

Professional Boundaries in Work with Expectant Families and Infants, Toddlers, and their Families

Dana: Good day, everyone, and welcome to the Professional Boundaries conference call. Today's conference is being recorded. At this time I would like to turn the call over to Amanda Perez. Please go ahead.

Amanda Perez: Thank you so much, Dana; and hello out there to everyone. On behalf of the Early Head Start National Resource Center, I want to welcome you to today's audio conference: Professional Boundaries in Work with Expectant Families and Infants, Toddlers, and their Families. We are so happy to have you with us today, and we've been really struck by the interest in this topic. Over 2,000 people registered for today's audio conference. So, that includes program staff from all over the country, federal staff, and training and technical assistance providers as well.

We are particularly thinking today of folks in the Northeast and in the coastal towns all up and down the Atlantic, the folks in the Caribbean, and all of those affected by this week's storms. We are holding you and your communities in mind and are so grateful for the work that you do to support children, families, and communities – all of you – in times of calm and in times of crisis as well. Thank you for being there for them, and also for being here today.

If you know folks who might want to hear this call at a later time, as Dana said, this call is being recorded and will eventually be posted on the ECLKC. So I want to direct everyone's attention to the supplemental materials that we sent registrants by fax or by email. You'll see that the objectives are listed on page 1 there; and on the second and third pages are faculty bios and photos. We have some incredible faculty here today and I want to give them a chance to introduce themselves so you – you all can connect those names with the voices and the faces and the expertise.

And we're going to start with Angie Godfrey, Infant/Toddler Program Specialist at the Office of Head Start. Angie, we are so glad that you're with us today.

Angie Godfrey: Thank you, Amanda. I am so glad to be here today. This is such an important topic, as evidenced by the number of people who have signed up for it. And I just want to welcome everyone on behalf of the Office of Head Start and thank you for coming. We know how important this work is. Our goal always is to support the development of very young children and the support of families in the context of relationships. And we know how hard that work is and how much responsibility we all have to ensure that there are professional boundaries that are – that are a foundation of the relationships we build with families. So thank you, everyone, for being here today.

Amanda: It's so wonderful to have you with us, Angie. Thanks for being here. Becky Carter-Steel?

Becky Carter-Steel: Thank you, Amanda. This is Becky Carter-Steel. I work at an Early Head Start program that's part of the University of Nevada, Reno. And we serve families in both a home-based and center-based option. We have 34 families in our home-based option that are through Early Head Start funding; and we just received funding to do 30 more families through the Maternal Infant Education Home Visiting Program. So we're very excited about that. And in our center-based, we serve 104 children at four different sites and have a relationship with our Washoe County school district to serve young parents in our high school settings.

Amanda: Lots of different settings there in Reno, Becky. Thank you for being here. Janet Humphreys?

Janet Humphreys: Thanks, Amanda. What an incredible pleasure it is to be here with you today. I'm Janet Humphreys. I'm currently the early childhood education specialist for the American Indian/Alaskan Native Head Start Training and Technical Assistance Network with FHI360 working with Head Start and Early Head Start programs in North and South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, and Colorado, where I've been providing training and technical assistance for the last eight years. And now, very honored to be with the tribal program.

So the rural-ness and, actually more often, the frontier-ness of this great region has lead me to experience all type of program options where staff can very easily feel that they are the only help available to families and thus experience some real boundary challenges, which of course lead me to do a lot of research on it and do quite a bit of training with the programs in these rural areas, helping them understand setting boundaries as well as establishing systems of support for those working in the helping field. Thanks again.

Amanda: Janet, we're thrilled to have you and that particular expertise that you bring. Thanks for being here. Anntoinette McKee?

Anntoinette McKee: Good afternoon. My name is Anntoinette McKee. I'm currently the Early Head Start deputy director here in the Midwest at Next Door Foundation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. We service in our home-based – Early Head Start home-based option 202 families. Within our entire Early Head Start program option, we actually have 66 center-based families in which we service. And with our entire organization, Head Start charter school Educare as well as Early Head Start, we service over 600 families here at our center.

I have over 20 years of experience in working with home visiting programs, and some magnitude of prenatal care, child development, as well as fatherhood and staff development. I'm very, very honored for everyone that is on the – the call this morning and very much passionate about high quality Early Head Start and Head Start programming that truly focuses on engaging the entire family – the mom, the father, as well as the child. Thank you, Amanda. Thank you, Angie.

Amanda: Anntoinette, we're thrilled to have you. Thank you for being here as well. So we're going to begin here by talking about the Standards, and the ones that are most relevant to this audio conference

are listed in your handouts on page 4. As you all know, the Standards don't use that term – professional boundaries – but in your materials we've listed a few Standards that touch on this idea of boundaries and help us define them a little bit. Angie, from a Standards perspective, what do you see here?

Angie: Well, again, thank you, Amanda. And it was great to listen to all of you talk about the work that you're doing because I know that the work that we all do is founded in Standards and I think those of us that work in Head Start and Early Head Start are fortunate that we have so – so many Standards that provide us structure that allows us to do the work that families need us to do with them. And I'm always grateful for the Standards, and there are a few here. There could be many more. But if you look at page 4 we'll start with personnel policy, 1301.31. And again, as with all personnel and with all of the practices and procedures in your program, it's so important to have written policies that define expectation.

We know, as we said earlier, the importance of enrolling families in a program and then serving their needs while at the same time building a relationship of trust with families. And when you're able to hire the appropriate staff, to give them training, to provide supervision – when all of those are in your personnel policies then they really are a foundation of how you get to those relationships with families that really do support families in a structure with professional boundaries. So, I think 1301.31 is a great foundation.

And 1304.40 – all of 1304.40 are some of my favorite Standards because they really do provide the structure for how we work with families and how we support families. In (a)(1), family goal setting is certainly a key to that. It's the ability to establish mutual trust and identify family goals, strengths, necessary services, and other supports. And how do you do that? One of the things is we know this is that this is not just the responsibility of one person working with a family but of the entire program's response and relationship with that family.

And then the others are human resources management. And I know – I'm just going to mention the 1304.5 briefly because I know that the faculty on this call will bring to life what the challenges are of hiring the right person for the right job and then supporting them so they become stronger in their work. And providing a system of structure that is an organizational structure that includes supervision and reflective supervision and that really includes professional development for staff, and that shows what the expectations are for staff.

We know that it's very hard work we're going to be talking about over the next hour and a half, and it's also great expectations that are – that we all have for the work, for ourselves, and for the families we work with. And again, I think there are many more Standards, but this gives you a good foundation to think about the work. To know the Standards will set a structure, will set a foundation, for you to move forward in your work focused on families and focused on how to support each other to work with very young children.

So it's just a brief overview, Amanda; but again, if folks have other questions later, I'd be glad to add more. So, thank you. I'm excited to listen now.

Amanda: Thank you, Angie. We're thrilled to hear from you at the beginning here and – and we're glad that you're going to be on the line with us, particularly for that Q&A time. I do want to call everybody's attention to the principles listed for you on page 5 and 6 of your handout. If you've done a couple of these audio conferences with us before, you know that we like to do these principles and that we often start with this first one, which is start with the Standards. It's really helpful to have Angie here talking about this foundational place to start. Thank you so much.

So as we think about boundaries, they have something to do with the way that responsibilities and roles are defined, I think, as Angie was describing, and we'll talk more about that in a second. And as we think about the importance of boundaries, I think we see a really broad impact. So we heard from Angie, Janet, that the concept of mutual trust in 1304 is so important, for example. Janet, can you talk a little bit about the importance of boundaries to mutual trust in a staff-family relationship?

