

Engaging Parents in the Home-Based and Family Child Care Program Options
Track E Plenary: Home Visiting and Family Child Care
17th Annual Virtual Birth to Three Institute

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Angie Godfrey: Hello. I'm Angie Godfrey, Infant and Toddler Program Specialist at the Office of Head Start.

Jennifer Boss: And I'm Jennifer Boss, Director of the Early Head Start National Resource Center. Welcome back. This is the final week of the Virtual Birth to Three Institute. Track E focused on engaging parents in the home-based and family child care program options. This track will include a plenary presentation followed by two webinars, and at the conclusion of our Institute, an engaging parent plenary session.

Angie: Our work with home visiting is some of the best work that happens with families and their very young children. I love we're going to be talking about home visiting this week. I also love that we will be talking about the family child care program option. It is a recently added option and a powerful opportunity to serve children and families.

But before we get into this week, I'd like to quickly review what we learned last week during Track D. Our first webinar, "Invest in People: The Use of Coaching in Professional Development and Continuous Learning," explored coaching as an effective strategy for professional development. Then we had the webinar on interviewing that offered specific strategies for interviewing applicants and their references to identify relationship-ready staff. And finally, the webinar "Growing Program, Growing People: Reflective Leadership in Early Head Start" explained the core practices and processes of being a successful reflective leader.

Jennifer: Our first plenary this week is "Engaging Parents in the Home-Based and Family Child Care Options," presented by Dr. Brenda Jones Harden. Brenda is an associate professor at University of Maryland at College Park where she teaches courses on child development, infant and toddler care, and the development of interventions for children at environmental risk. This webcast will focus on the concept that parents are central to a child's success and that programs must invite parents to be integrally involved in the program and their child's care and education.

Angie: Later in the week, we'll have two webinars. The first, "Family Child Care: An Effective Option for Children, Families, and Communities," will discuss the Early Head Start family child care program option and the unique opportunities it presents for providing comprehensive services to children and families. This webinar will be presented by Dr. Calvin Moore and William Castellanos.

Calvin is the deputy director of the Office of Child Care in Washington, DC. He has over 20 years of experience in early care in education, with vast experience working with Early Head Start and family child care partnerships at the local, state, and national level.

Bill is the Child, Youth, and Family Services Division director of the Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo, California. He oversees Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, and

state child development programs in 10 counties in California. Bill serves more than 600 children across those counties in the family child care program option.

Jennifer: The second webinar is "Keeping the Parent-Child Relationship in Focus." This webinar will explore how the parent-child relationship is the foundation of the home-based program option. It will discuss how the home visitor serves as the facilitator who supports the development of parenting skills and shares child development information. This webinar will be presented by David Jones and Patricia Brady.

David is the home visiting specialist at the Office of Head Start. Patricia has been working with families facing various adversities for over 20 years. She has a long history in child welfare and has presented at national conferences on topics such as engaging families, assisting those families with adversity, and developing resilience.

Angie: Last, but certainly not least, this year's parent plenary will again be moderated by Amanda Perez from the Early Head Start National Resource Center. The title for this plenary is "Something Better for My Children: Families Chart Their Course from Difficult Childhoods to Devoted Parenting." This final event of vBTT will celebrate how Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start can help parents who have had challenges and adversities in their childhood recognize their strengths and talents and build resilience to engage in the challenging and rewarding work of parenting.

Jennifer: We hope you've enjoyed this year's online presentation of the 17th Annual Birth to Three Institute. On behalf of The Early Head Start National Resource Center...

Angie: ...and the Office of Head Start...

Together: ...thank you...

Jennifer: ...for joining us.

[Music]

Dr. Brenda Jones Harden: Hello, everybody. My name is Brenda Jones Harden and I'm here to talk to you today about engaging parents in Early Head Start. I'm going to try to cover a lot today; won't be covering every bullet on the slide, but I want to talk to all about what we know about parent and child outcomes, particularly in Early Head Start. I'm going to talk to you a little bit about the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework.

I want to tell you a little bit about what I've learned from the research in Early Head Start on parent engagement, particularly in regard to home visitation. And I also want to spend quite a bit of time talking to you about all the opportunities we have in Early Head Start to engage parents. I want to think about some strategies in particular that have to do with program implementation, culture, and families at risk. So let's get started.

First, I just want to say that we've got a lot of research about Early Head Start and parents. And what we have learned from that research is, of course, that parents are the primary facilitators of young children's development through what they provide in their home learning environment, through how they support their children, and their functioning. The other thing that we've learned from the research

is that family engagement, parent involvement in schools, in child care programs, has a real impact on child outcomes. We know that children have better grade point averages, are more likely to enroll in challenging programs, etc., if their parents are involved in their schooling.

So with those two pieces of research – 1) that parents are the primary facilitators of children's development and 2) that parent involvement really does lead to better child outcomes – we can really take a look at what happens in Early Head Start and think about what parent engagement means for young children.

We have the great fortune in Head Start to have a Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement that has created a very comprehensive Framework that allows us to think about how we can adapt programs to make sure we do the best job we can at engaging parents. And I want to look at two particular pieces of that Framework, one in the second column and two in the third column, to think about outcomes and impact areas.

So in terms of impact areas, what that Framework helps us to think about is the import of changing the program environment to one that makes families feel welcomed, valued, and respected by program staff. They also in the impact areas emphasize family partnerships, as we have been doing in Head Start for many, many years, where families are working with staff to achieve certain kinds of goals. There is also an impact area that focuses on teaching and learning. And clearly for babies we're talking more about promoting baby's development, but we want to make sure families are equal partners in this endeavor. Finally, one of their impact areas is community partnerships. And we want to make sure the communities in which families reside support families' interests and their needs, and help them to really be more engaged in their young children's development.

In terms of the Framework outcome areas, there are many that are very important for us to consider in the context of Early Head Start. One is family well-being. Another is positive parent-child relationships, which of course we know is the cornerstone of Early Head Start. Another is families as lifelong educators of their young children; or we could probably say for babies, the promoters of their infant's development. They also talk about families as learners themselves. They talk about the importance of having parents engage in the transitions that their young children experience, families' connections to their own peers and community, and families as advocates and leaders.

So throughout this talk, you'll hear me really think about how these various outcomes can be achieved through the strategies that we engage in in our work with parents in Early Head Start and child care. So the first thing that I want to say, and this is really the cornerstone of Early Head Start as well, is that clearly relationships matter. And we want to make sure all families understand that we know that they want to and can be engaged in their young children's development.

We want to have all staff recognize the advantages of school, family, and community connections. We want to make sure all staff knows how to work with families from all kinds of diverse backgrounds. We want to make sure staff understands how to connect – not just refer, but how to connect families with community resources. And we want to really think about the importance of sharing the power of our programs with families and community members.

Also, we want to think about what the helping relationship really entails. And from our vantage point, it is important to think of the helper as a coach. The helper is somebody who really zeros in on child development issues, and you'll hear me raise this a couple of times throughout this presentation. The

import of having helpers who are emotionally involved and caring, unconditional positive regard as I like to say. And practitioners who can think about the helping relationship as one in which there is harmony among the practitioner, parents, and the larger family. So clearly, relationships matter when we think about the import of parent engagement.

