

## Coaching to Support Friendship Skills and Problem-solving

Joyce Escorcia: Hello everyone. Welcome, and thank you for joining us for this season's third Coaching Corner webinar. Today we're going to be talking about coaching to support friendship skills and problem solving. I am Joyce Escorcia and I'm joined here by my colleague Sarah Basler, and we're so excited that you decided to spend this hour with us today. You're going to hear a little bit more from Sarah in just a few.

We are so, so excited that we have a friend of ours, Abby Taylor, here, and she's our guest expert on the spot today. She is a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University and Abby just has so much experience and knowledge with working with young children and she's going to share with us some of her favorite strategies, tips, and tricks related to supporting coaches to use those practices in their different learning environments. Abby's going to introduce herself and share a little bit more in just a few.

Before we dive into our content, we wanted to just take a second and draw your attention to the viewer's guide. It's in the resource widget that you see at the bottom of your screen. The viewer's guide just really gives you some helpful strategies, reflections, note taking space, video links for some practices, and a resource list. All the resources that we talk about today are going to be included in that viewer's guide. We really encourage you to download it and to use it throughout our time together for taking notes, just doing some reflecting about the topic and just planning how you want to use what you've learned from today. Be sure and check that out in the resource widget.

Here's how we're going to spend our time together today. We're going to discuss effective friendship skills and problem-solving practices that you can support a coachee to use with children and families. During our Mindful Moment time, we're going to have some conversation with Abby about how a coach can support a coachee to use these practices. And learn some tips from her just based on her experience in coaching coachees.

We're going to get in some coaching and practice even, and then during our Focus on Equity, we're going to talk about how to individualize or be on the lookout for ways to ensure all children are really getting equitable exposure and support to using those friendship skills and problem-solving skills. We're also going to draw your attention to, as always, our Koko's Corner in your viewer's guide. We're going to also connect with Koko at the end of our time together today.

As you know, if you've been with us throughout the season, this year Coaching Corner has really been focusing on social emotional development which is one of the domains in the Head Start Early Learning and Outcomes Framework, or ELOF. Our last webinar was focused on emotional literacy and self-regulation. If you missed it, no worries, you can watch a recording of that webinar by going to ECL's Push Play, which we'll mention more at the end of our time together, or also by going to the Coaching Corner webinar page on the ECLKC. Those are always available to you as well.

And again, just as a reminder for many, our each Coaching Corner webinar this season has been focusing in on PBC to support education staff using different tiers of the pyramid model as the effective practices. Just as a reminder, the pyramid model is that framework of evidence-based practices for promoting young children's healthy social and emotional development. The pyramid model really builds on a tiered public health approach by providing universal supports for children to promote wellness, and then targeted services to those who need more support. And then intensive services for those that also need that level of support.

In this webinar, we're focusing in on those friendship skills and problem solving, and that's going to be that tier two level of support. We encourage you if you want to know more about the pyramid model to check out the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations, or NCPMI website and there are links to NCPMI resources in the resource section of the viewer's guide. Be sure and make that connection if you want to know more that way.

Again, thanks for joining us and let's get the conversation started about friendship skills. Well first, we just want to hear from you. What do children do when they have strong friendship skills? And think about that and drop that in the Q&A. That's going to be that purple widget. You just want to share with us what you think that children do when they have those strong friendship skills. What does it look like, sound like, feel like whenever we see that happening with young children? I am going to pop up my Q&A here so I can see as things come through. There we go. I know some responses are coming in. And again, this could look different based on setting, culture, they play together. They play better together. They sure do.

Lee says, again, they play together, they greet each other. They're just, like, flying in now. Elizabeth said, the social skills. Margaret says empathy. A lot of answers coming in and just keep those coming in. While those are popping up, I just want to pop this list and all the things that you're sharing in the Q&A we see in this list that's popping up here. As you shared in the Q&A, there are different ways and a different variety of friendship skills that children might use in early childhood environments. And those skills were really very based on age of each individual child.

For example, like with infants and toddlers, we may see an adult modeling how to take turns with a toy or material while, say, if we're looking at 4-year-olds, we might see children taking turns more independently with toys and materials. It is also important to note, just thinking about culture that based on kind of culture, all, friendship skills, these things could look a little bit differently based on what's appropriate depending on folks' culture. Definitely wanted to point that out.

