can do is help young children start to develop these critical relationship building and problem-solving skills. I know what all of you are

doing every day, through responsive caregiving and effective teaching practices that are responsive to an individual child's needs. In our most recent episodes of "Teacher Time," those were building relationships and emotional literacy in preschool, we've talked about ways that you can support executive functioning through things like serve and return, and the flipping your lid, the hand model.

Gail: Yes, I remember.

Saameh: Yes. From Dr. Dan Siegel. I practiced that a lot before, by the way.

Gail: Yeah, it was good.

Saameh: We also encourage you to look back at the last two viewers guides, that would be building relationships with children, birth through five, and emotional literacy with children, birth through five, to see more about the importance of nurturing and responsive relationships on the developing brain. What we're going to do is we're going to hear — now we're going to hear from Dr. Juliet Taylor, as she describes the development of executive function.

[Video begins]

Juliet Taylor: I'm going to show you a graphic of how executive function develops over time. Here's sort of a graphic representation. And one thing to point out is that we are not born with executive function skills in place. We're born with the potential to develop them, or not, depending on our experiences, our neurophysiology, and the interactions between those things.

This graph shows that on the horizontal axis you can see this is ages birth to 80, and notice that there's not an even distribution between the ages. And that is because there are particular peaks in executive function development. You can see skill proficiency on the vertical axis. And I'm going to highlight a couple of areas where you see tremendous growth in executive function skills, and that is really in the preschool ages, between three to five, and then in early adolescence to early adulthood, there's another spike in development.

The foundations of executive function are laid down in the earliest months and years of life, and that really happens through basic sort of serve and return, it's sometimes called, or those basic interactions between child and adult that happen over and over and over again. And that spike really does happen in the preschool years after children have verbal language.

[Video ends]

Saameh: As you can see, that graphic, it's just so helpful to see the development pattern. And we see that we aren't born with executive function. We are, however, born with the potential to develop them, and why our support as educators is so important. We know that the foundation of executive function skills are laid down in the first months and years of life. And what we heard and saw, the yellow highlight, is a spike in executive function development between three and five years old after many children have developed verbal language.

Gail: I love that, and I saw the other spike was like that, like, early or later teen years.

Saameh: I noticed that.

Gail: I've got two of those at home. I feel like I see that on a regular basis. Yeah, very true.

Saameh: It resonates.

Gail: It really resonates, both as a preschool teacher and as a mom of adolescents. That's so great. And, like, looked like some declines as we get older. It's not fun.

Saameh: A little less fun.

Gail: We're going to get to the "Teacher Time" BASICS, and we're going to talk about how we can use BASICS to support problem-solving and relationship skills. If you haven't joined us before, let's just go through really quickly what BASICS is. It's an acronym that helps us remember some really powerful teacher-child or adult-child interaction moves that we can make that can support children's growth and development in any area.

The "Teacher Time" BASICS are B is for behavioral expectations in advance. It is always helpful to tell a young child what you're expecting from them before you start a new activity. A is for attending to and encouraging positive behavior, which is so relevant to the topics that we're talking about now. S is for scaffolding with cues and prompts.

Those can be verbal cues, visual cues. You're going to see some of that today. Increasing engagement is the I. C is for creating and adding challenge. Young children grow when we add some challenge to, whether it's intellectual challenge or social and emotional challenge, that creates some growth for young children. And S is for that specific feedback.

If you've joined us for other webinars, you know that we only take two of these letters to focus on. It's too much to do all of them in one episode. We've focused on different letters at different episodes. You'll see that if you want to go back and look at some prior episodes. You'll see some of the other letters.

But today we're going to focus on the C and the S, create or add challenge, and the second S, which is about providing specific feedback to support problem-solving and relationship skills. We're going to jump to it. We're going to start with creating or adding challenge. This is one of my favorite things.