Now what I want to do is really pull on the research on home visiting and the little teeny bit of research we have on family child care to help us think about how parents can be more appropriately engaged in the work. And in many studies they characterize this helping relationship, this parent engagement kind of process, as the emotional quality of the family's interaction with the program. Not necessarily how many home visits they've made or anything like that, but clearly this emotional aspect of the interaction of the relationship between home visitors and parents, or family child care providers and parents, really becomes an essential aspect of the work.

We know there are lots of things that influence that emotional quality of that relationship. But what I want to focus primarily on today is what we can do as staff people to really support that emotional relationship. So, I'm going to pull from research that looks at things like preventing home visitation drop-out.

And what we've learned from that research is that if you want to make sure families are keeping their home visits, are sustained in the home visiting process, you want to make sure the home visits focus on child development. You want to make sure that individual needs of the family – the specific needs of the family are met. And you want to actually make home visits that are really, really engaging for parent and child.

And one of the things that I try to encourage home visitors to do, from the research as well as from my own practice, is really make this engaging for the parent-child as a dyad, not necessarily child specific where we work individually with a child. And the other thing that we've learned is that if the visits are scheduled when there are fewer distractions – now clearly we know that when we go into families' homes there are lots of distractions, but we can think about asking parents when there are fewer or even coming up with ways to engage the other children in the home while we're working with a particular dyad.

So there are many other studies that have also looked at engagement, and I want to think about one that has looked at Early Head Start for a moment and just focus on actually what it says about home visitors. So home visitors who are conscientious and persistent, meaning going back over and over again to reach the family to try and get them, home visitors who really help the parents understand the program goal and clarify their roles with the families, those home visitors tend to have parents who are more engaged.

Interventionists who can make sure the parents understand that their commitment to the program is really great and they want the parents to have an equal commitment. And again, where the home visit focuses on parent-child development. So the more the home visitor can engage in that parent-child interaction the more families are going to be engaged in that process.

Now we can think about how to link these engagement skills with child outcomes because, clearly, one of our goals in Early Head Start is to promote school readiness, at least to provide the kind of supports for the child development processes that lead to school readiness. So in the context of the home visit, how this notion of engaging parents in parent-child interaction can be manifested is having activities for

parents so that parents understand what their role is for children, so they know what to do with their children. Having them help us to assess children's process – progress.

So it shouldn't just be our role as an assessor, but really help parents to make the assessment using assessment tools that are parent friendly so they can help us think about where they want their children to go, but also to really coach them to use developmentally appropriate activities and materials with their children. So we can lend or give materials to them, we can use materials that are in the home, we can make toys and other materials with the parents, again, with this whole notion of having them be more of an active partner in the development of – of activities for their children as well as materials.

Now there is a lot of research that helps us to think about what this parent engagement looks like outside of Early Head Start, and I want to focus on that just a little bit. One of the goals that a lot of parent involvement programs have is to really improve family sense of agency, their self-efficacy. So in Early Head Start, how this could be manifested is really having them more involved in the administrative aspects of – of our programs, more involved in the professional development aspects of our program, even more involved in the evaluation aspects of our program where they're involved in action, research, and other kinds of things.

Another goal that comes out of some of this parent involvement literature is building family social capital. In other words, helping families to understand that they have a huge role in their communities and their communities can help them meet their goals as parents. So really to focus as much as we can on families' connections with each other within our programs, family connections with child care providers in and outside of the program, and family connections with other community groups.

So in that way, we have to think very carefully about how we communicate with families. Like one of the programs that I work with, families respond to text; that's what they want to do. They're young parents, for example, so we have to think about ways to communicate with them and really to get them involved, to ask them questions about when is the best time for them to attend events, what things would they like, and what things do they think would make their children's lives better.

Another thing that I really want to think about is sort of what this means for family child care. And I have to admit that the research and the practice information on how we engage parents in the family child care endeavor is really much less than what we know about home-based work. But just to talk about a few things.

One of the things that we've learned in the family child care literature is that when you have a child development specialist go to the family child care home to serve as a mentor or support person, that person really becomes an asset to the family child care provider and really helps improve the quality of family child care. So one of the things that we could think about doing in this vein is really expand the child development specialist's role, not just to support the quality of the family child care experience specifically but also to include parents and providers as collaborators in the promotion of child development.

The other thing that we've learned from the family child care literature is that low-income working parents are much more likely to use this kind of child care. Obviously, there are not enough centers to take care of all of their children. And that many of them prefer the flexibility of family child care homes and the intimate family-like setting, the individual attention that's given to babies in particular. So clearly there's a need for more practice and research that's really focused on how can we engage

parents in this process, in the children's experiences within the family child care homes that promotes child development.

Now what I want to talk about a little bit, and again I'm pulling from lots of different literatures to help us think about this particular phenomenon, is what we've learned from people like Joyce Epstein about what parent involvement looks like in schools. And I want to use that as a framework for thinking about the opportunities for parent engagement, family involvement in Early Head Start.

So Epstein identifies five different kinds of parent involvement: 1) parenting, which is about creating a supportive home environment for children; 2) learning at home, which is helping with homework and curriculum related materials – obviously we don't have homework for Early Head Start children, but certainly the curriculum idea resonates with us; how to communicate with families, the two-way exchanges about school or, in our perspective, Early Head Start, and child care, and children's progress; volunteering at school; and then decision-making.

So I want to think about this in terms of opportunities for parent engagement in Early Head Start. So on the parenting domain, one of the first things we have to do is really think about the family partnership agreement and, again to use that as a platform from which we can help parents to make decisions about how they want to be engaged in their children's development and in the process of what we're doing in Early Head Start. We also, from a home-based perspective, have the beautiful opportunity to use socialization groups as an opportunity for parent engagement. And again, asking parents how they want these socialization groups to occur, having them as collaborators in creating the kind of socialization groups we want to have for them.

The importance of parent-child interaction, which again is the cornerstone of Early Head Start anyway, to really use that interaction as a way to help parents learn how to be more nurturing, supportive of their children, not just in terms of their development but in terms of responsiveness to who they are and all those kinds of things. To really think about using the home visits and the family child care setting as an opportunity to provide coaching to parents to help them really learn the best ways to promote their children's development.

And one of the things that I've been working on quite a bit in my own work, to integrate evidence-based parenting interventions into Early Head Start. And the one that we're actually working on is the Attachment and Bio-behavioral Catch-up Program. But there are many others, like the Incredible Years, Promoting First Relationships, many others that we can think about integrating into our ongoing Early Head Start services. So that's the parenting domain.

In her learning at home domain, opportunities abound as well. We can think about child-centered home visits, which coach parents to promote development via caregiving routines; to have them follow the child's lead in play; to talk and read to children, which we know is so important for children's development at large; to really help them help us think about curriculum selection and planning, particularly what type of curricula seem to resonate mostly for them in the context of the home; to have lending libraries that offer games and learning materials. I think one of my pet peeves is when we take things and take them back, but this way we can leave them in the home and have parents use them for a prolonged period of time.

To have discussion groups with other families where they think about children's learning and what kinds of things other families are doing and that – that they can imitate and – and emulate. And then classes

that are more dyadic – not didactic classes, but more sort of supportive coaching classes on how they can stimulate their children's development. So all these things are certainly things that can occur within the context of Early Head Start and family child care.

So the other areas that Epstein talks about is communicating. And one of the things that I mentioned already is how we've learned how texting families, particularly young moms, really works best. We've also tried to use cell phone cards to engage them in sort of helping to work with us through their cell phones, newsletters, cards. We send home little mementos for them that sort of say, read to your child. All those kinds of very non-traditional ways and traditional ways of communicating.