And then one common misconception is that adults may have is that children are either good or are good at being a friend, or maybe they're not. And the truth is that friendship skills are really complex and require just explicit and intentional teaching from adults, just like any other skill we may expect children to learn in early childhood setting. That includes helping infants and toddlers learn those foundational friendship skills. No, this is kind of those muscles and those skills that we work on and build. This is something that starts at an early age as well.

The power of friendship is so, so important and we know when children form those friendships, they have positive influence on just child development in general. Just the development of things like self-confidence to academic success, to positive relationships in adulthood. We can see how the power of friendship and those friendship skills really lay that foundation for those other things as they grow and later on in life.

Now, let's think about problem solving. Problem solving is another way to think about using friendship skills. The term problem solving is used widely in early childhood, and it can refer to math, cognitive skills, as well as social skills. Today and within the pyramid model framework, we're referring to social problem solving, which really occurs between children when a problem arises. That could be, like, when one child wants a car that another child is playing with, or one child may want another child to stop touching his paper at the art table.

All of these are big problems that happen. When these problems arise, we hope that children are able to come up with an appropriate response, like asking them when — somebody to stop, or for waiting for a turn. But the truth is that this just doesn't always just happen without some intentional teaching and modeling involved in there. Or even often the case that children know how to do this without additional support or explicit teaching of those skills.

Again, these things don't just happen. When social problems arise for infants and toddlers who don't yet have the ability to problem solve on their own, they need even more support from a trusted adult to walk them through social problem solving. This may look like using problem solving vocabulary, narrating what the problem is and the solution to the problem. It could be something like, "Uh oh, we have a problem. Francisco and Tobias both want the ball." Maybe, "what if we get another ball for you, Francisco, and we can all play?" All of those things are what make up problem solving.

We wanted to pop in and again just ask you what skills do children need to be successful at problem solving? And again, use the Q&A to let us know what are some of those skills that you think children need to be able to be successful at problem solving. I'm going to give just a minute for our Q&A to pop up a little bit. I see folks beginning to put things in there. And again, what does that look like and feel like when thinking about those skills. What do children need to be successful with problem solving. Oh, here they come popping in. I think my Q&A was just a little bit delayed because it, like, bam, all of a sudden it all came in.

Self-regulation, good language skills. Michelle says good language skills again. Frederick says patience. Yes, we all need a little bit more patience. And, as you can see, what we've popped up here aligns just beautifully with what folks are providing in the chat. Again, thank you for putting those ideas in there. Many skills are needed for children to be successful at problem solving. Using friendship skills and problem solving is hard. It's complex and children need to be taught other skills first.

Some of the skills children must know to do before they can problem solve are things like, initiate and respond to others, play with others, being able to identify their emotions, regulate emotions, identify the problem, identify possible solutions. All of those things really come into being good at problem solving. These are, like, the building blocks that help problem solving to happen in a good way. Again, thanks for all of your responses there. Now that we've set the stage for the practices that we'll be talking about today, we'd like to really dive in to show how to support coachees to use those practices in their learning environment. And for that, I'm going to pop it over to Sarah.

Sarah Basler: Thanks Joyce. That was really helpful background info about the complexity, the importance of friendship skills and problem solving. Now we're going to move into the Mindful Moment and I'm so excited that we have our guest expert, Abby Taylor, here with us today. Abby, will you tell us a little bit about yourself.

Abby Taylor: Sure. Thanks for having me. I am a doctoral candidate at Vanderbilt, like Joyce mentioned at the beginning, with an emphasis in early childhood. Before I returned to graduate school, I was a teacher of both preschoolers and toddlers in inclusive classrooms. Then I went on to be a coach for teachers in early childhood programs on several different grants related to the Pyramid Model and Embedded Instruction.

But my personal work and research focuses a lot on teaching young children social skills like problem solving, promoting social emotional development through coaching teachers, and then promoting equity in Early Childhood classrooms. I'm excited to be here with you all today.

Sarah: Great. The perfect person — our perfect expert to talk about friendship and problem solving today. Let's go ahead and dive in. What friendship skills do you recommend that coachees teach first? Where should they start?