One fun way that we can create or add challenge to problem-solving and relationship skills is to create a friendship kit and invite children to use it when they notice that another child is upset. You can see on the screen that the friendship kit can have lots of little things in it. Really it could be like a shoebox. It could be a file folder. It could be any way that you can contain it. It could be a lovely basket.

But the idea is that in this friendship kit, there are things like maybe a pack of tissue if somebody is crying. Maybe there's a soft toy for someone to cuddle with if they're feeling like they're missing somebody. Maybe there's a pack of bandages to not only help with a small cut, but maybe if your feelings are hurt. We've had children also apply bandage. Very sweet. A sheet of stickers. Maybe a sticker would help someone.

There can be visual support cards of simple problem-solving solutions and things that you can do when a friend is in duress. Things like giving a gentle hug. Maybe saying, I'm sorry. That is certainly a challenge that we offer to young children is to provide a genuine apology, which is a great repair strategy for them to learn. That's one thing. I'd be curious to see if people are using friendship kits. You can enter that into the Q&A.

I've had lots of lovely experiences in my classroom with these friendship kits where children go to them when another child is upset. I had one experience. Well, I'll tell that story in a little bit. But they're just such great, lovely stories about how young children will use it. It's just like a physical reminder of what it takes to develop those special friendships. Now, there's another way that we can create or add challenges. Thank you for advancing that. That was a nice thing to do from our friendship kit.

Saameh: Right.

Gail: Thanks for advancing the slide.

Saameh: Of course.

Gail: Is to actually create a problem-solving solution kit or problem-solving basket. We have already had viewers tell us that they're using these out and about. You'll see lots of resources for supporting those in your viewer's guide. But this is to add a bunch of visuals about supporting problem-solving. Remember we said that one of the more difficult things for young children to do is to generate multiple solutions that are different from each other.

I do always remember when I started doing a lot of social and emotional development, problem-solving in a classroom, in my preschool classroom, I had a student in there, a child in my classroom named Freddy. I loved that. It was the only Freddy I've ever had. Freddy ran up to me on the playground and he said, "Teacher Gail, I've got a problem." I was like, "Perfect, so excited about this problem." I said, "What is it?" "Jordan took the ball and won't give it back."

Now, that is a real problem that happens on a regular basis in preschool classrooms. I said, "Well, what solutions did you try?" Because we were working on solutions. He said, "I tried five." I was so excited because that's a lot. I said, "What were they?" He said, "I said, 'Please, please, please.'" "

One of the things that this problem-solving basket or solution kit can provide for young children are different solutions. You want children to understand that it's not just trying the same solution over and over again or louder. But it is actually trying different solutions, like wait and

take turns, hardest solution. I think to try, make another choice, play together. We could ask an adult if it becomes a big problem.

Saameh: Right.

Gail: Just take a break. Lots of things that can be in there. And check your viewer's guide out because there's lots of visuals that you could cut out and use in your own classrooms and learning settings. We're on to the next. We are going to watch one of our favorite teachers ever. Teacher Heather is going to introduce the problem-solving solution basket to preschoolers in her care. And just pay attention. What do you notice? Share those in chat as you take a look.

[Video begins]

Heather: We've been working really hard with the problem-solving basket. I think I'm ready. I'm still mad, but I'm ready. I'm going to use that problem-solving basket you guys told me about. Is that a good idea?

Child: Yeah.

Heather: No, no, no. We got it right here. Remember, guys, we planned it this time. Oh, Eddie, hey, I just happen to have it right here. OK, wait. Here's my mad card because I need to breathe some more. I feel better now. I'm going to get one of those books you guys told me about. Teacher, will you help me? I will. It's hard for Eddie to hold the book, huh? I'm going to find an idea because that's what you guys told me last time. Find an idea in my book. And I don't have to read it, right? We have to look at it, right, Marilyn, because there's pictures, right? Pictures for Eddie. Oh, yeah, I remember. We've been practicing a long time, ever since we started school. Okay, here we go. Sharon, can I trade a block with you? Say no.

Girl: No.