In terms of volunteering, we know a lot of our parents really want to be involved, maybe can't be involved, so we have to really expand what we think about volunteering as. So certainly there's within the classroom volunteering, which many parents are willing to do. But there are also external volunteer efforts that families can engage in. Big family nights where we have dining experiences and social experiences and academic experiences for families and children, in my mind, fall within that domain.

And finally, as we have done for years in Early Head Start and Head Start, to really have families be a part of our decision-making processes through Policy Councils and parent advisory committees. And perhaps we can think of even smaller groups that families can engage in that might allow them to practice some of those decision-making opportunities.

Now I would be remiss if I didn't address certain issues that really are important for us to consider as we think about parent engagement, and I want to focus on a few of those right now. I'm going to start with cultural issues. First of all, I think it's clear in Early Head Start that one of the things we want to make sure we do is capitalize on children's home culture. So we want to make sure that at least our home visitors and family child care providers, if they aren't from those same cultures, that they have really good knowledge. And where do we get that knowledge? From parents themselves about the cultures that these families come from so we can use that in our approaches to helping them learn about promoting their children's development, but also so we can show a lot of respect and admiration for the child-rearing practices that occur in their culture.

And one of the things that goes without saying is making sure that we have practitioners who speak the home language of these families, because obviously it doesn't make sense if we have families who don't speak our language to try and think that we can help them at all. I also want to talk about implementation issues a little bit. One of the things that we know from home visiting work is that dosage is important. And in home visiting, for example, families typically don't get the number of visits that we intend for them to get. So, clearly, parent engagement is important to try and increase those number of visits.

So one of the things I think about is looking at the frequency of visits over time, identifying which families might not be getting that dosage, and really doing some more intensive engagement around those families. I also think as – as supervisors we have to make decisions about caseloads so that we can think about the highly engaged families being on the same caseloads with some of the families that are more challenging.

We have to think about this issue of content and making sure that home visitors are delivering the content that we want them to do, particularly in regard to this issue of parent-child interaction and promoting child development since we know from several studies that that increases parent

engagement in the home visit. And really thinking about parents as partners so that the home visitor doesn't become the center of the session, but indeed the parent is as they engage with their children.

The other particular issue I want to talk about is father involvement. Now we know from the literature that fathers provide something unique to their children, that their involvement is important, and that most low-income fathers want to be involved with their children. But one of the things that is clear from the literature is that unless a program is designed with specific services that are adapted for fathers and fathers understand that these services are particularly geared to them, they're less likely to be engaged. So clearly, one of the things we have to work on in terms of parent engagement is making sure we have a set of services that are labeled for fathers and that they understand that they have a role in those services, in designing them and planning them and, of course, receiving them.

The other issue that I want to spend a little bit of time talking about is engaging parents as – at risk. And clearly, these are the families who are more difficult to engage although they're the ones who are more likely to be involved in home visitation and more likely to be involved in family child care. They still present some challenges in terms of engagement.

So I just want to talk about a few things that in my own experience has really worked to engage those parents more. One of the things that I've learned from my own experience is the importance of really thinking about increasing the dosage for these parents. In other words, as I said before, we know that parents in home visitation don't typically get the number of home visits that we try – that we intend for them. And particularly for our high risk parents who often drop out of home visiting services, we may want to start out with doubling our attempts as a way to try and achieve a full dose. Because one of the things we also know about these parents is if they don't get a full dose of home visits, they don't show the internalization of the skills we're trying to address with them.

The other thing that comes up for us quite a bit is the importance of providing concrete incentives to families; for example, things like diapers, things like that. So programs should really think about budgets that allow them to provide some of these concrete things for parents. One of the other things that we've been giving them a lot recently is videotapes that sort of chronicle their children's development and help them to see some of the great things that they're able to do with their young children.

The other thing that has come to us that's really important is really trying to align our goals for their children with their goals for their children. So we ask them right out, for example, what do they want for their children. And they'll say things like, "I want my children to be good in school. I want them to learn. I want them to be good people." And so, we try and find ways of putting our goals – for example, children to learn how to talk more and things like that – underneath the goals that they have so we are engaging them on their own level.

The other thing that we've worked on is really thinking more carefully about how we do skill building with high risk parents. And our experience teaches us that we have to be a lot more directive with them, giving them sort of blow-by-blow instructions, if you will, in the coaching context: to how to talk to their children to how to read to their children, to how to be responsive to their children to how to follow their children's leads. Whereas other parents can sort of go with it, we really have to sort of help them moment by moment in those moment-to-moment interactions to see how they could do these kinds of things.

The other thing that's become increasingly important to us is really addressing issues that are specific to family risk. So although, clearly, our primary goal is to focus on children's development and the babies stay the center of our work with families, we clearly know that we have to provide these kind of supportive services. Often we can do that around their interaction with the baby. That really helps us to not only think about the baby's safety, security, stability, and sustenance, but the safety security, stability, and sustenance of parents, because often they have not had early caregiving experiences that have provided those very important things to them.

We also want to make sure that we address these other issues that prevent families from doing the kind of parenting we want them to do for very young children: their mental health issues, their substance abuse issues, their family violence issues. But clearly, although we are addressing that using ancillary services to address that in large part, we still want to make sure that the center of our work remains the baby.

Finally, and I'm borrowing a phrase from Jeree Paul, we want to provide these parents with a "corrective emotional experience." In other words, giving them experiences with us that are different from experiences they've had with other human service practitioners – but also probably different from the experiences they've had with their own parents – where we give them unconditional positive regard, where we constantly are working to help them understand in as many ways and as many times as possible that they are valued and that they are important to us.

So in closing, what I'd like to sort of do is cover the things that we talked about today. One, that parents are key to children's positive child outcomes and long term school success. We know that from a lot of Early Head Start and other data. Two, that parent engagement has a positive impact on children and families. So, we want to make sure all of our programs really work hard to promote engagement of parents.

We also know that parents really need us to be strategically intentional about how we engage them, in particular parents who are at risk. And we also know that our programs, our home-based and family child care programs, present us with some unique options for helping parents to become more engaged, and ultimately to promote their children's long term success. Thank you for being with me this afternoon.

[Music]

Terra Bonds Clark: Good afternoon. I'm Terra Bonds Clark, Director of Special Initiatives at the Early Head Start National Resource Center. Thank you for joining us for today's webcast. We've just heard a wonderful presentation from Dr. Harden about the importance of engaging parents in the home-based and family child care options of Early Head Start.

Now, I'm pleased to moderate a panel discussion to help us build on what we learned. Please join me in welcoming three panelists who are here to share their knowledge and experience with us. First we have David Jones, Home Visiting Specialist at the Office of Head Start. Next we have Bob Stechuk, Assistant Director of the Office of Head Start's National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness. And last but not least, we have Jennifer Boss, Director of the Early Head Start National Resource Center.

Dr. Harden covered a lot of important ground during her presentation. One area that I'd like to focus in on is the importance of relationships and how they truly are the focal point of the work we do with

families. As Dr. Harden mentioned, programs need to be intentional in their planning. Supervisors need to take time to consider how program staff are engaging with families and how well they are supported in doing this crucial work with families. Program staff themselves need to be receptive to learning from families and to having open communication with them, communication that really is a two-way street. So what are some concrete strategies that programs can use to begin building relationships with families? And once relationships have been established, how can programs further build upon and sustain these relationships? Bob?