Abby: That's a great question and I think one that many people brought up some of these in the chat earlier to one of the Q&A's. But we really need to make sure that we're supporting children to learn how to get someone's attention, like tapping on the shoulder or saying a peer's name, giving a turn or giving a toy or material to another child. Asking for a turn, so saying, "Can I have that please," or, "My turn, that kind of initiation." And then conversational turn taking where you're listening to a peer's question or statement and then giving a response to that question or statement. Really being able to go back and forth in that conversation.

Sarah: The strategies that you mentioned feel mostly geared to teachers and family child care providers. Just thinking about often in the home environment, there might not be multiple children where you have to take turns. But these are something that a coachee might suggest parents teach their child when thinking about friendship skills.

These strategies really make me think of a great resource it's called the Peer-Mediated Strategies and it's listed in the resource guide in the viewers guide. And it would be a great place for you to start with a coachee who's looking at teaching specific practices to the children that they're working with. It's a really great resource that comes — it actually has step-by-step

instructions for how you would teach the skills, and also it's laid out in a way where the skills build upon each other and there's nice visuals that go with it. These are some practices you're thinking that the coachees – the children in your coachee's either classroom or the children that they're working with in the home might need some support, that would be a great resource to tap into.

Those were some really great ideas, but I know that many of our listeners might be supporting families of infants and toddlers, or they might have teachers and family child care providers who work with infants and toddlers. What does teaching friendship look like for infants and toddlers?

Abby: A lot of this goes back to adults being able to model. This might look like adults using a friendship skill near infants, or maybe using some gentle physical support for toddlers to practice getting someone's attention appropriately. For infants and the skill of giving a turn, you might just situate two infants next to each other and when one is done with a toy, the adult might just say something like, "you're finished with the drum, let's give your friend a turn, while passing the drum."

Really the adult is walking through that process but the infants are there, seeing it, and hopefully just experiencing that modeling. And then for toddlers, that might actually look like helping them practice giving materials to a peer by maybe having them be responsible for making sure everyone has a material. Does everyone have a paintbrush in the art area today or does everyone have a cup at the lunch table. Really helping them practice those skills.

Sarah: And I was thinking about what this might look like for coachees that have children with suspected delays or disabilities.

Abby: Absolutely. I think that's really critical to think about and have a plan for. I think the number one thing I would help coaches identify is times of day when you could provide opportunities to practice a skill. When can you get some repeated exposure to a skill in. It might just be a few opportunities and just take a couple of minutes, but really planning for that time and being ready to provide that systematic prompting to that child. What level of prompting is the child going to need to find success with that skill and being prepared to provide that while you're practicing.

I think the other thing is when children are first learning these social skills, it's really important to try to be sure the skills are effective. Does using the skill work for the child, and so making sure that if the child asks nicely, can we find a way to make sure that the child gets the toy they're asking for when they're first learning how to use that skill. Those are the three main things I would make sure to plan for with coachees around individualized instruction.

Sarah: Those even sound like they would be things that you would want to support a coachee to use with all children. Like, supporting them to make sure that what they're trying is successful, and giving feedback when they use the skill, and that repeated exposure. And one thing that you said made me think – I think often we think about friendship skills and problem

solving being skills that need to be practiced at, like, center time or maybe during play time or free play. But there's really other opportunities throughout the day that you can practice those skills. And I think that we need to be mindful of that, that turn taking can happen at mealtimes and at times that you wouldn't necessarily think about.

Abby: Absolutely, being creative about times. I also think especially when you're providing some individualized instruction, transitions can be a good time to pop down and work with a child on practicing a skill just a few times. It helps pass the transition for the child and it makes that otherwise that time when the child might just be waiting for something, makes it maybe more productive.

Sarah: Awesome. Those are great ideas. We talked a lot about what skills we might try first. What can a coach do to support coachees with these practices? What's their role in all of this?

Abby: I think the coach is really critical in helping a coachee think about so the age of the child or children the coachee is working with and what's developmentally appropriate for children to be doing at that age. Making sure that we're not expecting 18 months old to be problem solving, but that we are laying the groundwork by teaching them maybe some of those very preliminary friendship skills.

And it could be that the skills a coachee or family might want to focus on teaching the child or children could be too advanced. Really making sure you're having that conversation with coaches. Then the coach can sort of reflect with the family or the coachee to talk about what's a more foundational skill that we can try. If you're curious about what that would be, you could use the ELOF, which is a great resource to help identify the skill that's going to come in that developmental trajectory to identify where a child might be in that progression.