Janet: Sure. Well, one definition that a peer of mine found a while ago as we developed a presentation on boundaries is on your handout, and it goes like this: "Limits which protect the space between the professional's power and the family's vulnerability." This is by Peterson, 1982. I really love this because we're working with such a vulnerable population that can so easily be intimidated with the power our positions represent to them, even if we don't feel powerful or consciously extend that power in any way. And this perceived power can really seriously impede our ability to establish those trusting relationships with families that do require those attuned responses to their needs just as we offer to our youngest children.

So it's vital that we emphasize that we are just one of the team supporting the family's needs and offering our strengths and what we have access to, not all that we are, just as they will be doing. So, we need to be very conscious of this as we work with families.

Amanda: Absolutely. So there's this piece of kind of defining the expectation of the role and then there's a piece of really being conscious of what that relationship looks like for families and how they might be experiencing that relationship and – and sort of the behaviors within that relationship that might impact one another.

One of you out there sent in a question for us asking us to clearly define boundaries. And one of the things I want to say is, like so many things in our work, it's really complex; right? But if we think about impact and individual communities and the culture of those communities, I think that this particular definition can really help folks identify in a more concrete way, unique to each community, the practices that can damage that particular space and the relationships that staff and families build, and I really appreciate that about this definition.

Anntoinette, you wanted to talk about particular issues for work with expectant families and infants and toddlers and their families around boundaries.

Anntoinette: Sure, absolutely. This is really of particular importance for families that we serve in Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start with our youngest babies in which we service. For families that are working with staff who care about them and – and their children in this relationship-based context, it can be a completely new experience. And many times it can also be very confusing, in particular for teen parents and first time parents as well.

So as we think about babies, we know that young children don't necessarily have boundaries. They put everything into their mouths. And many times, parents that are new to services for – for children as well. So for example, you may have a situation where the mom goes to the grocery store and she's seeing that baby continually pick things up and put fruit, perhaps, in their mouths. So boundaries actually protect children and they also keep families and staff safe as well.

Amanda: I love that thinking, Anntoinette, about this is a very parallel process – that as we're thinking about what is happening with the very youngest children, that we can also think about sort of how that might impact staff-family relationships as well. I think it's a really useful place to begin. Thank you so much.

And as we look at Principle 2 and kind of thinking about the value and the importance of professional boundaries, we had a question come in from the field. Someone was asking, "How do I help staff to do this? This is very hard." I think understanding the value to these particular boundaries is key to garnering commitment to preserving them. So as we think about that value and importance, I want to call your attention to another resource sent to all of you as part of this audio conference today, and that's the relationship-based competencies. If you haven't seen this document, it's a document developed by the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. It's absolutely based on the Standards and it identifies the fundamental knowledge, the skills, the actions for staff and supervisors working with families. I encourage you to really use it in your thinking and planning here. Professional boundaries are identified as valuable and important to the work you do throughout this document and I think it's key to what we're describing.

I think another piece – so we've talked about sort of what's important for families as we're thinking about this. I think another piece that is important for folks to understand is that, while we begin with thinking about protection for families, boundaries also offer protections for staff. Becky, what would you say about this?

Becky: Absolutely. I think they are – they provide protection for staff. And I feel like that's our job as administrators. For example, in our community we have the highest unemployment rate in the country right now and we have a very tourist-led industry. So there's a big seasonal draw for folks that often come in for special events, but they really don't offer a lot of job security or benefits. So when folks move from their home communities to earn money, oftentimes they may actually get stuck here and not have those connections to extended family that can help support them in surviving parenthood and raising their own children.

And oftentimes for us, if there's one person in the community who could likely be a teacher or a home visitor who just simply says hello to them, that can often be the very beginning of a relationship for them and really shows the need for the informal support that can happen and that also oftentimes allows boundaries to be easily crossed. And the interesting thing is that we instruct our staff to care about these people, support their families, provide a nice, nurturing, safe relationship for the families to be able to let us into their lives and help support them with their needs and help them raise their children. And that can be an incredible burden for staff, especially if we don't talk about the need for being able to do that and then not establishing the boundaries so that everybody's space and trust is protected.

Amanda: Absolutely. So it can feel like they're – they're the only ones there to help. I want to draw everyone's attention to the other definitions on page 7. Janet talked about the first one for professional boundaries, but there's also one here for staff burnout and one for secondary trauma. So these are issues that absolutely we know can trouble programs and individual staff and they can be related to issues very related to professional boundaries.

We don't have a ton of time to go into depth here, but we wanted you to be aware of these terms in case they offer you some insight into what you may be feeling or what you might be seeing with folks that you're working with. This work, we know, as – as Becky described, can weigh very heavily on staff and we want to really normalize what you're feeling. Please take opportunities to talk with supervisors, with mental health consultants, with EAP programs as you can about these issues. Anntoinette, I know you are seeing some of this in your work where you are.

Anntoinette: Definitely. Many times we experience burnout as – usually it's the last result to anyone that's experiencing any emotional, mental, or – or physical exhaustion. They totally shut down. People that are really driven usually are those ones that can really mask it very well. When staff have no pleasure in work or they retreat from the process of home visiting, they're totally physiologically withdrawn. They are experiencing exhaustion even in the morning. They are more prone to catch colds, have stomach pain, have some anxiety, perhaps even depression, and many times they sleep less and they also have a magnitude of stress. And particularly with home visiting programs, home visiting programs can assist and reduce staff burnout by having realistic expectations of their home visiting staff while also paying very close attention to the Head Start Performance Standards.

Amanda: And Anntoinette, another thing that you talked about was that staff often want to help so much and they want to be so good at their job that it's hard for them sometimes to say, "You know what? This doesn't feel good. This feels uncomfortable. I wonder if I crossed a boundary here." Any of those things can feel – they might feel threatening, perhaps, to folks.

Anntoinette: Most definitely. Many times that's why one of the things that we focus so much on is that reflective practice and being able to have that support and being able to have your supervisor or your leader to be able to have that time so you can really reflect on and really have a time to be very transparent with those ones such as your supervisor that are supporting you as you do this type of work.

Amanda: Yes. I think a lot of our message here today is that this is really typical. Relationships are tough. They can be messy. The boundaries can be messy and very fuzzy. And as we look at Principle 3, we have to just sort of acknowledge that, that boundaries can – can be fuzzy, that it's very easy at times to sort of step over as you're doing this relationship-based work. And I think that's important for all of us to keep in mind as we go forward, that this is a very natural part of the kind of work that we're doing.

A few of you all out there wrote in to say that you're worried about your staff, that again, this boundary setting really seems hard. So let's talk now about some strategies that can help. I think that message – we've heard about a couple of them. We've heard about reflection and others and we'll go back to those in a moment. I think that message that boundaries are not as clear as we might hope in this work is an incredibly important beginning, as I said. Defining your professional functions and your responsibilities is not easy to do. Janet, you find that people often have to start with those personal boundaries.

Janet: So true. Yes. I find that lots of folks in our field often don't have boundaries in their personal lives, particularly with their own family members but also outside of the family. You know, just for all of us right now to take a second to just consider how your boundaries in the grocery store work. Do – do you have any? Or at the auto mechanic or with your spouse and children? How many times do you find yourself saying, "It's okay," when it's really, really not okay? Or saying to your own child, "You can do that for yourself," and letting him or her experience that joy of accomplishment or, indeed, the simple consequences of a more negative outcome, which is a learning opportunity obviously.