Bob Stechuk: Thank you, Terra. And thank you, everyone, for watching. So families in Early Head Start are wonderfully diverse, but what they share in common is the strong desire to support their children's development. In longer terms, the families want their children to be successful in school. So the beginning of concrete strategies to engage families in the family child care and home visit options are for the Head Start staff to recognize that children's development is driven by their daily experiences.

We have an overwhelming amount of research that tells us that children's daily experiences drive their development. And we also know that those daily experiences are taking place within the context of the family's culture and home language. And so, programs can develop concrete strategies by giving their personnel the opportunity to both share information with families and to plan – plan out what kind of information to share starting with the first contact with the family.

Programs can also plan out the kinds of information that they can seek or try to learn from families. So even something as simple as asking the family – "Tell me about your child. What are they interested in? What do they like to play with? Or tell me about what you do with your child? How often do you go for a walk? Tell me about singing or talking or reading to your child." By – by having a planned approach to sharing information and seeking information, that begins that relationship building process.

Terra: Dave.

David Jones: And one of the ways I think it's important that you can get at what families are doing with their children is – is in the beginning of the relationship process, sometimes home visitors have to think about more intensive home visiting up front. And – and part of the reason why that is is because as you're building relationships with families what you're really trying to do is to make sure the services are meeting their need.

And I think sometimes – you know, we have to obviously adhere to the Performance Standards that – with the 90-minute once a week home visit. But sometimes if a family is dealing with some really challenging issues, you may want to front load those home visits into a couple of extra visits to get them connected to resources in the community and things like that. But it has to be appropriate for the family; so that's a negotiation piece.

I think what also happens during that process is you have an opportunity to begin building upon the strengths. But in order to do that, you have to look for those strengths. You have to be able to recognize them and then acknowledge them with the family. What that does – it contributes to the partnership process. And when you're building partnerships with families, you know, initially the home visitor's going in and it may be a little bit more labor intensive, like they're doing a lot more of the modeling and the facilitating of the activities.

But if the partnership is working in the way that it really should be working, what you'll see is a shift. The parent will then begin to sort of embrace more of their responsibility and not want to defer so much to the professional and then take on more of those pieces of the home visit in interact – interacting with their children, and sort of embracing the role that they are primary facilitator for their child's development.

Jennifer: And I love the way that Brenda really talked about sort of the intentionality of the way that programs are approaching home visiting and family child care. And, you know, one of the things that struck me is how important it is for the professional to really understand their role. So the home visitor really understanding what their role is with the family and understanding what their professional role is and what the boundaries are around that. And one – and when you enter into a relationship with another person, you really do have to do that with a sense of knowing what your outcome is, what your intentional goal is.

And so – and how you are, I think. And she talked about that too, how you are with the family as much as, you know, the things that you're going to do. But how you comport yourself, how you act, how you – how you interact with that family I think is really important. And that helps to – knowing that going in really helps you to begin to build those kinds of relationships that are sustaining.

Terra: Absolutely. Dr. Harden also talked a little bit about home language and culture and really how that is part of the building of the relationship. Bob, can you tell us a little bit more about that.

Bob: I would love to. So that – that whole piece about focusing on child development is just so powerful. So Early Head Start staff just have tremendous potential to effect children's development, not only during the time that the child is enrolled but long-term. So we know from the research that – that language development that children do birth to 3 is fundamental to their long-term success. For example, there are many measures of reading success that are rooted in development in the – in the first three years. So, all families want their kids to do well in school. They may not see the connection between language development in the birth to 3 period and that later long-term – those later long-term outcomes.

So, programs can provide their staff with professional development around understanding those specific features of the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework to understand those key pieces of language. And then for – for the hundreds of thousands of children and families in Early Head Start, in Head Start who speak home languages other than English, it's important for staff to recognize the importance of home language. And the key to understanding that is the recognition that's very basic to Early Head Start and Head Start that language development is connected to all the other domains.

So it would be very unfamiliar to us to say language is – is somehow developing apart from all those other pieces. So when a child is growing up with a home language, regardless of what it is, whether it's Spanish or Somali or Serbo-Croatian, the child's identity formation is – is connected to that. Their social-emotional development, their physical development, and their thinking skills.

So, we don't have enough time here to go into all of those wonderful details, but the Office of Head Start Multicultural Principles speak to this issue in depth. So Multicultural Principle 6 talks about the importance of the home language and points out that some families may want to stop speaking their home language to their child and speak English instead. That's not really a good idea if they don't have strong skills in English. What we want is for families to use their strongest language with their children.

And so the programs who are interested in pursuing this information, take a look at the Office of Head Start Multicultural Principles. Those are available online through the National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness. If programs go to ECLKC and click on our homepage, the link to the document is there. There's an extensive summary of the research on pages 47 through 52 explaining in depth why we don't want to do away with the home language of the family.

Jennifer: And in thinking about that as connected to this – the question around building relationships and sustaining relationships and – Brenda talked about the – the importance of – of respect for the family and respect of the family's culture. And that goes such a long way when you can demonstrate that respect by being able to communicate. I mean, not just for the child's development but for building those relationships with families that are so critical to the work.

Terra: Absolutely. Absolutely. When the three of you were talking, I heard little bits about professional development. So you all brought up some really great strategies and I hope our viewers are taking notes. [Laughter] Now, in thinking specifically about what programs can do to prepare staff to engage with families, I always want to come back to the concept of professionalism. So David, can you talk with us about what it means for home visitors and family child care providers to have a professional identity?

David: Sure, Terra. You know, professional identities are critical. I don't know – I don't believe that we can say enough about what that means, professional development and developing a professional identity. You know, it's not just about professional conduct or about how staff view themselves, but it's about what they do with – with that intentionality. It's ownership. It's commitment. It's integrity for the work. It's seeing home visiting as a viable option and making sure that that's how you sell it, that's how you promote it. That way, you know, initially when you begin working with families they're clear.

I think you know, home visiting it – it – well, the professional development aspect puts home visitors in a place where when they confront a challenge or a family's dealing with some sort of crisis, they have the tools that they can draw from to either support that family or know that they have a place where they can go to get the support. So it's not feeling like you have to have an answer for everything that you're confronted with, but being secure enough within yourself to say, "You know what? I don't know." You know? And I think that's the difference between someone who's professionally trained and supported and experienced versus someone who's sort of fairly new and feels like, "I have to be able to respond to every situation that – that I'm confronted with."

Bob: Very well said.

Jennifer: Yeah. And for family child care providers, as well. I mean, Brenda talked both about home visiting and family child care. And, you know, it's the same sort of thing. And how our programs really being intentional about supporting the professional development of their family child care partners if they're partners, or staff if they're staff of the program. So what are they doing to support that person's capacity to relate to the parents as well, and to see themselves as a professional in this field?

David: And I'm glad you said that too, because we – we were talking a little bit earlier. A very critical piece is that professional development. You know, we always want home visitors to be cognizant of the fact that they're going into someone's home. So that within itself speaks to the respect and the approach that you use when you're going in. With family child care providers, the provider – it's their home.

So they have to look at professionalism from a very different vantage point to know that they are really embracing the parents' sort of nervousness and concerns about leaving their child with them and being respectful and mindful. All those things that come with that; not being controlling and saying, well, this is my domain. Well, you're providing a service for families so you always want to make sure that you're sort of welcoming them in a way that they can feel comfortable leaving their children with you.