But another thing is that it might be helpful for the coach to notice what skills could benefit the children in that learning environment. Looking at, the coach is doing their observation and they notice, oh, children really seem to be trying to get toys from one another. Helping a coachee reflect on what type of skill might help children in that scenario could be really helpful. But young children really develop so quickly. Noticing, like, how children are approaching other kids, but maybe they look like they don't know what to do and so guiding a coachee to reflect on, oh, we could teach a child what to do when they approach another child, could be really helpful.

And make that action plan and a goal that you're working on with that coachee really productive for the learning environment for the children and for the coachee. But I also think coaches can model the language we use with children and help coachees really plan for what to say in those moments. Be really intentional about, if I am going to model this social skill for children, what does that actually sound like? And coaches can really help coachees have a plan for that. Then the other thing which I think we sort of already alluded to is just noticing and planning for the times of day when you can build and practice around these skills, whether that's in the home, whether that's in family child care, really having intentional times of day when we're going to try to practice.

Sarah: And that makes me think, too. You mentioned modeling, but it sounds like role play would also be a good strategy to prepare with the coachee for delivering these – using this vocabulary, practicing what they might say in the moment. Because I imagine that for some coachees, this could be difficult to think about, teaching friendship in such a really intentional and discrete way. It feels a little different. They have to think about it a little bit more.

Abby: Yeah, I do think role-playing or actually scripting out what you're going to say can be really helpful. It's something I did when I first started teaching problem solving, was, like, exactly what am I going to say and then how am I going to respond to the child. I think that could be really useful.

Sarah: Awesome. Now, before we move out of this segment, I want to know what's one thing that you just really want our viewers to know about friendship skills and problem solving?

Abby: I think that friendship skills really lead very nicely into the problem-solving skills. They're very complex, but if you break them down into smaller skills like narrating the intention of another child – for young toddlers, or getting a peer's attention, or asking for a turn and toy – modeling turn taking, giving a toy and receiving a toy.

You really start to – once you start to build those really discrete skills, you start to build a repertoire of skills that really lend themselves well to problem solving, and then allow for a child to have the skills to be able to access some great solutions to social problems. I know you said one thing, but I also think that sometimes we expect children to just learn these skills or sort of absorb them, and then wait for there to be a problem before we teach these skills. But children are so new to socialization, to interacting with others, and we're here to teach them these skills.

We always have to just understand and go in it with the idea that they're learning, and we don't expect mastery, but just practice and progress. And that if we start really young, this can prevent many problems from arising if we help children develop these skills early on. We just want to make sure that we're building this culture of caring and friendship and respect that can start in infancy.

Sarah: Yeah. I feel like that I started younger with my 2-year-old son around problem solving, mainly because of the age that my older son is. But I think that it really primed him to be able to problem solve a little easier. Like, he's starting to already problem solve and I feel like he's ahead of where Harrison was at that age, just simply because I was using the language and I was more intentional about embedding that at home. I agree that children are never too young to start using the language, teaching these skills.

Abby: Absolutely.

Sarah: Now we're going to move into Coaching and Practice. We've got a case example here of a teacher that is using problem solving in the moment. We're going to take a look at that and practice with a focus observation. We see this goal here. This is for Sandra and she's a

preschool teacher and her coach is Hana. And Sandra wanted to work on problem solving in the moment and supporting children to come up with solutions to their problems.

Here's the goal: I will support children to problem solve in the moment by helping them to identify the problem and talk through possible solutions. I will remain close to support children until there is a resolution. As you watch, take notes in your viewer's guide of what you're noticing Sandra doing. Is she using the strategies from her action plan? How are the children responding to those strategies? Notice if she's using any materials, and we'll take a look at her in action.

[Video begins]

Sandra: How do you feel when Akari is trying to get you wet? [Speaking Spanish]

Child 1: Triste.

Sandra: Te gusta? No, oh, so [Speaking Spanish]. You're sad when Akari tries to wet you. Akari, how do you feel when Berenicia tells you that you're fea? How does it make you feel?

Child 1: Sad.