And I'm so guilty of this myself. I remember teaching my son to make his bed when he was 3 and having the same expectations as my mom had of me, and she was in the Navy and insisted that we bounce a quarter off of it once it was made. Well, clearly my 3-year-old failed miserably at that. So I would show him over and over, finding actually that it was just easier to do it for him all the way to finding myself leaving him in a college dorm saying, "Let me show you how to make your bed just one more time." And even though he laughed, I actually did make his bed. And I know better! But, you know, we so want to be the image of that good mom or that good staff member, but this is doing for the child rather than supporting him or her to learn that very valuable life skill. So our need to feel needed impedes their development, and in the same way we can impede the development of the families that we work with.

So, just a strategy – what we need to do is take care of ourselves; put our own oxygen mask on instead. And – and this is so hard for so many who fill themselves up by doing for others. So again, change this around simply by taking five minutes a day to start and doing just one thing that just brings us joy. But – you would think how easy this is, but it is an absolutely huge shift for many. It's like, "Take time for me? I don't think so." But once folks can start doing that it becomes easier, then, in also professional situations.

Amanda: Wow. So start with five minutes on the personal and then it impacts what happens professionally. Very interesting. Janet, I think we all want to know if your son can now make his bed.

Janet: Well, let's see. He's 41 now. So this has been many, many years, and I can only hope that him living by himself since he was 25 – actually when he came home from college, yes, I didn't make his bed for him, but I also didn't go into his room. And he moved out at 25, so I don't go into his room anymore either. So I'll just trust that he's – he's been shown enough to know. Thank you. [Laughter]

Amanda: It's good enough, right? So Principle 4 here is to start with the personal. I – I just want to bring in the pre-activity here that – that we asked some folks to do as well. We really wanted to offer you some reflective questions to start you thinking about your – your personal boundaries. This might have been really hard. It was hard for me, actually, as I was looking at this. It might be – one of the things that somebody suggested to me is that it might be easier to think about when you know your boundaries have been crossed, you know. Is that an easier way to think of it? So we hope that you had a chance here to reflect on this activity, to think about whether boundaries are easy to set or if they're difficult to set in your personal life, in your professional life, and maybe even to think about why do you think that is.

I think, in our planning, all of our faculty talked about how caring for children and providing child development and family support services often grows out of a wish and drive to be helpful – something that, again, Janet, you just said – but it can be really hard for folks to define that work as professional work. Becky, you have a history working in family child care. Can you talk for a minute about what you saw there in terms of the blurring maybe of professional boundaries?

Becky: Absolutely. Thank you, Amanda. With family child care providers that we have worked with in Nevada, these are frequently women who are providing care for their own children out of their homes and they're making a business of having child care spots available for other people to come in and pay. And it's – it's a much more intimate setting and it's a much more isolated setting for the family child care providers because they don't have those coworkers to bounce things off of like you would do in an early childhood education setting in a center. And what we've found is that we really saw that these women didn't see themselves as professionals, and I think that's an indicator in the entire early childhood field but particularly in the family child care setting.

So when we start working with family child care providers, we spend a lot of time with them really helping them to set limits that would make sense for them because they're running a business out of their home. So it was very easy for them to get taken advantage of, for example, maybe opening a half hour earlier than they really wanted to open because one family needed that. So we worked with them to look at their contracts and their policies and procedures, and helped them work through things like setting hours for their business, putting in vacation and training time into their contracts – paid vacation and training time – really trying to support them both through training and monthly visits to see themselves as professionals.

And anytime you go into a home for a home visit or because you're a family child care provider, it's a much more intimate setting than simply walking through the door of a child care center. And sometimes I think it's a lot harder to maintain those professional boundaries when the business is actually in

someone's home. And one of the issues that was a big revelation for the family child care providers that we worked with is that they should build time into their contracts for professional development and that should be paid time for them. And we really had to work with them to help them understand that they needed to take that time for themselves to build themselves in looking more as a professional for the business and being able to present themselves and their business as a profession, not simply babysitting out of their home.

Amanda: So Becky, one of the things that's interesting about your program is that it was – it kind of was about before – before Early Head Start came in and you're – and it's not an Early Head Start sort of funded family child care model. But it – but there's some really interesting pieces there around sort of really making sure that the folks that are providing family child care have a sense of the professional – of the – of their profession, that what they're doing is this incredible gift to the community. But it's not just a gift, it's a – it's – again, it's a profession.

One of the beauties about family child care within – within the Head Start Program Performance Standards is that it can be really flexible to the hours of families. But again, you know, how can programs work with them to balance – work with providers to balance sort of family – what families need as well as what providers need to stay well? Really interesting piece, and it gets us here to this Principle 5, which is, of course, celebrate that profession and really understand the work that – that folks are doing as – as a profession. I don't have another word for it. Anntoinette, you wanted to say more here about home visiting.

Anntoinette: Sure, absolutely. One of the things that we found that there was a real need to support staff and actually defining their roles and their responsibilities. So one of the things that we do is that we first ask staff to reflect and to identify what they see as their roles. We also provide and review the Early Head Start home visitor handbook with all of our staff. That really allows them to see their role and their responsibilities tangibly and very, very clear. We also have at our parent and family orientation where we also provide each family with a copy of the Early Head Start parent handbook and we discuss with the families about the services of the program, and most importantly, the roles of the home visitor.

At a recent – at the first – first home visit, the visitors listen to the families, the goals and expectations of the families, as well as looking at the home visitor. And then we also provide them an opportunity to go back and to revisit the home visitor's roles and responsibilities. This is definitely a parallel relationship, so that's something we've definitely focused on. And here are pretty much some of the things that our staff are able to talk to the – the families about. "Here's some things that I can help you with. What are your expectations for me as I continue to be an advocate for you in the Early Head Start program?"

And so, then we go back to revisit the roles and responsibilities with a family every three months. And then also, at a recent orientation, we highlighted family engagement while we're asking parents to network with other parents at this orientation and informing new parents of the program services and about other services that we offer. We overheard a conversation from a parent stating that she enjoyed the home-based option and that she knew what her home visitor could and couldn't do. That told us

that she understands boundaries and that she also does allow for her to be clear and for her to be in a helpful, trustworthy – trusting relationship which can also, in home visitation home-based program, sometimes can be very, very confusing.

Amanda: Absolutely. And I love that this is just a part of systematically what folks are doing every three months, revisiting those roles and responsibilities. Seems like such an important place to be. Becky, you had something to add here as well. You do something similar?

Becky: We do do something similar. Whether our families are in a center-based or a home-based option, we actually have the very first meeting with them, either with their home visitor or their teacher, in the classroom and we have them sign a statement that basically talks about how each party is going to treat the other one.

The home visitor, for example, in our home-based program commits to being on time, preserving confidentiality, being prepared for the visit. And these types of agreements really outline the roles and expectations of both parties, and they really emphasize respect for each other. And then the family is going to commit to be willing participants in the visit and – and again, really focusing on using language that is respectful and treating each other with that element of respect. And by doing this at the very beginning of the relationship, it's a way to hopefully clarify those boundaries like Anntoinette was just talking about.

Amanda: Yeah. So as we're looking here at Principle 6, I'm reading the words here that say "define roles early and often," and you're talking about expectations as well. Define those expectations for the relationship and the way that folks will treat one another early and often as well.

Becky, one thing that you talked a little bit about was that the teachers in your program can spend up to 10 hours a day with the children that they're serving. So we know that in some programs, particularly Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs, we know that can be an even longer day with those children. And we know that that investment of time, that investment of care absolutely, understandably can blur boundaries for teaching staff who might sometimes feel angry at families or might disagree with families and feel protective of children. I have to say that I remember that from when I was teaching at times. How have you all helped staff with that?

Becky: Well, thank you, Amanda. I think that we are so, so lucky in our program because we actually have some money set aside in our budget to contract with a marriage and family therapist who is very familiar with early childhood education. And she has worked with our staff on individual basis and both in – in training as well, so training large groups of our staff on perspective-taking and particularly when we consider the – the term secondary trauma. And the importance of taking the universal precaution that every single client we serve has experienced some sort of trauma.