Bob: What I'm hearing my colleagues saying is that we want Early Head Start staff, whether they're in family child care option or the home visit option, to be able to give families a very clear idea of their purposes and role as a professional, whether their opening their home to children or whether their visiting families in their home. We want the Early Head Start staff to be able to present themselves as professionals and to be able to represent the – the key features of the Early Head Start program.

Those – those cornerstone – cornerstones – those key pieces of Early Head Start, we want them to be able to communicate what those are. And a simple way to think about professional development is if we don't prepare staff to work from a professional – a professional identity up front, at some point very early in the process they're going to have to invent one.

So, there are many different kinds of family child care – licensed, unlicensed. We want that Early Head Start family child care person to be able to present themselves about what it is that they're doing as an Early Head Start person. For the home visitor, they're not showing up as a friend. So when the family says, you know, "I want to move. Can you show up with a truck?" or, "I'm short; can you lend me \$50?" we want the – the home visitor to have that professional identity to work from as a way of relating to whatever situations may arise.

Terra: I think about family child care and, really, the child development specialist that goes into the home to support the family child care provider in not only sort of the administrative piece but certainly, more importantly, in how they interact with the children and interact with the family. So that professionalism piece not only speaks to the trainings and opportunities that the child – the child care provider themselves might have in working with Early Head Start, but certainly that role of the child development specialist and – and the way that they present or support or mentor and coach. And I think Brenda spoke to that in her presentation, as well.

Jen, I want – I wanted you to talk a little bit about thinking about the home visits and the parent-child interaction and how the provider – the home visitor is in the home to – to provide that support.

Jennifer: Sure. I really love the way that – that Brenda talked about the home visitor not being sort of the center of the session, that really this is about the parent and child relationship. And – and you know, in the context of this part of the conversation where we're talking about professional identity and really understanding, again, what your role is, what you are intending to do when you go into another person's home, and how you comport yourself, how you are with that family, it takes really skilled training and a person who understands their role well enough to know how to keep that parent-child relationship at the center.

And it's particularly hard to do when you're faced with things that you weren't necessarily expecting when you walk through the door. When families are in crisis or when things happen that you hadn't planned for, how do you continue to keep that parent-child relationship at the center? And Brenda talked a little bit about that in her – in her presentation. You know, for programs that are thinking about

training their staff and – and thinking about their – their sort of theory of change around their home visiting program, how do they support their staff to be able to walk through the door and kind of in the moment figure out what to do from moment to moment with the family?

And also – and we talked about this before – also understanding that, you know, sometimes people are going to make mistakes. Or sometimes you're not going to necessarily know what to do right in that moment and – and you have to be able to kind of know that you're going to make mistakes, things are going to happen, but you go back again and you have opportunities for, you know, sort of fixing – for repair. There's always an opportunity to go back when you have that kind of relationship that is sustainable with the family.

David: And that's one of the beautiful things about the anchoring of professional development is that someone who sees himself – who views himself as a professional embraces that role. They're okay with accepting the fact that they made a mistake. They're okay with going back and having a conversation with their supervisor and saying, "Listen. You know, I really botched this in the home visit. I was really trying to do X but it turned out to be Y. How do I fix it?" You know – and – and it's a great way of modeling for – for the families that you work with, that, you know, mistakes will happen and this relationship is so important to me, to the work that we're trying to do together, that I want to repair it. And I think that's a really important thing.

That also sort of lends to the place where a true professional is not one to see themselves as the primary facilitator. Now, they know – again, as I spoke earlier, they may initially do more work up front, but I think they get excited when they can step back and watch that parent or those parents – mothers, fathers, grandparents, whoever is it, whoever it may be, taking on more of the responsibility for the relationship and – and, you know, enjoying.

Jennifer: Yeah, and understanding more their role in supporting their child's development. Because, you know, that's where we're sort of ultimately sort of shooting for is to help that parent or the – the person who is taking care of that child to really understand how they can support their child's optimal development. And – and in this case, really sort of thinking about the connection to school readiness – supporting that child's readiness for school and beyond.

Terra: Thank you for sharing those thoughts about what it means for family child care providers and home visitors to have a professional identity. As we move on, I'd like to talk a little bit about how hard it can be sometimes to work with families, particularly – and Jen, I think you mentioned this earlier – when they're going through difficult times, as so many of our families are. What can program staff do when families are dealing with multiple challenges? How can staff effectively work with families who are experiencing major crisis or maybe even several crises at once? Jen, maybe you can answer that for us.

Jennifer: Sure, and I'll – I'll say a little bit more about what I was saying earlier in that, you know, crises always are going to happen. And there's always going to be something that families are going to be dealing with that the professional who's working with them is going to have to sort of try to figure out how do they support the family through this. And one of the critical pieces that I was touching on earlier is that, you know, being able to – in the midst of the crisis to be able to say, you know, "Wow. What – what – how do we think this is impacting your relationship with your child? How do you think that these things that are happening right now – what kind of an impact is it having? What is your child feeling about this? How's this, you know, support – or impacting your child's development?" and helping the

parent to or the person – the caregiver of the child to kind of come back to – to pivot back to, "There's a lot of things going on here. What does this mean for my child?"

And – and that, again, takes, you know, some skill on the provider's part, whether it's a family child care provider or a home visitor, to be able to have those kinds of conversations with families and – and help them to – to keep the child at the center of what's happening.

Bob: Yes. Absolutely.

David: Yeah, I – I concur. And, you know, one of the things that in – in my experience that I've seen happen a few times is that you know home visits are so well-intended that they'll make mistakes based upon their own beliefs and value systems. And I think some of the assumptions that happens when a family's going through a crisis, we may place more weight on that situation for them than what – their experience. Our families are extremely resilient. And sometimes they may have already gone through similar situations and have negotiated those situations.

So it's really important, again, to take that professional stance, to step back, to be clear about what it is that you're seeing, and ask relevant questions. But you will need to get at, "So how is this impacting upon your ability to parent your child?" to make sure that your child is doing okay during this process.

And I think the other important thing is that, to me, there is nothing in my experience about good work that's easy. So a lot of this is going to come with – with some energy. This – we know that this work is really difficult, it's challenging. And I think some of the – some of the professionals that I know that do this work are really excited about the fact that they're going to take on this challenge and support families. But they also have to know that they have a team of support behind them; that you don't do this by yourself; that there are supervisors, there's program directors, there's mental health consultants behind you that can help you come up with a concrete plan for how you're going to support families.

Bob: Yes. And that speaks to the key role that program leaders can play for both the family child care and the home visit options. So family child care providers may encounter cultural differences around a certain aspect of caring for the child, or home visitors may walk into either a new crisis or one that's being ongoing. So if – if staff in either program option have regular access to support and to communication, if they can regularly debrief on the issues that they're facing in a safe environment.

So, their work involves engaging families and helping to support that parent-child relationship. But there's also, as David was mentioning, the parallel process about the EHS staff person being able to work with the families. So if program leaders can – can plan and carry out regular kinds of support, opportunities for staff to debrief, to reflect on their own emotional level of involvement as well as what's going on in the family, and then to re-purpose or re-plan what's going to take place on the next visit. "So maybe I did make a mistake. Maybe I – now, in reflection, I would think I would do things differently." Then to take that final step of creating a new plan going forward and fine-tuning the relationship if you will so that – again, that all of those key relationships – parents, children, and Early Head Start staff – can be as productive as possible.