Heather: Uh-oh, she said no. I'm so disappointed. I don't know how to fix this. What should we help Eddie say? Hey, Eddie, you know what? Our class does something funny when we feel disappointed. You guys want to help him again? Ready? We say, oh, pickle. And then we try another idea. I'm going to try another idea from a different book because that book didn't have the idea I wanted. Let me see. I'm going to share. Jocelyn, can I have one of your blocks? Great, great, great. Sharon, say yes this time. Can I give you this block and you give me back my three blocks?

[Video ends]

Saameh: Love it.

Gail: So great. Oh, pickles.

Saameh: I told you about the puppets.

Gail: Yes, exactly.

Saameh: The puppets showed up.

Gail: Exactly. Puppets are so great for supporting and role-playing social and emotional problems because you can control their —

Saameh: Totally.

Gail: I mean, in a helpful way. You can control what they're saying and experiencing, and the children can help the puppet out. It's really great.

Saameh: I love that.

Gail: She does a great job of that, and our viewers agree. They are commenting that they're loving that, and hopefully we'll share that video with others.

Saameh: I just love that. It's sort of just a way of children stepping outside of the scene and being able to see what's happening.

Gail: It's like a little fishbowl in a way.

Saameh: When you're in it, you're feeling so many feelings, so many things happening, it's hard to use those executive functioning skills around it. You're actually developing those executive functioning skills when you're like, okay, I wonder how I can support these puppets and planning and working it out and da-da-da. It's really wonderful. It's a great way. Very powerful.

Gail: Yes. Huge puppet family.

Saameh: Yes, we can do so much.

Gail: We're going to have to have a whole episode on puppets.

Saameh: Puppet Time. Yeah, both you and I. Great. We have our S now from our BASICS, and that is specific feedback. Providing specific feedback is another way educators can support problem-solving and relationship skills, and that's naming and acknowledging when we see a child engaging and building relationships. It's really important to be specific about what you see, and we have some examples here.

Like, you're helping me put Natalie's coat on, or I saw you get a tissue for Kai, which was so kind. And I can see that you were both feeling frustrated, and let's get the solution kit and get some ideas of how we might solve the problem. Noticing and acknowledging goes a long way. It's I see you, I hear you, and right there you have buy-in. It's like, OK, let's work together. I think all of us, children, and adults alike.

Educators can provide specific feedback to a child when they see them taking turns, sharing, trying to solve problems, or helping a friend. I can see you being a helpful friend and working with Isaiah to get his mat set up for nap time. That's probably a typical one. Nap time is a big one. Setting up for nap time is a big one. That itself is a whole thing. A lot of ripe opportunities for problem-solving.

Gail: Absolutely.

Saameh: Providing specific feedback is also a helpful teaching tool. And we might provide feedback on how to be a friend or how to solve a problem, like another one that resonates with me. I hear that you would all like a turn on the tire swing.

Gail: Oh, yes.

Saameh: Many opportunities for problem-solving with a tire swing. Very popular tire swing. Let's try using the sand timer to make sure everyone gets a turn. Or I can see that you're both feeling frustrated. Okay, we talked about this one. Let's get the solution kit. Get some ideas how we might solve the problem. Offer specific ideas of what the child might do next. Remember that how feedback is given, including what you say, how you say it, it should really be individualized to meet the learning characteristics and temperament of each child. It's not just like one size fits all model.

Gail: Absolutely. I think like the key word is the specific here in specific feedback. Because I noticed all the examples that you gave, it wasn't like, a good job. It was really specific and it didn't even have to have a praise statement. It really could just be like saying what you noticed. You got a tissue for Kai. That was so kind.

It's just labeling the behavior that they're doing can be enough to provide them specific feedback that like, wow, that was important enough for my teacher to say or my educational support person to say. Then that specific feedback about like, let's try something new. Let's try something a little bit different. Also, very helpful. It's so great.

Saameh: Yeah.