And by doing this and – and being able to address this work both as individuals with our family coach – is what we call her – and in training situations, this approach has helped us and helped our staff promote

attachment and bonding with the children and the families that they serve. And we want that because it – it really helps the teachers and home visitors take on the perspectives of the family. And we find that this is a positive approach. It is viewed in empathy and is a very nurturing approach, and it's very, very powerful for our staff and the families who are then the recipients of our staff being able to take their perspective.

Amanda: It's so interesting, right, because it sounds sort of counterintuitive, that trying to take a parent's perspective might feel like it's crossing boundaries, trying to imagine sort of what they're feeling, but the truth is that what you're describing is that it offers an opportunity to understand families in a way that really honors their role, which I find just so interesting here. And it really gets us to Principle 7, which is to consider the family's perspective. And I think you would – you might add here, Becky, intentionally – intentionally consider the family's perspective when it feels like things might be a little awry in how you're feeling about what's happening.

Another issue that we know comes up in a variety of programs – and we had a few questions about this as well – is when the personal and professional blend. So we know there are programs where families are serving members of their family in programs, for example. Janet, in a few minutes we'll be talking more about some of the strategies and approaches that can be really helpful, I think, in maintaining boundaries overall, and we've talked about some of those. What I think I've heard you say is that those approaches and strategies are even more important when there are these dual relationships.

Janet: Absolutely, Amanda. That – that good supervision and leadership is just so very critical, especially in such cases. Blood relationships will always win over professionalism. That is just an outright fact, and this really has to be recognized when hiring staff with relations in the programs, which, you know, we think "Well, that's easy enough to avoid." Well it's really not, particularly in migrant and rural, never mind frontier, type of programs where there aren't a lot of options for staff at some times. And – and so often there are relations that are being hired.

So having those policies in place and the Standards that we're presenting as well that really establish an understanding of professionalism and boundaries as well as providing that clarity as to who can that person reach to for that objective support regarding them. And then of course, ensuring such policies are understood as well as implemented is sometimes the step that we don't have the time to take. So all of this provides a proactive system that can be reflected back to as needed if a challenge were to arise.

And it's so important that everyone in the program is then aware of the relation so that challenges can be avoided as much as possible. For example, not putting the teacher's own child in a classroom with a teacher that he might – that he or she might not fully respect. That leads to a lot of challenges. So if a conflict does arise then it is the job of the supervisor – and I think that is not always clear in many cases as well, but it is the job of the supervisor to be as proactive as possible in providing the reflective supervision that supports those staff members in reestablishing the communication that they need to move forward.

Amanda: And just really monitoring what's happening in those relationships, I imagine, as well.

Janet: Indeed.

Amanda: Yeah. Becky, as part of your work in this community where folks are feeling really isolated, you're looking at ways – I think this is so interesting – you're looking at ways to support them in making informal connections. How are you doing that in Reno?

Becky: I have – I'm very fortunate to be able to work with some teachers who are extremely skilled at bringing families together and helping them make connections with each other. For example, several of our teachers invite their parents to come in and volunteer in the classroom. They're actually an extra – an additional adult support in there who can hold the infants and toddlers and – and form relationships with them. They – one particular set of teachers I have has encouraged the parents in their room to set up play dates with each other on the weekends. One of our former parents invited all of the families who didn't have any place else to go in her classroom over to her house for Thanksgiving. And the teachers were very supportive in making sure everybody knew about that.

Another thing that we're doing that – again, we're very lucky to have our marriage and family therapist on staff – is that she is going to be offering parenting classes. We're setting up a session of those in the spring, and that's more of a formal way to connect parents. But the one thing she started recently that we're so, so excited about is a more informal group. She's – our marriage and family therapist is an avid knitter. And so, she has set up – on Tuesday afternoons from three to four, she comes and she sits and she knits and parents are able to come in and learn how to knit and talk about things that are going on in their lives. And she really wanted to set it up this way because, in years past, that's how parenting and child rearing information was passed on, is through those informal circles of women, and – and men too, coming together and sharing experiences and sharing strategies. So we're really working hard to try and help folks build community on several different levels, both formally and informally.

Amanda: I think that's such a creative and exciting sort of strategy as you're looking at a group of folks who are feeling very isolated from the folks who really care about them, and how can they build these relationships in the – in the program. I just love it. Anntoinette, I know you really work with your home visitors to help families identify those informal supports as well.

Anntoinette: Absolutely, Amanda. We have families that would like for home visitors to come to their homes two and even three times a week. And we have an assessment tool called the Family Support Scale that asks families who else is a support for them, whether it's parents, friends, a medical professional, et cetera. This allows for families to be able to reflect on their macro and their micro circles of support other than the home visiting staff, which is informative to families as they reflect and also it relieves any possible load or overload on staff to be this family's everything, which we know there is absolutely no way that a staff person can be everything to a family.

Amanda: So, really helpful for the staff to be participating in that process so that they can see, okay, there are – there are other folks in the circle of support. Yeah. So that really gets us to Principle 8 here, which is: Support families in building and identifying informal support networks. One thing I want to call folks attention to is that a really helpful piece was highlighted on the Office of Head Start Facebook page a couple of weeks ago. It was after we had published these particular materials. But if you go to the ECLKC and look under the term "Social Connections," there's a really helpful tool, I think, to use in helping parents consider the folks in their informal networks and really supporting them in considering their own social support. So again, that's at the ECLKC under "Social Connections;" really interesting, very simple kind of tool to use there. I know a lot of people are using different tools to do that kind of work but I liked that one when I saw it.

A related idea that came up for us in our discussions, I think, is that in their sense of themselves as helpers, staff often feel pulled – as you described, Anntoinette – to be all things to all people. We know that staff in Head Start programs are helpers; when a family needs help, they just often feel so called to provide it. I imagine many heads nodding out there. How can we recognize that need for folks and at the same time help them draw the boundaries that are meaningful? Janet, can you respond to that question?

Janet: Sure. Families, you know, really are in such dire circumstances. You know, you hear story after story where you just get so involved in the challenges that they're facing. So it can be very tempting to become the hero because, of course, being the hero boosts our own self-esteem. It's so easy to get caught in the loop of "the more we help, the better we feel about ourselves," which is sort of a self-esteem addiction. Many of us enter this field to be the help, but we really need to realize that doing for a family, being their end-all-be-all person just creates co-dependency for the family and leads to our own burnout.

Amanda: Yes, absolutely.

Janet: And I'm... Go ahead.

Amanda: No, no. Go ahead.

Janet: Well, I'm not sure that many in this field realize the toll of being so trauma-informed has on our own well-being. For example, you know, when we once thought of – what we once thought of as – once we – once we... [Laughter] I can't even speak. What we once thought of as a period of, you know, she'll get over it, sadness after the birth of a baby, we really recognize that now as postpartum depression and know the traumatic effects that this can have on a baby, never mind the entire family. And these cases lead us to cross those boundaries and want to do even more than is required of our professional positions to help that family, and in particular, that child. And when this occurs, we very quickly forget that our overall goal of supporting children and families is their own skilled development. And this is particularly challenging as the budgets tighten and caseloads increase and responsibilities of staff grow and families are in more dire straits in this economic downturn.

There can be such huge needs, and staff with less time to provide the needed support for children and families can find it easier to do for that family rather than with them and actually supporting the family to do for themselves. So in the end, that doesn't support the development that we really hope to see for Early Head Start families and children.

Amanda: Yeah. We're really looking for that empowerment piece, I think, and sort of how are we – I love the way you said that – how are we helping families do for themselves and we're – and we're working with them to do that.