Sandra: It makes you sad. You know what? Akari's sad when you call her fea, and you're sad when she tries to wet you. What can we do? [Speaking Spanish]? So we can both be happy? Ah, you gave each other a hug. Do you want to tell her please call me Akari, that's my name? Tell her. Tell her please call me Akari.

Child 2: [Speaking Spanish].

Sandra: [Speaking Spanish].

Child 2: [Speaking Spanish].

Sandra: Okay, and then you can tell her what? [Speaking Spanish].

Child 2: Yo [inaudible].

Sandra: [Speaking Spanish]. What can you tell her about her wetting you? You can tell her, Stop, I don't like that. Okay? Tell her, Akari, please don't wet me, I don't like that.

Child 1: No, no no like it.

Sandra: Good for you. All right, it looks like you guys gave each other a hug, so I think you took care of things.

Child 3: Ms. [inaudible].

Sandra: Yes.

[Video ends]

Sarah: Now let's reflect on what we just observed. You will have the opportunity to share your reflections in the Q&A, so type in some of the things that you noticed and I'm going to pop up some prompts to think about what you noticed.

The first prompt is: Was Sandra implementing her goal? Was she successful and how do you know? While we're waiting for some of those responses to come in, Abby, Joyce, what were some of the things that you noticed?

Abby: I definitely think that she was successful at working towards and meeting her goals. She was in close proximity with them. She helped them identify the problem. And that help even give some words where they didn't quite have them just yet to talk about, like, the solution or just to verbalize it.

Joyce: I love that she met each child where they were at. She was ready to support that problem when it was in the moment, just like her goal states, but that she got down on their level and used prompts when the child needed additional prompts with what to say. And I love that she switched back and forth between Spanish and English in a way that helped the child understand what she was describing.

Sarah: Let's see. We've got some. It says Sandra spoke in a calm voice. She identified the problem. Oh my goodness, they're coming in fast now.

Her approach was positive and identified each kid's needs, which is what you mentioned, Abby, but I think is so important because I think sometimes with problem solving, we turn someone into the bad guy sometimes and unintentionally, like, you are the one that caused the problem, but here it didn't feel like either child – she was just trying to work them through it without placing any blame. She helped them understand what the other children – other child was feeling. Let's see. She was calm. She took time to support, got down on the level. Proximity, which I think is really important. Yeah. Let's see if there's anything else.

Abby: Yeah, I think you said this already, that it came through in the chat. But thinking about it sounded like your last webinar around emotions and regulation. You can really see that the teacher is labeling emotions in this, and that there's such a strong connection between some of those skills being regulated before you can problem solve. And you really see the teacher guiding the children through that in this example.

Sarah: Yeah. And one thing I don't know that I don't know if I noticed. Maybe it's in the chat but it got a little busy in the chat there. But one thing I think is important that we often do on accident, it's she didn't solve the problem for them. She let them work through it, which I think that sometimes as adults we want to be the fixer and we want to solve everything, and then we take away the autonomy of the kids sometimes unintentionally. And it takes some practice to step back and let them walk them through that process.

Joyce: Yeah, and that's how that reminds me of talking about like waiting for giving kids a chance to respond. Like, I remember somewhere I read that it was allow like three to five seconds before, like, we come in with the answer and I thought this is a beautiful example because, like, as a fixer and to my fellow fixers out there, the tendency is, like, well, this is a problem and this is how we fix it, and we're all good now. But the, like, this approach is really about, like, building capacity and helping them to own that themselves. I love that you pointed that out.

Sarah: Yeah, giving them — I like that you said that, too, the building capacity. Because if adults are always fixing their problem, then they don't have a need to fix it. Someone's going to fix it for them.

Abby: Yeah.

Sarah: What suggestions do people have for Sandra? Was there anything that maybe you noticed Sandra maybe could do differently or anything that you might suggest? Materials or anything that you might suggest Sandra use? You can pop those responses in the Q&A and while we're waiting for those to come up, let's see what you think, Joyce and Abby?

Joyce: Well, I'll just say I think Jan in the Q&A, she must have known right where we were going because she had already popped in there that one of her suggestions was using those visual cards, thinking about for children who are dual language learners. And say if Sandra didn't speak their language, to be able to use visual cue cards to help support them with that same thing without being able to speak their language. I thought that was a great suggestion as well.