Jennifer: And that is just – I mean, that's just so critical. I would just underscore everything that Bob and David just said. Because it's almost impossible to do this kind of work with other individuals, this very relationship-based, relationship-driven work, without having those opportunities for reflection, for stepping back, for having a team to support you in this, that it's – that's just critical. If there's one thing I

think that, you know, anyone watching the webcast walks away with I think, you know, thinking about those – that kind of a team support and opportunities for reflective practice is critical.

Terra: Absolutely. And I think even parents would appreciate the fact that we're here. We're coming with our passion and sincerity. And certainly in developing our relationships, we're human, we're not going to be perfect. But understanding that the – the parent is open to welcoming you into their home, or the provider is open to welcoming us into their home to work with them, and there's that genuine trust and reciprocal relationship. I think people can appreciate if you make a mistake then I come back and have a corrective action or some plan to say, hey, I made a mistake and here is a way that we can approach this, and we're all working together for the good of your child and for your family.

Thank you. This has been so helpful. Before we end our discussion, I'd like to revisit a few of the key points made today. First – and truly, we can't say this too often – relationships really matter. Building strong relationships with children and with families is the key to doing the work we do well. You can study child development or family dynamics all you want and have perfect systems in place, but unless you get in there on a very real and personal level and build a strong connection, you won't effect change.

Of course, this doesn't mean giving up professionalism. We talked about the importance of maintaining boundaries. But it does mean investing in that baby and in that family on a very real and human level. That personal connection is what has an impact on – on the life of infants, toddlers, and families.

We also discussed the importance of taking an intentional approach to relationship-building and having systems in place on a program level to support staff in the work that they do. That includes ensuring that staff is well trained and have ample opportunities to develop the skills they need to engage with families. They need to understand exactly how everything they do to support a family ultimately supports the child's optimal development. Staff also need to have a strong level of trust with their own supervisors and program leaders so that they are able to take advantage of the program support network and have safe opportunities to ask questions, seek guidance, and release their own stress. No one should do this work alone.

Finally, we talked about just how critical it is to support the child's development in the context of their family's culture and home language. The child's home language is their first connection to their family, their culture, and their community. It's the language they first use to learn about the world around them and the language that helps them get set for life. In building a relationship with the family, program staff need to remember that the family's language and culture is a great source of pride and strength, and that the child's home language supports their growth and development in many ways.

As we conclude today's discussion, I want to thank David, Bob, and Jennifer for being here with me in the studio. And I also want to thank all of you for joining us for this plenary webcast in the final week of Virtual Birth to Three.

As a reminder, the live audio call questions and answer session with Dr. Harden is about to begin. If you have a question for Dr. Harden, you can access the call internationally by dialing 719-325-2171. In the United States, you can call toll-free at 877-681-3373. For both numbers, the participant passcode is 798174. The audio for the question and answer session will be broadcast right here. So if you don't have a question yourself but want to hear what others have to say, you can simply stay right here and listen in.

Later this week we will have two webinars for you, along with the conclusion of this year's Virtual Birth to Three, the Parent Plenary webcast. You definitely don't want to miss this final event. I hope you've enjoyed today's discussion as much as I have and that you have your questions ready for Dr. Harden. Thank you and take care.

[Music]

Terra: Good afternoon, and welcome to the Virtual Birth to Three Institute live question and answer session with Dr. Jones Harden for her presentation, "Engaging Parents in the Home-Based and Family Child Care Program Options." This is a wonderful opportunity to talk with Dr. Jones live. I'm Terra Bonds Clark. And while we're waiting for our first caller, I'd like to thank Dr. Jones Harden for that wonderful presentation and for joining us for this live Q&A. I would also like to thank our special guest, Angie Godfrey from the Office of Head Start, for joining us on the phone today.

Dr. Harden, establishing a strong professional identity for home visitors and family child care providers was discussed by the panel as an important element for programs to consider. Will you please offer us your insights and some possible strategies programs might use to prepare staff in the various program options?

Dr. Harden: Well, first of all, I'd like to say that I totally, totally concur that all of us who are part of Early Head Start should work to maintain our professional identities no matter what our position is within the program. So it's critically important for all Early Head Start staff. So that's what I want to just start out by saying.

And I also wanted to say that this is an issue that comes up for us a lot because many times in Early Head Start, we're hired because staff might be part of a community or something like that and we all want to help parents. But we have to always keep in mind that we're child development professionals. It's sort of like a mantra we have to say and that should govern everything that we do with families, whether we're child care providers or whether we're center-based providers or whether we're home-based practitioners. It doesn't matter.

So I think there are many ways to develop a professional identity, but I think the sort of crux of it is really being a person who constantly pursues knowledge in your field; that you're always looking for ways to learn more about children, to learn more ways about parents, to learn more ways to engage parents, which was the topic of this discussion today. And I think there are many ways we can do that; certainly through taking advantage of the many training and technical assistance opportunities that the Office of Head Start offers.

But I also think, and this is particularly true for family child care providers and home visitors, that we are very fortunate to be part of a peer network that we can use as much as possible, like other family child care providers in the community or other home-based persons within or even external to our programs where we can learn about – particularly things like how to engage high-risk parents or how to help parents who do not have the same language that we do, or even how do deal with some of the more thorny issues that I know child care providers have to deal with; for example, when parents come late to pick their children up and things like that.

So just getting support from the people around us allows us to be a part of a professional network. And I think that can even extend to being part of more formal networks, as well – National Association for Education of Young Children – but even, you know, family child care provider associations, home visitor networks, and all that kind of thing that are more formal.

I also just want to add one other thing that always comes up for me when I supervise or consult with staff who work with parents in Early Head Start, and that is the issue of boundaries. Again, we're often part of the same communities that families come from. We all want to help them. We all want to be their friends. We all want to be nice to them. But I think one of the things about having a professional identity is making sure that you hold on to the professional boundaries.

In other words, parents are depending upon us to be professionals with their infants, but they're also depending upon us to be professionals with them. So that means that there's certain things that we would not do with them that we might do with friends. So constantly revisiting the issue of boundaries within a program I think is important for supervisors to do, as well as for home visitors, child care providers, and other professionals to do in terms of their own self-reflection.

Terra: Wonderful. Thank you, Dr. Harden. Angie, would you like to add anything or respond to Dr. Harden's comments?

Angie: Well, just first of all, I'm so happy to be here today with Brenda Jones Harden. I just think that the words that she's given us and the work she's done with families around home visiting, particularly, just always reflects professionalism in terms of building those relationships with families. And I just agree totally with that. I think that the key to the work and the ability to do the work with families is in that relationship that you build with families. And I think that that's so important in both home visiting and in family child care.

So many families – I loved when Brenda said that families want their babies in – in homes and in family child care and for providers to understand that and work to build the relationship with families so that they understand that it's a process that involves and engages all of them and – and with the goal and the outcome being the baby's development and the very young child's development. So, yeah. I just I agree with what Brenda said.

Terra: All right. Thank you, Angie. I'd also like to remind our audience that if you have a question for Dr. Harden, please call in now and press *1 to ask your question. Operator, do we have any questions waiting? Okay.

Well, I have another question I'd like to ask you, Dr. Harden. And Angie, you just touched a little bit on this particular topic. You spoke about parents being the key to positive outcomes for children. And I know in the presentation Dr. Harden spoke about this as well. So if parents are certainly the key to positive outcomes and long-term school success for their children, Dr. Harden, can you talk a little bit about how – in a home visit, how you might structure the parent-child interaction so that that relationship is the focal point of the visit and not necessarily the home visitor being at the center of that?