Gail: I just think it's like the S in there is really important, that specific part. I really love that. Specific. It's almost more important than the praise is the specific sort of I see you.

Saameh: Because empty praise is not necessarily the most helpful.

Gail: Yeah. That's another whole thing that we're going to talk about.

Saameh: At some point.

Gail: But we are so excited that we're going to check back into Teacher Heather's classroom and see how she provides specific feedback while helping two children solve problems. See if maybe a few know this, some of that specific feedback that she's providing.

[Video begins]

Heather: Uh-oh. Amy and Jami, what's the problem? You're getting it to make the fort. And it looks like Amy's holding it, too. Thanks, Elina, for moving so I could get up. What are we going to do about it? You both want the same block? What are we going to do about it? How are we going to fix the problem? I'm going to hold the block for a minute while you guys help figure it out. What's your idea? You want to play with it over there. Should we find out what Jami's idea was? What was your idea, Jami? Oh, and she thinks she needs it for that building. You both need this block for two different buildings.

Do you want to look for an idea in the basket? Grab the book. See what you can come up with. There's another one over there, right? I think Amy's got the book. What are we going to do? She's looking. Let's play together. That would be building the same building together. Take a break. You just take a break from building. Wait until she's done. One more minute. She would have it for a minute and then you would have it for a minute.

You build with something else. Maybe next time. Talk to me. Elina dropped it in there. Playing together. You would build it together. Do you want to build together, Jami? Look, Amy's talking to you. Sorry, I just said it and Amy was saying it. Sorry about that, Amy. Here. Amy, you're going to help Jami build her tower. Excellent. You guys are expert problem solvers.

[Video ends]

Gail: So great.

Saameh: Live in action.

Gail: And people are providing some feedback on that as well. I mean, she does such a great job of providing that specific feedback along the way.

Saameh: Absolutely.

Gail: Along the way, absolutely.

Saameh: We are ready to move on to our Small Change, Big Impact segment. Small Change, Big Impact, where we share how small adjustments to the way we set up our learning environment, modify our curriculum, or engage with children can make a big difference for a child's learning.

We know that children vary in their learning characteristics and how they engage with the people and materials in their learning environments. These small changes, also known as curriculum modifications, are made based on the individual needs of the child to help promote their engagement and participation. We know that when children are more engaged, they have more opportunities to learn.

Some children might need more highly individualized teaching to help them learn problem-solving, such as embedded teaching or intensive individualized teaching, making curriculum modifications based on a child's individual learning needs. This can be a great place to start to support engagement.

Gail: Absolutely. And today we are focusing on using social stories. I would be so excited to hear how our viewers are using social stories. I imagine that some people are already using these. But for those of you who might not be familiar with social stories, they are a great little curriculum modification, or not little, because they actually take a little bit of time to put in place. But they are there to support a child who might have some more specific or individualized needs to navigate a social situation or just providing them with a little bit more information as to how to navigate a social situation or a change.

These are written from a child's perspective. And this is very individualized. They have the child's picture in them often. The child's name is used in them. The social story highlights and clearly describes to a child what the most important aspects of the social situation are, like what the appropriate behavior expectations are in that situation, how people, including the child, might be feeling or what they might be thinking about in that social situation.

Social stories, hard to say, sometimes social stories can help increase a child's understanding of a social situation. It can help prepare them to use that new focus skill or focus behavior that's going to help them navigate the situation as successfully as possible. They are very effective in introducing many types of new skills and behaviors to children that might need that, again, more focused and turning the volume up, as I like to think about it, on some of the social atmosphere that might be going on for a child to help them learn.

There is a great video, if you haven't seen it yet, because we've actually shown it before. But if you haven't seen it yet, there's a great video on "Teacher Time" Community in MyPeers about how to make and how to use social stories for teaching purposes. We are going to show a video of one preschool educator using a social story to support a child in the learning environment. As we watch, share what you notice about what the teacher is using, how they're using the social story, or anything else that you notice in the Q&A.