Abby: Yeah, I think visuals are great for individualized support and when teaching problem solving, I would have visuals available for all the kids to use as a universal support. Because children aren't — it's hard to hold all the possible solutions in your head, especially as a 3- or 4-year-old. Having those visuals available on the playground and in the classroom and at home, all the different places can be really helpful.

Sarah: Yeah. Well, I'm not seeing a whole lot of responses from — for what she — they might do differently except I am seeing a lot of adding visuals.

Joyce: We got a shoutout for the solution cards from the Pyramid materials there.

Abby: Yeah, those are great, and you can just get them and download them. It's easy. They come in different languages and you can send them home as well. There's sets for the classrooms, sets for the home environment. One thing that I think goes along with using visuals that I might support Sandra around is thinking about how to move towards a little bit more independence for the children. It's great to provide a verbal prompt in exactly the language the child needs to use when they're first learning, and then how do we move towards more independence.

That might be giving the visuals without – and waiting to see, or giving a choice of two solutions. And then maybe even helping the children think about, well, what happens when we use the solution? Did this one work, and really reflecting on the problem-solving process sort of after-the-fact. Oh, it looks like it worked to say please stop. That's great, our problem solving worked. Kind of completing that instructional sort of cycle with the children.

Sarah: Yeah, I like that suggestion, too, because I think sometimes we think, oh, we've solved our problem, we're all done. The reflection is a really key piece to making sure that it lands and they are aware of, hey, we walked through these steps, did it feel like it worked for you? It did and reflecting on how it felt.

That's a really great strategy to use and sometimes it's better to reflect because sometimes emotions are heightened during the whole process and it's hard to really think about that as it's happening. Reflecting later, they might be able to really be able to think about the whole process more in the moment.

All right, we're going to move on to our Focus on Equity segment, and we have a couple more questions that we wanted to ask Abby. And we'll just go ahead and get started. Thanks to everyone who responded in the Q&A. Those were great thoughts and suggestions. Okay, what are some things a coach should be observing for to ensure that these practices are being supported equitably in the learning environment? What should a coach be on the lookout for?

Abby: Yeah, this is really important I think to observe to see if coachees are first of all creating a foundational environment that fosters that caring and respect among peers and with families. Making sure that we value all ways of initiating to each other and all ways of communicating with one another. And that we're not highlighting overly identifying children who maybe have clearer friendship skills than others as – and over relying on them to be peer models and that sort of thing, but that we're really valuing where all children are at in this learning trajectory.

The other thing I think that is important to think about is identifying what each child needs to make sure that they're getting what they need related to these skills. And that might look different for each child. Children come in with different types of skills but are adults really supporting each child to build on the strength that they came to your learning environment with.

For coachees working with families, that might be helping parents identify what their child's current strengths are. How do they initiate currently, and maybe how do we want to teach them to initiate, for example. But the important part about equity is not that every child is getting the same instruction, but that every child is getting the instruction they need to be able to practice the skills that they need to be successful in social interactions and in the learning environment. That's what's really critical about focusing on equity here.

If you see a child who's exhibiting challenging behavior, you really want to determine – around social interactions, you want to determine what skills that child might need and that might be related to social skills, friendship skills. In group care, adults could be promoting friendship skills

with most of the children, but there might be one or two children who aren't getting the level of instruction they need and therefore appear to be having behavioral challenges that come up. But if we're providing the level of support that each child needs, then you should see some of those challenges lessen over time.

And for home-based settings, coachees can really support parents to observe what skills a child might need to be successful in the types of social interactions and problem solving that occur in their home and during their group socialization. When they have family gatherings, when they go to the park, how can families support their child to practice those social interactions. And also in ways that align with the family. With the family's values around social skills. It's really important to be having these conversations with coaches about whether each child is really getting what they need to be successful in their social interactions.

Sarah: Yeah, I love that reminder, because I think so often we think, oh, I've taught friendship skills, or I've taught them problem solving, but maybe it's that we need to think about how to do it in a different way, or more intentional, or more practice for some children.

Abby: Absolutely.

Sarah: How can a coachee be sure that they are being culturally responsive about a family's values related to friendship and problem solving?

Abby: That's a great question. I think it's really important to make sure that the solutions and friendship skills – and I sort of already alluded to this, but that you decide to teach are culturally relevant and important to each child in your group or to the families you work with in a home-based setting.