Dr. Harden: Sure. And, you know, this is one of my favorite things to talk about.

Terra: I know. [Laughter]

Dr. Harden: So that was a great toss, thank you. But before I do that I, just wanted to underscore what you said and what Angie said about parents really being the key. I mean, we know just from a lot of research that what parents do with their children matters more than what we as professionals do. And I think it – that isn't to diminish professionals' contribution to children's developmental outcomes.

I think our work allows us to do some really wonderful things with babies and young children that really do lead to positive developmental trajectories. But in the end – and we know this from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation project we know it from the big NICHD child care study – that in the end it's really what parents do with their children in the long-term that matters. And we can think about that because it's parents who are the consistent people in their young children's lives.

We can think about it in terms of, you know, parents really spending much more of their time with their children than we ever could. Even if they're in child care with us 10 hours a day, five days a week, parents still trump us in terms of time. We can think about it in terms of the kind of day-to-day interactions that parents have with their children that make children more focused on those kind of experiences. I mean, there are just many mechanisms, all of which we don't know, that really lead to parents being the most important educators, supporters of their children's development than anybody else.

So I think one of our issues about professional development – I mean, Angie talked about the importance of relationships with parents and relationships between parents and children. Clearly, that is key. But the other thing that's key about our own professional identity is being humble about the fact that what we do is really ancillary in many ways to what parents can do. So I think that always allows me to have a certain humility about my work with families, to know that I am not always the expert, to know that I am not the person who's going to make or break this child's life. It's the parent. So I just wanted to sort of underscore that.

But in terms of what can happen in the context of home visits, and I certainly think family child care providers can also think about even doing some of this during drop-off and pick-up times and times when they have an opportunity to be with parents and groups, that what we really want to do is understand and scaffold parents to be what they can be for their children. That we – like I say to many of the people I supervise, we shouldn't even be touching that baby in the context of a home visit. And I know it's different for a family child care provider because they are providing care. But certainly in the context of a home visit, the mechanism by which we try to make change is via that parent.

So we are a coach, if you will, to the parent so that that parent can do the kind of interactive things. And I think that goes from anything from the routines that they normally have, like feeding and changing the baby's diaper and fixing the baby's hair and putting on their clothes – from those kind of more concrete routines to the more play-based routines that we try and have in the context of a home visit, that all of those interactions should be centered in the home visitor really being removed from the interaction, if you will. We don't want the baby attending to us. We want the baby to be attending to the person who's going to make the most difference in their lives, and that is their mother or father or grandmother, whoever the primary caregiver is.

So it's almost like we are sort of whispering in a parent's ear, looking for those teachable moments, looking for those opportunities to say, "Oh mommy, look at how your baby's responding to you. He wants you to play with this toy with him now." To get moms to be more responsive to their children; to

follow their children's lead; to be more nurturing to their children; to understand the messages that their children are trying to give them because they don't have language, but through their play and through their behavior; to tune into that so that they can respond more appropriately; and also help them to understand how those behaviors really do relate to the long-term developmental outcomes like school readiness.

And that's sort of part of, you know, what I encourage home visitors to say to kind of connect those little moments where the baby is patting a book, for example, that home visitor might give to the mother to share with her child. And you see the baby patting a picture and you say to the mom, "Oh my goodness, you labeling that picture for him is going to help him to be ready for school when he goes to kindergarten." So constantly showing them 1) how important those little behaviors are, but 2) how they relate to these long-term developmental outcomes like school readiness that we want in even little, little kids.

And for us as home visitors, I think the key is to be able to articulate development in a way 1) that parents can understand; right? So we're not sort of talking from this high and mighty textbook kind of thing, but 2) to put it in the context of what parents are experiencing not day-to-day but moment-to-moment with their children with the goal of enhancing their skill in interacting with their children. One of my pet peeves is when we go in and try to "educate" parents about child development when we know that that kind of didactic approach doesn't even work for adults of any kind.

So what really, really makes the difference is being a supporter of the doing that parents are engaged in, and that way they're more able to internalize what you're coaching them to do and they can see the import of every moment that they spend with their children. Every smile that they give back, every picture that they label, every song that they sing, every object that they sort of do hand-over-hand to show the child how to manipulate it, that those little, teeny moments that might, you know, last two, three minutes because babies don't have a whole lot of, you know, attention span. Really, if you think about the confluence of those moments over time, you can really help parents to see how important it is for kids' long-term outcomes.

So what I would argue is that we should be sitting on the floor or wherever parents are, on the bed with their babies, sort of being a whisper in their ear about what they can do to respond to their babies' natural engagement in object exploration and problem-solving and language reasoning, the kind of things that babies are just wired to do. That what we can do is support parents to be right there and help them to push their babies a little farther in the way that Vygotsky used to talk about with his zone of proximal development. Just push them a little farther to see, you know, the new limit of – of their capabilities.

So that's what I think, you know, home visitors can do. And I certainly think, you know, some of the work that Early Head Start programs are doing with family child care providers really allow them to do some of the same things with parents, and certainly do that with the kids during the regular child care day.

Terra: Wow. That was wonderful. You offered some beautiful imagery when you were talking about speaking for the baby and what that looks like in a home visit as the home visitor is interacting with the parent and child. I wonder if we have any callers, Operator. Okay. I guess we don't have any callers waiting. Angie, I wanted to give you an opportunity to perhaps add to or speak to something that Dr. Jones Harden just said, if there was anything you wanted to add.

Angie: Well, that was wonderful. I – like you – the imagery was so – that you mentioned to her was so great. You know, speaking of a home visitor as whispering to the family. And I just – you know, I think that's – that's so key. That – the other thing that you said, Brenda, that we don't go into a home to show a family or to teach a family. We just – we move into that environment.

And one of the things I love about Early Head Start is we talk about Early Head Start as a child development and family support program, and that's exactly what home visiting is. It really is, you know, supporting families in their role with their child and understanding that it – it is connected. You know, on the panel, people talked about that too. David Jones, at one point, said that it's so important to go in – and he didn't use the word "humble," as you did, Brenda, but he talked about approaching the family with humility and going in where they are.

And maybe at first it's not what you think it's going to be. There may be more intense home visits or a family may be in crisis. But you – you join in and you guide, and it's all a part of building a relationship with the family. And also, I love the part about making sure that the connection is with the family and the baby and that the baby's tuned into the family. And it's so powerful but yet can be done so quietly. And without the home visiting – or the home visitor being there or the experiences there, it might not happen, which would have long-lasting impacts on families.

And the other thing I was thinking about, too, was Bob talked about culture – culture and language and how sometimes as families join programs they think they should stop speaking their home language around their baby. And he talked about how important it is to keep speaking the home language. And it reminded me that one of the things that we do is really try to protect and preserve the family and then support them in their development, both the – the parents as well as the children.

And I thought of one other thing, and this is just a quick little story. And – but it's about the family child care option, which I think sometimes programs struggle with as they think about how do we – how do we go about the business of setting up the family child care option? And one of the things that I've learned over and over again is that it's so much what families want for their children and it really does support their – oftentimes in ways that other options don't, their values and their beliefs, their traditions. And having a provider who understands that and can work with the family, and not just sending home notes at the end of the day about what a child did but how to connect what a child did to what they are doing.