[Video begins]

Teacher: Andy. Andy, not a big deal, okay?

[Children shouting indistinctly]

All right, Andy, check it out. You need to keep your hands and legs to yourself.

Andy: [Inaudible]

Teacher: And a calm voice.

Andy: It's too hard.

Teacher: Can you show me a calm voice like this? Hmm? Let's do one more.

Andy: I need some help.

Teacher: Look, Andy.

Andy: I need some help.

Teacher: If my friends do something I don't like, I can say, "Please."

Andy: Please.

Teacher: "Stop."

Andy: Stop.

Teacher: And get a teacher to help me.

Andy: I need some help.

Teacher: Well, what do you need help with, Andy?

Andy: That.

Teacher: You can use a calm voice and say, "Please stop."

Andy: Please stop!

Teacher: This is what we're good at, right, David?

[Video ends]

Gail: Well, I love that. That is a real situation. There's a busy, bustling classroom going on, and that teacher still has enough organizational support going on in that classroom to be able to go over and individualize the support for that young child. They are going through a social story, which the child is referencing with the teacher support, but eventually I think the child's able to use it independently on their own.

Again, if you want to know how to create social stories, or if you want some links to social stories, check out your viewer's guide. We've got lots of links to some social stories that you can use, such as using one for Tucker Turtle. There's also that video in MyPeers about how to get those set up.

Saameh: I see somebody in the chat who speaks so much to the relationship that the child has with the teacher, which, yes, as we can see how important that is to starting out, really building that relationship so the child is trusting the teacher to support.

Gail: Absolutely. And Roxanne's comment about being very calm and listening to the child, right, it just takes me back to what you had us do at the beginning. It takes a moment.

Saameh: Right.

Gail: You have to be mindful as an educator to be like, OK, there's a lot going on in the classroom. This child is really needing my support. Taking a deep breath and then walking them through it.

Saameh: Yeah.

Gail: It's great so that you can stay calm and support them. I love it

Saameh: Very important. Throughout this webinar, as you've noticed, we have been discussing ways to foster social emotional skills for all children. Today in our Focus on Equity segment, we're going to be using our equity lens to take a closer look at implicit bias and how it impacts how we interact with children and support them in building problem-solving and relationship skills.

The value that we place on peer relationships and the way we go about building and maintaining them are influenced by our families, our culture, our community, and our experiences. And sometimes subtle biases can interfere with our ability to support and partner with children and their families with an open mind. Uncovering these biases takes time and reflection.

What you may have noticed is that we paused and we took those reflective moments throughout this webinar today for reflective practice and starting to think about the following questions. These are ones that we've gone through today here at the webinar. What value do I place on peer relationships? How do I expect peers to act with each other? How do I feel about conflict? Do I listen openly to all children when there is a problem? Is there a child that I am more likely to make negative assumptions about when a problem involves that child?

It's really to take a moment to reflect on these things throughout our day or week or in certain situations. It can be really helpful to ask a friend, colleague, or coach to video record you during a time of day where there tends to be more conflict between children and then to watch that video and notice how you respond and interact with each child involved in a conflict. This is interesting because it reminds me of a puppet thing again. It's like taking a step outside and looking at yourself from the outside.

Gail: Yeah.

Saameh: It's kind of hard to see your own back is what somebody told me before.

Gail: Yeah.

Saameh: This is a way of doing that.

Gail: Yeah.

Saameh: And does every child receive the support and instruction they need?

Gail: That's right.

Saameh: We're going to wrap up with our BookCASE. This month, Dr. Gail Joseph had the chance to meet with our "Teacher Time" Librarian, Emily Small.

Gail: Yay.

Saameh: I'm so excited to hear about the books this month.

Gail: I got to go to the library. It's pretty fun.

Saameh: Oh, nice. Let's watch them make the CASE.

[Video begins]

Gail: Hi, everyone. It's time for one of our favorite segments, The BookCASE. And how lucky are we to have our very own "Teacher Time" Librarian, Emily Small.