For example, children greet their families with a certain type of greeting so that might be the type of greeting that you choose to use in the classroom, or in your family child care. Or knowing the skills that are valued by the family before suggesting skills during a home visit. Really asking families, okay, how do you want your child to ask for a turn? What do you want them to say, how can they communicate that they want to turn, or that they need help, or really getting the family's input about that before you come in and say, we need to teach your child how to ask for a toy. You want to make sure that that is valued to the family and that language that you're using is appropriate for their family.

Yeah, I think the other thing you can do around problem solving is gather input from families about the types of social problems children face at home. That might be with what types of materials or toys the children come in – are interacting with and try to incorporate that into the coachee's instruction or what the coachee might suggest to the parents around problem solving. If the children – the child who the coachee is supporting at home maybe has difficulty with their sibling around deciding what to play, and so they really disagree on what to play but they want to play together.

Well, you can help the – or the coachee can help the family decide, okay, what does the child need to learn to navigate that solution. And that's one way to make sure that the solutions and the skills we're trying to support the coachee to teach children or teach families to teach children aligns with what the child actually needs in their environment. In a group setting, if you have a few children who really like playing games at home but the family members tell you they don't know how to take turns, well, then you can build in turn taking in your group setting, in your family child care setting, to help them practice that skill because that will help them then when they go home.

That's another way to make sure that children, again, are learning the skills that are going to be valuable and relevant to them in their natural environment. Some families might expect to share where other, the - the skill of sharing toys while other families don't. Gathering input and having that open and ongoing communication so that you can use that information to inform what friendship skills you teach is going to be critical to being culturally responsive.

And to being respectful to families' values around that. I taught problem solving to some siblings and the family didn't find it important to give the toy right away. Like if you ask for the toy, you might have to wait. One of the solutions they wanted their children to have was to wait for a turn. And that might not be a solution in another family, but it was for them, that sometimes we just have to wait our turn. Asking the family allowed me to know that and incorporate that into that instruction. And it was really important to aligning with their values.

Sarah: Yeah. I love these suggestions because I think sometimes we forget to include the family and gather input, and it can be so valuable to know how to – what to teach and what's important. All right, well, we did have a couple questions that popped into the chat that I think we want to ask before we move on. There was a question that came in about are there group activities that we can suggest that teachers can do to build some of these skills. Friendship, problem solving, what are some group activities that you would suggest?

Yeah, having some story problems or I call them vignettes, like, little thing – little problems – social problems that are common where you can have puppets and have children role play between, like, what to do when you have this problem.

The rabbit puppet says, like, I want the toy that you have, or whatever, and then the turtle puppet says, well, that's a problem, let's get our solution kit. And then looking at the solutions together and really role playing. You would start by having the coachee do that and model that for children, and then you would give the puppets to the children and have the children practice identifying solutions with one another.

That's one activity that can be used I think a lot while children are learning problem solving with different levels of support. Starting with the coachee modeling it, and then the children practicing using the visuals to make sure they have options for what types of solutions to use. And I think the same thing is true for friendship skills.

We want to make sure we model the Coaching models, and then the children get opportunities to practice where we can show visuals and provide prompting, and then we support them in the moment when these things arise. And prompt them and provide that support in the moment and provide that descriptive feedback.

I guess that's a couple different ideas. I'm trying to think of others. Reading books that have social problems come up is also a great way to have conversations with children about common problems that characters in the book face and what we can do about them. There's just a couple.

Sarah: I noticed in my son's class, they started pulling out, like, board games, and although that's not like a whole group, but those are some opportunities to where kids have to take turns and work together. And I thought that was interesting, because if you've ever played a board game with a young child, there's lots of problems that pop up. But it's a good -

Abby: Yeah, and I don't think it – absolutely – and I don't think it needs to even be a board game. You can have children have a common goal. Friendship activities, like putting a big piece of paper on the table and saying, yeah, we can go to art but we're going to do art together today on the same piece of paper, or we're going to build a tower together. Like, let's build the same tower and add animals to it.

That's a great way to practice friendship skills and usually some problems arise in those activities, too, where you can prompt some problem solving. Having planned buddy time or sort of time where it's intentional that they have to work together or do the activity together. That's a great one. That's a great example, Sarah.