Anntoinette raised an issue that I think is really important here. We have the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework in the materials that we sent out. Anntoinette, when I asked you why it feels particularly important to be talking about professional boundaries in this time – in Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs, you pointed to the ideas of this framework.

Anntoinette: Definitely. Now, as the Office of Head Start has, we have the Parent, Family, and Community Framework; and now as folks have switched a bit from talking so much or concentrating so much about parent involvement to something much broader and much deeper concerning family engagement. It's no longer just offering and getting families to socialization or having them to attend field trips, but it's really getting them fully engaged with the program, the community, and their children, even if that means their families or their parents are coming to the classroom. This calls for a little bit more of a deeper level of connectedness and it can also be confusing for some staff.

Amanda: I think that's such an important point here. And in my conversations with the folks at the National Center for Parent, Family, and Community Engagement about this topic, they brought me back to this arrow across the top of this framework that talks about goal-directed relationships. We also know that the first competency in their relationship-based competencies is positive, goal-oriented relationships. So there's that word again: goal. And they raise this important skill here, setting goals with families and working with them around those goals as well as maintaining those boundaries that we – that we've been discussing.

How – I – I have to get to this Principle 9 here, which says: Remember your goals. Thinking about what Janet said about making sure that we're empowering families to do for themselves or empowering children to do for themselves, and at the same time we're really focused on, maybe, some of the specific goals that we have that families – that families have developed for themselves. How do you all support staff in making sure that they are doing – that what they're doing with families is goal-directed? Janet?

Janet: My suggestion really to staff and education, family, and home visitor supervisors is to establish a general agenda for what's going to happen at each session or home visit during that first session. Saying something like, "We unfortunately have so little time together that we will mostly be focused on the goals you've set as it's my job to support your progress with them. Let's plan on taking the first few minutes each time we get together to discuss any challenges you might have incurred in reaching your

goals, and then we can shift to how you might be able to move through those challenges. And then we can spend the rest of our time together focused on" whatever it is that you're there to focus on. You know, so a statement such as that can really set – set the tone for them. And it's also a great idea to establish the future agenda following these kinds of guidelines at the end of the current session or visit with the family so that expectations can be set and the family can enter it much more prepared and solution-focused.

Amanda: I know Becky and Anntoinette sort of offered that as well, that they work with staff really closely to monitor and track what's happening with those children, with those families, and their progress towards their goals as a – as a reminder – as a way of really reminding us sort of the process that everyone is engaged in. I think that's another real skill for child care teachers, for family child care workers, as they're thinking about ways to help maintain their boundaries really to keep those goals in mind not just with families but also with children. I think all of you mentioned – all of you – and we've already mentioned it here today, the importance of reflection here. Always keeping in mind these goals, constantly reflecting on how the work is going, what is happening, where it's moving. Becky, you had some additional thoughts here.

Becky: Yes. One of the things that I have learned recently, and I'm constantly working to improve my own practice as a supervisor, is I found a set of questions that actually came from a positive discipline training I attended, which is a parenting program. And they talk about three questions and I started using them with staff when they come to me with concerns or issues with families and – and about boundaries. And what – what I ask – what I say to them is "Okay, what are you thinking about this?" And then I – I follow-up with, say, "What are you feeling about this?" and – and reminding them that feelings are usually just one or two words. And then the last question I think is the most important: "What are you deciding?" What are you deciding about this child? What are you deciding about this family? What are you deciding about yourself as a professional?

I have found in my work with staff doing reflective practice that all staff are at very different places developmentally when it comes to working with families. And so, having a strategy that I can sort of use across the board with all staff regardless of where they are at in their professional practice, that can be a really important part to help them focus on what skills they want to develop and what skills that they really want to work on and what skills do they already have that they can use as strengths to build up in other areas.

Amanda: I love that, and – and just – I love also, too, the way that you described that, that folks are at very different places. And so, this – this – this strategy of really encouraging reflection as a constant piece of what folks are doing – as a primary piece of what folks are doing can really help folks get to not only the goals but also how they're feeling about a relationship, what might be happening with boundaries, all of those other pieces. On page 9 we've listed those questions that Becky just described for us – or just listed for us, and we also have some other reflective questions for folks that really gets to some of these issues around boundaries that we hope that you all can use in your work as you're moving forward.

Okay. So, all of this is really important. What other strategies have you all found to cut down on the staff's sense that they are the only folks who can help families? We talked a little bit about that.

Anntoinette, what would you say here?

Anntoinette: We find that it's very important to ensure that staff know and that they understand themselves as part of a team. They don't necessarily have to be the all – end-all, as we said previously. We know that that is not necessarily something that staff can do. There are others who can help. So we have a two-hour group meeting with all our home visitors, and this really gives them an opportunity to have goals that are established. They are also able to establish trust, encouraging, and also be really transparent. They're also able to talk about any part of their situation and really be honest about the hard parts of this work.

We also have, as Becky stated about weekly supervision, weekly reflective practice and supervision that also connects all the new staff with a coach, which is their supervisor. One of the mental health consultants also offers one-on-one time for home visitors to be able to kind of speak to him or her about some of those issues perhaps that are just too large to be put in a group setting. So we definitely want to continue to encourage our staff and get them to know that they are very important to our team and that them being able to reflect on some of those things that they have going on with themselves personally is actually an asset to our program, and that we know and understand that this is – sometimes can be a very messy business but we also understand and we want them to know that we truly support them and their efforts of being a great staff person.

Amanda: Becky, in your program you've really developed a team approach as well; something that really identifies folks as part of a larger team. Can you describe that a little bit?

Becky: Yes. Thanks, Amanda. I did not realize that this is maybe a little bit unusual for Early Head Start and Head Start programs, but one of the things that we do is – because oftentimes families move from home-based to center-based program options or sometimes the other way around – center-based to home-based. And then we also have one person who handles our enrollment and attendance and – and all of those recruitment pieces of Early Head Start. So there's a variety of people that our families can interact with. And we have set up intentionally so – our organization so that if families feel more comfortable going to one person over another, that's okay with us.

There's many, many different doors that are open for families to be able to walk through that they can talk to their teacher about issues, or maybe their home visitor or former home visitor, or perhaps a site supervisor they feel a special relationship with, or even the program coordinator who's our head administrator. Perhaps they have a good relationship with her and – and they – they feel comfortable in going in and talking with her. So we maintain that we have an open door policy. And we truly try and implement that every single day, that if a family comes to us we're not going to shuffle them off to someone else. We're going to do our best to help them with whatever it is that they need and get them the support that they need.

Amanda: That's a lovely way for us to be talking about this Principle 11, which is: Remember your team. It's so important in this work that families understand that – that they're working with a team of folks and that staff know that there are folks around to support them as well. In fact, the program provides a structure for this teamwork and communication among team members.

I just want to say a little word about confidentiality here, because we did have a few questions from the field. So when introducing the program to families, it's important to be clear about confidentiality and also the limits of that confidentiality as it pertains, of course, to child abuse and neglect certainly, but also that the whole team is there to serve the child and family together. One person cannot do it all. It's lovely, as Becky described, to have a relationship. You know, there might very well be a stronger relationship with one person or another, but that person is a part of a team. So the whole team is organized then around serving that child and family. And often, information needs to be shared there. And families should be clear on how your program operates from the very beginning, I think.

I want to just move on here to reflective supervision. I think everyone on faculty here has talked about the importance of reflective supervision. We talk so much about this from our end that I don't want to spend a ton of time here, but we know that this is often a critical component. Fuzzy boundaries can crop up often. This is intimate work. Having someone to talk with regularly, to reflect with staff on what they're seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking, as Becky described, is absolutely essential. Anntoinette, what did you want to add here?