And I was thinking how, you know, the longings parents have for their children and how those exhibit themselves in different ways. And I was talking with a program director who had – who worked with families and they had a family child care option. And she said to me that the mom was trying to decide among providers and she had met with – there were a few providers she could meet with in the program – and she looked at the director and she selected one. And she said that she was selecting her because her couch was the same as theirs and they knew that that familiarity would be so nice for their baby.

And I thought that was so sweet that that program understood that that's what the mom wanted, was that kind of nurturing and support. And that through the different options that we have, we really do have the ability to engage families in all those wonderful ways that Brenda was talking about earlier.

Dr. Harden: And if I could just respond...

Terra: Absolutely.

Dr. Harden: ...to a few things that Angie said which I thought were right on point. This issue of Head Start being a child development and a family support program is such an important issue. One of the things that I've been trying to talk to home visitors about is that family support has a lot of range in how we define it. And certainly we want to focus on self-sufficiency and certainly we want to focus on parents' individual goals and certainly we want to focus on mental health, but I think our major, major goal, the thing that we do best, is supporting families to be really good parents to their children and that we want to make sure that that takes precedence in our home visits, et cetera, because it's very easy to be cast away with all the crises and things that many of our parents face on a day-to-day basis.

And the message we give to them, I think, by supporting families to be the best they can be for their children is that even when your life is full of all kinds of stressors your baby still should be the center, and that there are things you can do that you can't even control in the outside of your life but you can certainly control what kind of experience your baby has with you that I think can help moms feel better when things are so stressful, when life is so stressful. So I wanted to underscore that.

The other thing that Angie said that really resonated with me was how critical home visitors, and family child care providers are for that matter, to the long-term outcomes for young children. I think what I have seen in my work and the work of people whom I supervise is that parents don't really understand how powerful they can be in terms of promoting children's outcomes. And so the home visitors, particularly when they focus on their strengths, particularly when they show them how moments matter for kids, really invoke such a sense of pride and power in parents that I think only leads to them being better and better and better at what they do.

And the only thing I was going to say – the other thing was about the culture and language piece that Angie raised. And I'm so glad she raised this because clearly this is important for family child care providers as well as home visitors. And, you know, one of the things that I'm always talking to my students and supervisees about is what a wonderful thing it is to be bilingual in this world. And we know that not only will it help you get a job when you're older if you can do that – you're always going to be picked before somebody who's monolingual – but it also, you know, as we know, helps cognition, helps meta-linguistic skills.

There's so many things that being bilingual does for you above and beyond language. And so to say to parents to hold onto your language, to say to family child care providers who, as Angie said, might be chosen because of the consistency between the home and the family child care provider's environment. You know – like, we have done a lot of work with families from East Africa and they are not at all interested in putting their children in center-based child care when they're little babies. They want some woman from their community to take care of their children.

So having those children get the language of the home in the child care environment is critical. They will get English. They are going to get English in this world. So to be able to have the opportunity to be exposed to English in other venues and in the home have an opportunity to retain and learn the grammar and the syntax and the vocabulary of your home language can only help you. And we know from a lot of research that it really does help you to learn the second language as well. So all of that that Angie said is very important.

And I think, again, going back to where we started, learning as much as we can about all those kinds of things really does help us to get the kind of professional identity that will help us do the best we can for children and families in Early Head Start.

Terra: Wow. This has been a wonderful dialogue. I'm not sure if we were having some kind of technical difficulties, as people couldn't get in on the line for some reason. But I think what you've shared, Dr. Harden, is some wonderful, wonderful rich information. And also I think that, Angie, you provided some wonderful insights as well.

I wonder – and I'll put this question out to both of you. And Angie, maybe I'll start with you and let Dr. Harden have the last word. Are there any particular things, insights or strategies, that you would leave the audience that would help support them as they strengthen their ability to engage parents, engage families in both the family child care option and the home-based option? If there was sort of one or two specific messages that you would leave them in order to think about?

Angie: Well, I think just, you know, with... First of all, with thanks to everyone, and particularly Brenda and the panel, who I enjoyed listening to. I think it's been said in many ways, but we talk about it with children but it's just as important with adults to – to meet them where they are. The – you know, families – as many families as we have in the program, as many, you know, different and unique qualities each family brings, and it's important to understand those. And I think to fully engage with families knowing that the work is going to support their child that you have to go in it with an openness.

Last week we talked about attachment-ready staff and I think, you know, there are so many qualities that an early childhood professional needs. But I think openness to the families and openness to the work. And one of the things families say so often is they feel a trust in Early Head Start. And I think that's so important because, particularly when you're going into someone's home, there is intimacy there. And it requires a lot of trust and no judgment to go into a home and really appreciate the opportunity. And I think the same is true with family child care as programs are, you know, contracting with them or, you know, with – if they're staff – but a lot of our programs contract with family providers – that you go in with an openness. And I'm going to stop talking so Brenda will have the last word.

Dr. Harden: Well, Angie, you know, you and I think alike. So I agree with everything you've said. I'll just give a few last-minute thoughts. One, I think to go back to what we said before to really approach this work with humility and understand that, yes, although we have a lot to offer, that parents are really key and they're the ones who are going to allow children to have the positive developmental outcomes that we all strive for them to have.

Relationships, which is how I started this session, and certainly Angie reiterated that; relationships with parents are key. So you want to provide them with a corrective emotional experience where you say to them, "I really, really appreciate who you are." I think validating and empathy – empathizing with them are really where we start and where we should continue throughout our relationships with them. I think in terms of our focus on child development we should move beyond educating them, if you will, and really trying to build their skills in the context of their interaction with their children. And I think we can do this clearly in the context of home visits, but I think family child care providers can do the same thing.

I also think we really need to build our own skills around how to engage high-risk parents how to keep them in programs, how to get them to understand what a school experience is like for children, because we want to make sure that they're ready for what public school brings and they can get their children in.

So the more we know about engaging them and working with them in their early years the better, I think, for the children in the long-term.

And the last thing I'll mention is sort of this parallel process idea that really frames a lot of my work. And that is that we are trying to fill parents so they can fill their babies. So whenever we work with parents, whether as family child care providers, center-based providers, or home visitors, we have to constantly be thinking that we are filling parents not only in terms of validation and empathy but their skill level so that they can do for children what we know is so important for their own development but more importantly for their children's development.

Terra: Wonderful. I know I've said "wonderful" a few times in this presentation, but I want to use a synonym, perhaps, for that to say that this presentation and even this discussion today has been inspired and brilliant. And we thank you so much, Dr. Jones Harden, for sharing your wisdom with us. And we thank you, Angie, as well for sharing your wisdom and insights with the audience.

And I'd like to remind the audience to please join us for Track E webinars this week. We have "Family Child Care: An Effective Program Option for Children, Families, and Communities" on Tuesday. On Wednesday, we have "In the Midst of Challenges: Keeping the Parent-Child Relationship in Focus." On Thursday we have the vBTT culminating event, the Parent Plenary, "Something Better for My Children: Families Chart Their Course from Difficult Childhoods to Devoted Parenting.

And we hope you've enjoyed the Institute thus far. Please provide your feedback on the evaluation forms. And remember that all vBTT sessions will be archived on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center website in September, so you'll be able to continue the learning experience. We appreciate you for participating in "Nurturing the Foundations for Success with Children and Families," and we hope that you have a wonderful afternoon. Thank you for joining us for Virtual Birth to Three Institute.