Sarah: And I want to - oh, go ahead, Joyce.

Joyce: Oh, no, no. I was just going to say I love, like, the tiered strategies and ideas there. Because it's, because there might be some things, like, you might want to, like, pull out the book or use the puppets like to build those foundations of having the conversations. That's, like, a lower stakes way of talking about that even maybe before you pull out the board game. Or there's only one ball in the room, you know? That's a little higher stake, a lot more emotions involved. I like those different tiered approaches. I like those ideas because I'm just thinking of my 2-year-old and it gets - those feelings get intense real quick, you know?

Abby: You have to be ready for them.

Sarah: You mentioned scenario - like, problem solving and scenarios and I did just want to highlight that in the viewer's guide in the resource list, there are links to the We Can Be Problem Solvers social story or scripted story, and there's one for we can be problem solvers in the home, and it's – there's that – a resource for a group setting or in the home and in that resource, it includes some of those picture cards with scenarios that you could use role play, act it out, have children act out the scenarios. Want to give a little plug to a resource that could help with that. Thank you so much.

Joyce: Sarah, one question that just popped up. I think it's a nice way to start coming back into the end of our time together. But Judy said it's best to start supporting children who have some skills or who are struggling. Basically, like, when is the best time to start I guess supporting or working on these skills? Like, is it ever too early really, to start this.

Abby: Yeah, I mean, I really don't think it's ever too early as long as you're figuring out where children are at and teaching that next proximal skill. And that you can use the ELOF standards for that. Making sure that a child can initiate and respond or has a communication device for being able to do that. I'm trying to think of what else I would suggest about that. Can you repeat a little – the end of your question? I'm sorry.

Joyce: Yeah, let me pull it up right here. Is it best to start supporting with children who have some skills or with those who are kind of struggling?

Abby: Yeah, I think that I see teaching social skills as sort of a universal thing that we need to do. We need to be introducing friendship skills and problem solving to all children in the environment. And then we need to make sure that individual children who need more targeted instruction around those skills receive extra practice or the level of support they need to find success with this skill. I guess it's a both/and.

Joyce: We like those kind of -

Abby: I hope that helps.

Sarah: There was one more - okay, one more question and then we're going to wrap it up. But there was one that said how do you correspond with families who take offense to the feedback that you give them? I'm assuming that came from when you give feedback related to maybe social skills that they might should try, or how might that – how much you handle a situation like that?

Abby: That's a great question. I think that starting with the child's strengths usually helps take the defensiveness edge off a little bit. What is the child already doing that's letting you know that they're maybe ready for that next social skill, to really build on, I noticed that your infant is maybe, like, going, Ah!, to get your attention or something like that.

Maybe the next skill that we might want to teach them is a sign for getting your attention. Or I noticed that your toddler is really great at letting you know when they want their favorite toy, and so what do you think your toddler might be able to learn to be able to let you know that in a more, I don't know, appropriate way or in a way that would work for you. And then letting the family guide what that looks like in their home. And that usually helps I think put – give them some choice in it.

But we want our toddler to say it like this or we want – and then you can – that also helps you be able to say, well, toddlers might not learn to use full sentences until they're closer to, until they're a little bit older but we could start by teaching them this. And that I feel like usually helps give the power back to the family around that.

Sarah: It goes back to, yes, some of what we talked about in this last section, like getting their input. But I like how you mentioned, like, starting with strengths of the child, too, to take the edge off. Great. Thank you so much. This has been awesome. You are a wealth of knowledge and I've learned so much about friendship skills and problem solving. Thank you so much for being here today. I'm going to turn it over to Joyce -

Abby: Thank you for having me.

Sarah: - to wrap us up.

Joyce: Definitely. Thank you and thank you Abby. Well, we just want to point out Koko. Koko is our Head Start Coaching Companion mascot, and if you take a look in your viewer's guide, Koko has some information there about Creating Focused Observation and the Head Start Coaching Companion. Just follow those QR codes to watch some of those Quick Start videos, learn a little bit more about Koko and Head Start Coaching Companion.

And as always, we just want to say thank you for joining us today and spending your hour with us. Please feel free to continue that conversation in My Peers. We always look forward to your questions and input there. And again, just a big thank you from your Coaching Corner crew and we'll see you on My Peers.