Anntoinette: Well, just briefly, I've noticed also within programs we were doing a family service – family credential service training, and one of the aspects of the training we found was a clinical infant development program that asks mothers what is it in the particular program that they found most valuable in their – in their home visitor – or within their home visitor. And the quality that they appreciated the most was that their home visitor staff will actually listen to their concerns. So we know with reflective supervision that it is a place where staff can have that experience so they can offer that listening skill to families. And staff actually find it very, very enjoyable. They love it and they actually need it.

Amanda: And we have that here as the 12th principle, to really offer that reflective supervision. Janet, there was an important point that you wanted to make here.

Janet: Yes. I just think that it's so important that supervisors have that reflective supervision as well. You know, we think that the buck stops with you and you're the supervisor, and the fact is that you have as many needs, if not more needs to get that reflective supervision, to really be able to get the support that you need to support all the people that are working with you. So supervisors, too; reflective supervision is all the way to the top. I think that means all the way to Angie. Right, Angie? [Laughter]

Amanda: We hope; we hope. Anntoinette, you offered a list of tips particularly for administrators that can help as they're addressing boundaries. Can you just share them with us here quickly?

Anntoinette: Sure. Of course there are some things that programs and organizations can do to help their staff become more successful in learning and sticking to boundaries. So one of the things perhaps is to first – to set reasonable boundaries. The keyword here is definitely reasonable. Nobody likes vague rules or micro managers.

Secondly, don't forget to teach the why. "Because I say so" didn't work when you were a kid and it doesn't work here either. Boundaries must be reasonable and there should be a clear purpose behind them.

Three, be positive. Boundaries should be communicated in an instructive manner rather than by lists of do this, do this, or don't do this.

Four, give people a voice in the process of establishing appropriate boundaries in the work place. Who knows better than people who are actually doing the work every single day? And sometimes employees can come up with tougher boundaries than even supervisors.

And fifth, get serious about enforcement. Noting – and nothing discredits Standards quicker and confuses families than the lack of a backbone to stand behind them. This should be done consistently and fairly.

Amanda: Five really important strategies for administrators there. Thank you, Anntoinette. Janet, you talked about how there's just really limited time. Earlier you talked about how there's really limited time for individual staff to deliver comprehensive services, and again, that temptation to do for children and families rather than to do with. What else are you seeing out there with the programs that you're serving?

Janet: Well, with caseloads increasing, time is more and more limited for actually supporting families to meet their needs, just as it is for teachers to meet the needs of children when so much reporting has become the requirement. It gets fuzzy. And just as it is for administrators to keep positions filled with trained staff.

It becomes very tempting when you see, you know, that a – a needed position was actually needed, you know, a month ago. And so when you find somebody, you have a tendency to skip over that essential orientation and training that serves to inspire and ground a person into the role and into the organization and instead send staff directly into the job; you know, trial by fire, so to speak. And this may seem like a time efficiency effort when in reality it's a real strong contributing factor in turnover. So taking the time to truly establish understanding and relationship can work miracles for retaining staff as well as retaining families, especially in this time when – when staff and – and families are so pressured.

Amanda: And so what you're speaking to here is staff development, right?

Janet: Indeed, yes. That is absolutely critical that we're taking the time on a – a proactive level rather than a reactive level, which costs so much time and money on the other side.

Amanda: Becky, I loved what you had to say about this.

Becky: I just think it's so interesting that, especially as – as Janet's saying, when new staff come on oftentimes we give them sort of the essentials of our program and we tell them, "Okay, make sure you have personal boundaries," but we – we don't really sit down and talk about what does that mean. What's the nitty gritty of that? Give me some real life situations where this might come into play. What might I encounter where I need to know my own boundaries and the program boundaries? So, we talk so much to people about them and setting them but we don't really talk about them at all.

Amanda: So as we look at Principle 13 here, prioritizing staff development around boundaries, I think that this is really an important piece; you all have certainly said this. I know Anntoinette spends a lot of time with her staff, particularly at orientation, making sure that there's a really intense staff development experience that focuses in some part on this staff boundaries piece and also incorporates role play, which I think is a really important strategy to be thinking about here. Anntoinette, did you want to say anything more about that?

Anntoinette: Just briefly. Definitely, Amanda, one of the things that we do with staff development is really wanting to educate staff on what staff development actually is. One of the things I – as I said before is that we have a training called the family – family service credential training, and it does incorporate lots of role play, lots of modeling, and a tremendous amount of reflection. It's a very intense team-building time. It's really intentional about addressing tough parts of this work – sometimes things that people really don't want to speak about, including boundary setting and maintenance of yourself and your own self-care.

I've found this to be very, very key to any successful program. Allowing for staff to be able to be transparent and also with using role play as a strategy here, it has become an eye opener to perhaps some of the trainings and some of the ways that home visiting staff are working with their own families when they put themselves – themselves in the – the – the situation or as being the family or as being the child as well.

Amanda: Well, it's a really – it goes back to what I think Becky was talking about in terms of perspective taking, as well. You know, what does that look like when staff have an opportunity to really think about what's happening for the other person in the relationship? Very interesting strategy.

We know how difficult – I think we've talked about this now for over an hour – how difficult it is to set and maintain boundaries. There's certainly some strategies there but we know how fuzzy it can be. How understandable it is then that sometimes staff and sometimes families overstep right? So someone wrote in, even, to ask: Once a boundary has been crossed, can it be uncrossed or fixed? Janet, what would you say here?

Janet: Well, this can be a tough one indeed. Again, it's so very essential to have good supervision, good leadership, as well as those policies in place that promote boundary setting and maintenance to refer back to as needed when boundaries are crossed. But close supervision, regular, honest communication throughout the agency, consistent substantiation of a culture of professionalism, and emphasis on the benefits the professional relationships can have and how that impacts the child. And then of course, as we've mentioned, training that supports realigning ethics – not just having them but realigning them to what it is that we're working with.

All of those contribute to a proactive, systemic approach that will avoid many boundary violations. However when boundaries are crossed, it's so important to provide protection for both parties in the form of assurance that, number one, no negative personnel action will be taken unless, of course, a law has been broken, which is, you know, a whole different story. But then setting up a safe space for both parties to be heard objectively as well as together with a supervisor, that can be offered with the intended goal of, again, moving both back into that relationship through the act of facilitated problem-solving with a real big focus on the spirit of learning from each other. And of course, trust of the supervisor has to be in place for this to be successful.

Amanda: And I love what you describe because it really, I think, focuses us on the importance of that relationship and the understanding that those relationships can have those fissures and breaks and issues that need to be addressed, but it's still worth it to maintain that relationship whenever that's a possibility for folks. I love that idea. And that gets us to this 14th principle, which is: Attempt to repair if that is necessary whenever possible. It's lovely to have those relationships continue forward.

At this time I want to invite Dana on just to share information on how to call in with questions. And then as we wait for folks to queue, we're going to move ahead with the final question. But go ahead, Dana, and let folks know how they can call in.

Dana: Thank you. If you'd like to ask a question, please signal by pressing the star (*) key followed by the digit 1 on your telephone keypad. If you're using a speakerphone, please make sure your mute function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment.

If you have signaled for a question prior to hearing these instructions on today's call, please repeat the process now by pressing *1 again to insure our equipment has captured your signal. Please be aware that a voice prompt on your phone line will indicate when your line is open. At that point, please state your name before posing your question. Again, that's *1 to be placed into the queue.

Amanda: Thank you. Thanks, Dana. And so, here's – here's sort of a final question for our faculty before we get started with those. Another issue that I just have to say came up a lot in our – in the questions that folks were sending in through registration was social media. It introduces a whole new complication into the world staff and families inhabit often together. Becky, what would you say about this social media issue?