Emily Small: Thanks for having me back.

Gail: We're so excited. This is just such a treat. Emily has brought a collection of fabulous books for us to talk about. And she's going to make the CASE for one of them. If you're new to "Teacher Time," let me just remind you what the CASE is.

The CASE really stands for an acronym for four strategies that are really helpful to help you maximize the learning you can get from children's books. C is for connect. We want to think about how we can connect the content or the characters or the story of the book to one of the ELOF outcomes. And the A is for advanced vocabulary.

We know that children love big words and finding big words in books is a great strategy to help support their growing vocabulary. S is to support their active engagement with the book reading. And E is to extend the learning beyond the book. Finding ways that you can keep that magic of the book alive. With that, tell us about the books you have.

Emily: The first one we have is "Luli and the Language of Tea." This book just came out in 2022. It is probably one of my favorites. It features some children that don't know each other because their families are going to an English language learning class. I also feel like we don't see that very often in picture books.

Gail: I've never seen it.

Emily: Luli is trying to connect with the other children in the space. And she discovers that tea is all a part of their culture. They have a tea party. It's just a great way for kids to learn that you are connected to others. And you just have to find that connection piece.

Gail: Love that. And the illustrations look amazing.

Emily: Yes.

Gail: So engaging.

Emily: We have "Amy Wu and the Warm Welcome." This is the third one in the "Amy Wu" series. Highly recommend them all. There's a new child in Amy's class who doesn't speak English. And Amy really wants him to feel welcome. You see the steps she takes to help the child feel welcome in class. It's a really great story.

Gail: Again, illustrations are beautiful. I don't even know this book and I want to read it.

Emily: Yes, I love how bright the colors are. Just like, yes, it draws you in immediately. We have "I Forgive Alex: A Simple Story About Understanding." This is a wordless picture book. Wordless books are fantastic to use for all families, but especially ones where English may not be their home language because anyone can tell a story in any language with a wordless book.

Gail: That is such a great strategy to bring in.

Emily: Yeah. I'll show you some of the photos. But basically it's a story of a child that accidentally ruins another child's artwork. It's just an accident and then the steps that are taken to rekindle that friendship.

Gail: It's such a beautiful story and I love it. Without words, but you can still tell the story.

Emily: Yes.

Gail: Great.

Emily: And for the CASE, we have "The Little Book of Friendship." This book is tiny but has so much great stuff in it.

Gail: Yay.

Emily: For the connection, it has really good concrete examples of how to be a good friend, how to make a friend, and then it even addresses when you're not getting along with your friends and those challenges that come up.

Gail: Which happens. A lot.

Emily: Yes, yes.

Gail: Great. Emily, for our A, our advanced vocabulary, we see words like bloom, grumpy, amazing, complimenting. We've got a lot of good emotion words.

Gail: Absolutely.

Emily: For our supporting engagement, this book asks a lot of questions. It would be great for people to pause while they're reading, maybe write them down so kids can reference them later.

Gail: Great strategy.

Emily: Then for our extend the learning, at the beginning it talks about making a friendship garden. And you could make a friendship garden in your classroom where they all work together to build a garden. Also taking photos of your own children in the classroom so that kids can reference back to them, maybe in a photo album or posting when they're having a hard time with friends.

Gail: Such a great way to make the CASE for this book, "The Little Book of Friendship." We hope you will find all these books at your local library.

Emily: Yes.

Gail: And bring them into your classroom.

Emily: Yeah.

Gail: Thanks for being with us.

Emily: Thanks for having me.

Saameh: Awesome. That was wonderful.

Gail: It was so fun to be in our "Teacher Time" Library.

Saameh: Thank you. That's about all we have time for today.

Gail: That's it.

Saameh: And thank you so much for joining us. Join us again next month for Responding to Challenging Behavior with Infants and Toddlers. And again in May for with Preschoolers. And bye for now. Thank you so much for being here with us.

Gail: See you on MyPeers. Take care.