Becky: You know, this has been something that has come up time and time again over the last few years. And for those of us who have been in the field a while, it's something that we really didn't even consider. We see that boundaries are really kind of blurring all over the place. We have in our center-based options – a lot of our teacher assistants are college students, and we employ them and we work around their schedule, and then they provide us with assistance in the classroom to give breaks and help as teachers. And we have to spend a lot of time working with them to think about what it might mean if, you know, they see something cute in the classroom and they take a picture of that child and then they post that child's picture on Facebook and say, "Look! Look what this child did today." And this type of openness is very, very new to us and has brought up so many issues that we didn't even think that we would ever have to – to face.

And then the other side of it – so we were sort of dealing with the student employee issue about confidentiality and boundaries and not sharing everything with everybody, and then we also have families who oftentimes are very young – often the same age or younger than our college student employees – and one of the things that we're finding is oftentimes people do not have home phones anymore. So cell phones are often the only way that we can get in touch with our families. And so, we may have to send them a text. And that sort of raises questions about home visitors putting out their own cell phone number by texting clients to say, you know, "Can we meet next Tuesday at 9?"

So what this has made us aware of is that social media might be the only way we might be able to get in touch with some families. And when we have to think about putting policies and procedures in place to protect families and staff, we have to be very thoughtful about those because we don't want to make really black and white policies that are going to negate being able to contact families or – or establishing relationship with families.

Amanda: Yes. So that really gets us to Principle 15, the developed policies and procedures. I know that Janet also talked about that when she was talking about folks that have dual relationships, families who are serving family members or friends who are serving friends. Really important, I think, to understand that this can be very different for different programs, that it can depend. So, Anntoinette, do you want to talk for a minute about your approach to Facebooking in particular?

Anntoinette: Sure. We actually just had this conversation a couple of days ago concerning Facebook and setting boundaries. One of the things that we do is we have the home visitor to think about what if they were the parent. This actually opened the eyes of staff in their decision-making and the program's liability. Being a Facebook friend, what really does that mean? And with a family, it could possibly open up both a HIPPA issue and boundary violations, and also organizational liabilities.

We need to, in – in our opinion, we need to maintain our professional roles when relaying to others in this capacity. And many times, inappropriate personal relationships can be misconstrued and may even damage or jeopardize our ability to provide quality home visiting services to families. And so, we encourage our staff to think and place themselves in the situation of the actual parent. And then also, as

we talk so much about team building, think about what they're doing and how and what are the ramifications of what they're doing with that perhaps one family, how that will possibly affect the entire program up to 202 families in which we're servicing.

Amanda: Yeah, so it can really snowball. The impact of those kinds of relationships can snowball. I just want to call everybody's attention to page 10 here, which lists some questions and sort of issues that may really benefit in your program from some really deep conversation and thinking about, particularly, policies and procedures, if these are issues that could really be addressed in your program. If they're raising concerns, if they're raising questions, you know, that might be a sign that there needs to be some further discussion about them and some real thinking about what's going to be necessary to protect the families in your community as well as the staff. And we just want to call your attention to that list there.

Dana, do we have any questions that have come in?

Dana: There's no one in the queue at this time, but as a reminder, it is *1 if you'd like to ask a question on the telephone.

Amanda: So another question that came in for us was that folks wanted good suggestions for home visitors to say to parents when they invite you to their family events. And so, we've talked – we have on – on this list sort of can programs come or can program staff come – go to a birthday party, for example. But what are some ways – we know that there's a lot of relationships sort of tied up in that question. "I care about you. You care about my child. Will you come to my child's birthday party?" Anntoinette, what do you suggest for folks to say when a parent approaches them with a question like that?

Anntoinette: Well, one of the things that we discussed with our staff is that we first want to affirm the parent that's actually asking and that's actually inviting. It's really great to be able to say, "You know, family – you know, Rebecca, I really appreciate you wanting me and giving me the opportunity to visit you or come to a birthday party, and I really thank you for doing that. However, I am not available on Saturdays or Sundays and I'm actually with my own family. And that's really important to me, and I know that that's really important to you. And so, I appreciate you extending that offer; however, I'm going to have to decline and I hope that you guys have a really great time. And let's talk a little bit more about it when I come and see you next week at the home visit."

And in an approach such as that, it allows for the parent to – not to feel as though she's been rejected, but it allows for her to really look a little bit deeper to be able to see that the home visitor is also someone that has his or her own family as well. So it gives them a little bit of a broader aspect of saying and being able to see that she is accepting of me doing this and it doesn't feel so much like a rejection. And then the home visitor has the capability of following up and still being involved but at a different capacity when she goes back to the visit the next week.

Amanda: Yeah. Janet, did you have anything you wanted to add there; or Becky?

Janet: No. I – I totally agree with what Anntoinette had to say. It is that recognition of that person's emotion at that particular moment. And so, really acknowledging that, oh, you really value me. Thank you so much and I really value you and I also value my own family. I really need to keep my boundaries around all of that to maintain a balance in my own life. So...

Amanda: Becky, how about you? Anything to add?

Becky: I – I think Janet and Anntoinette said it very eloquently. It's a very difficult situation that comes up very frequently with our families, and I think the kind of words that Anntoinette provided are just perfect for maintaining the boundary and the relationship.

Amanda: Yeah. Dana, do we have any other questions that came in?

Dana: We do have a question on the phone.

Amanda: Hi.

Chandra Clack: Hi.

Amanda: Are you there? Do you have a question?

Chandra Clack: Yes, this is Chandra. Can you hear me?

Amanda Perez: Yeah.

Chandra: Okay. My name is Chandra Clack and I happened to read your question in regards to accepting food and drink from the family when you're going to a home visit. How does one do this aspect? I mean, I'm looking at it on a hospitality aspect; when you come into somebody's home, they offer you food and drink. So with this being part of my profession now, how would I pertain with this aspect?

Amanda: Right. So, Chandra, this is a really similar kind of question; right? So I'm going to turn it over to Anntoinette. Sort of, how do we preserve the relationship understanding that culturally offering food can be a really important piece for many of the families that folks are serving?

Chandra: Right.

Anntoinette: Definitely. Thank you for asking a question. And as we – we've said in many aspects of this teleconference, there's – there's some fuzziness to all of this. Definitely; knowing that with working with some of our families traditionally, perhaps it may be a sign of disrespect if we do not partake. One of the things that I've – had a discussion with my staff is, still at the same time, just speaking to the family even at the beginning about this is what I can do and this is what I really – because of our program policies and procedures and our boundaries, this is perhaps what I'm not able to do.

And I think that what has worked for us is that we're able to say it at the beginning and we talk to them and go back to revisit that information to give them a better understanding. I think that the majority of the instances that we've seen, it's because parents perhaps did not know from the beginning or parents just don't understand why. And so, when we explain to them based on our policies and procedures that we're not able to do – whether it's eating or drinking or partaking in certain things, they're able to digest it a little bit easier.

And I know that even with home visitors it's very tempting to, because we don't want to be disrespectful and we don't want to – we want to get into that home the next week and a lot of times we're thinking, "Wow, if I don't take the water, you know, maybe he or she will not allow for me to be in that home." But I definitely view it as being respectful. And then also, one of the things that we've spoken to our staff about is that depending on the situation there may be times where they are allergic to certain things and they might not know that that's in that particular food. So we always err on the side of caution and always err on the side of safety for the family, but also for the staff and also for the program.

Amanda: And this is Amanda. I love that idea of really making some of those pieces clear at the beginning. And sometimes with gift giving, we got some questions about that; sometimes with, you know, attending these – these parties and functions. To the extent that folks are able, really at the beginning of the relationship, trying to lay some of those things out as program policy can be very helpful for staff that are sort of, you know, in the middle of this relationship and really torn about what could happen or what could not happen. Janet or Becky, did you guys have anything to add?

Becky: This is Becky. I agree with Anntoinette. And – and that is actually one of the things that brings itself nicely to our home visitor parent agreement that we do in that very first meeting where we establish what the focus of the home visit is going to be. And we actually sometimes spell out, you know, "The focus of our home visit is for me to support the relationship between you and your child, so these are the types of activities that we are going to do." And by talking about it up front, as – as Anntoinette said, you establish those expectations both for the home visitor and for the parent. And sometimes you may have to be even more specific if it comes to them providing you with food. But if you can do it up front, I think you're less likely to run into that down the road.

Amanda: Thank you.

Janet: And I would agree totally. Janet here. Yeah.

Amanda: Dana, do we have another question?

Dana: We do have another question on the phone.

Amanda: I think we have time for one more. Go ahead.

Claudia Smith: Hello, my name is Claudia Smith and I am a home visitor. And my question is I'm a home visitor who has actually lost the boundaries with her client, and it's on – on my end as well as the agency's end, and I'm just trying to find out how can I bring those boundaries back as a home visitor as well as with my supervisor person, who is actually new to the field. So when I came aboard, a lot of these boundaries were – were already broken. So now I'm in this position to kind of pull back with certain things. We – we go as far as making doctor's appointments. We go as far as catching the bus with them to the doctor. So it's a lot of – we're holding their hand a lot of – a lot of ways, so they – they haven't gained a lot of independence in our program. So I'm really struggling with that right now.

Amanda: Wow. That seems like – that seems like a lot for you to be handling, Claudia. So, you know, I don't think that we can speak particularly to – to every situation or – or particular situation, but I'm going to ask Janet to just respond a little bit to this in sort of thinking about what might be possible to do as a family has, you know, understandably come to rely on a program for more than – than the program is now able to offer and how we might help families make that transition.

Janet: You know, I – I think, Claudia, I – I just heard you speaking as though you were speaking from every home visitor's perspective. You know, we all run into this because you're there out there in the field and run into the challenge of balancing the – the professional policies of the organization as well as the family and what those needs might be. You mentioned a little challenge with the supervisor too. You know, I think we – we often think we can't do anything about a supervisor. I can't tell you how many times I hear, "Well, she'll retire in about 10 years and all will be well then." [Laughter] And it's like, no, we can't wait 10 years, you know.

So we have that – speaking of setting a boundary, when you feel like that is a challenge to ask for a facilitator to help you come back into communication about that. You know, I think that's definitely your right to ask for those. And then when it comes to the families and what you say where you're really having to pull back, that they're becoming, you know, less and less independent, I think a way to shift that might be to talk a little bit about interdependence, which is really what we are. We – we call ourselves a country of independent souls. Well, we're not. We – we can't function without everyone else in this world, as I think we've realized in this economic downturn.

So, you know, talk about how we really all need to function as a team and – and come up with: What are your strengths that you can add to this team? What are your strengths that you can add to the team? What are my strengths that I can add to the team? And how we are really building that interdependence that together we are better than any one of us could be on an individual basis. So to reflect back to that family, "Wow, it seems like, you know, I'm doing a lot for you, and the goal," as you can relate to in the Performance Standards, "is really helping families to do for themselves. And so, how can I support you in that rather than doing for you?" Does that make sense?

Claudia: Yes.

Amanda: Thank you, Claudia, so much for that question. It has been such a wonderful hour and a half, but I have to bring us sort of to a conclusion here. And to do that, I wanted to give each of our faculty an opportunity to share just an important message that they wanted folks to walk away with – a final word. So I'm going to turn it first over to Anntoinette. Anntoinette, go ahead.

Anntoinette: Thank you, Amanda. I just wanted, just as an end note, just to... I'm – I'm so grateful that we have this many callers that are on this call. That just lets me know that we're in the right vein and we have that professional development where people really want to improve their systems and their policies and procedures. And really, overall, I just want to really continue develop a magnificent rapport with their staff and their staff develop a great rapport with their families.

I think that the keys to successful Early Head Start and Head Start programs, number one, is always recognizing and looking at the Head Start Performance Standards. When you look at those first and – they are actually the key for you to be able to develop programs and policies and procedures, rather. And then looking at teamwork, teamwork is going to be very, very crucial to any successful Early Head Start/Head Start program that is looking to maintain and to establish those professional – those professional boundaries.

And then also with family engagement, family engagement is very, very crucial to an Early Head Start/Head Start program overall. And then always remembering that boundaries help programs, but boundaries also protect families and children. And in this line of work that we do – and we love babies and love fathers and love mothers – it's very important just to be able to have that openness and that transparency with our families in letting them know we're here to reunify in some cases, if it pertains, but also to be able to walk and work with you to be able for them to become self-sufficient, for them to be able to eventually empower themselves, and to be able to empower others. So, boundaries and professional boundaries is extremely important.

Amanda: Thank you so much, Anntoinette. Becky, what would you say?

Becky: Thank you, Amanda. I would like to end by saying – and I'm addressing this to Claudia – it was my intent to say this anyway, but one size doesn't always fit all, especially when we're dealing with children and families. And so as you're thinking of solutions to challenges that come up in regard to boundaries, remember that individualization is the key point because we expect our home visitors and teachers to individualize for a child and for each family, and that means that we also have to individualize for each staff. And this issue of boundaries is really no different when it comes to individualization. We have to look at all those elements in order to come up with solutions that are going to work for everybody. So, individualization is the key.

Amanda: Thank you, Becky. And Janet?

Janet: Well, I think it's really important for programs to keep boundaries in focus on a very regular basis. And there's so many suggestions on the handouts provided to this audio conference, each of which

could be the topic of a 15-minute dialogue at the beginning of every staff meeting. And I also think it's very important to play with boundary setting in your program. It is a serious issue and yet we learn so much more through laughter than we do through pain and criticism. So for example, playing the ongoing game of calling each other on crossed boundaries in a "caught you!" fun kind of way can help to bring staff members' awareness to how frequently boundaries may be crossed. So really playing with that I think is key. So play!

Amanda: I love it. Well, and I want to thank our faculty so much. I want to start with Angie and then Becky, Janet, and Anntoinette, of course. Thanks so much for spending this time with us today, for all that you've shared.

I was thinking about something that Angie – Angie talks about so often, which is the crisis really that many of the families we serve cope with everyday. And it feels so important as we're talking about boundaries to have resilient staff so that we can support families and children building that resilience themselves. You all are so important, and I'm so grateful to you for joining us today in the face of so many competing responsibilities to think about what – to think about your self-care, as Janet said – what that self-care can offer those children and families.

We also want folks to – to move forward in continuing those issues. We do hope that you all can use the questions on page 11 to take some time as individuals or as a group to reflect on boundary setting, boundary maintaining, how that can happen and with what supports in your program. We want to refer you to the resources on page 12, and of course those relationship-based competencies.

And finally, please, please send those evaluations into us either online or on paper. We definitely use those and they help guide our way. We need them. Please send us your comments. Thank you so much, again, for being here today and for the work that all of you do with the children and families that you serve, again, in times of crisis and in times of relative calm. As you do that work, I just want to alert you to one final resource. You can sign up for the baby e-lets. These are brief bi-weekly emails that offer connections to resources and upcoming events, and they're available from the Early Head Start National Resource Center. You can go to the homepage at www.ehsnrc.org to sign up. Thank you so much again for being here, and I'm going to turn it over to Dana now to end the call.

Dana: And again, that does conclude today's presentation. We thank you for your participation.