

4 Tips for Empowering Families! (Part 2)

Operator: Good day and welcome to Tips for Empowering Families conference call. Today's conference is being recorded. At this time I'd like to turn the conference over to Amanda Perez. Please go ahead.

Amanda Perez: Thank you so much David and hello again to everybody out there. On behalf of the Early Head Start National Resource Center I just want to say how glad I am that folks could be back with us today. Yesterday we talked about supporting families and feeling confident and competent and really recognizing themselves as their children's primary teacher and their best advocates.

And today, Lisa Desrochers and Lara Robinson are here again to respond to your questions and comments. If you want to chat with our colleagues tweet us at hash tag empowering families, that's hash tag empowering families. It's been really quite on that line you guys so let's hear some noise, let's hear some conversation. What are you all doing to help families recognize their power and build their confidence? We really are eager to hear from you. We want to open the lines for questions and I'm going to ask David to do that now, so David.

Operator: Thank you. The question and answer session will be connected electronically, we ask that you please press star one on your telephone keypad at this time to be placed in queue. If you're using the speakerphone please be sure your mute function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. After you queue to ask a question a voice prompt on your phone line will indicate when your line is open. We ask that you please state your name prior to posing your question. Once again, press star one to ask a question and we'll pause for a moment to assemble to queue.

Amanda: That's great and as we're waiting for folks to queue I do have a question for our panelist that came in through registration. So Lara and Lisa one question that came in for us was what would be a timeline to actually see empowering strategies working for parents and this participant points out that it's one thing to use these strategies in our words, the kinds of strategies that you all talked about yesterday. And it's another thing to see families really take in those messages. And I'm wondering Lisa, what would you say to that question, what's the timeline?

Lisa Desrochers: Well I think the work timeline is – can be tricky. I think what we want to be thinking about with families is really what's their timeline. And it's going to be different for every family. So you may have a family who, you know, comes in, they're fully engaged, they're ready to go and they have some real markers where they want to make changes and reach their goals and you can really watch them become more confident and competent along the way. It can look really different for another family who may be facing multiple stressors and challenges and so I think with those families who also need to think about you know what works for them, what's right for them. And the other thing as I would say that you know as you're practicing some of these skills that Lara and I have been talking about is sort of tweaking them along the

way. You know you may try something with one family and it really works. You feel really great about that and you think oh, you know I'm going to use that the next time and then you try it with another family and it doesn't seem to work quite the same way. And so you might have to sort of go back into your skill box and think about a different approach because it may not work with that family. So I think giving yourselves a chance for trial and error and seeing what works and then kind of working with the family along the way to really – you know really kind of monitor together where they think they're at and how to you know encourage them in a way that works well for their own family.

Amanda: It reminds me of what Lara said yesterday which was there's no right way to parent and there's really no right way to do this either right and we just don't know, it's sort of a very flexible about sort of how families come in and how we greet them and meet them and serve them along the way. Yeah?

Lara Robinson: Yes, absolutely. I think, like Lisa said, everyone comes in with their own background and their own experiences and building trust is really critical to this parent engagement piece and so that trust is going to be dealt very differently based on everyone's own filters and background experiences. But I think that one thing that does help is making sure this is a systemic approach in your agency, that there's not just one person in the agency or program who's going about this approach that it's really felt throughout and that does help, you know, make these practices a lot more easier to be picked up and implemented throughout. And just like we talked about the importance of state stable nurturing consistent relationships between the mother and child that, you know, our relationships with parents need to be the same, as well. And that again feeds back into that trust and the ability to engage with families.

Amanda: Well that – Lara that really feeds into the second part of this question that came in from this provider and she said you know so we know what would be the timeline for families, but also what is the timeline for staff to really learn how to use these empowering strategies. And I think what I'm hearing you say is that, you know, it takes from time that we really have to, sort of, develop relationships with each person and also develop skills. This isn't necessarily something easy that people are born with. Lisa is there something that you would add there?

Lisa: I think you know the – I love that the question is sort of a parallel process. Right? We're thinking about families developing their skills we're also always thinking about our own skills and so thinking within the context of your program and your existing infrastructure and really framing things as like an ongoing reflective practice in your work and then working with supervisors and colleagues to practice those skills. So just like anything, you know, you can think about a child learning developmentally, it's similar for us learning a new skill. We're going to try something, it's going to work or not work, we reflect on it, we decide what we might want to do differently we might have a conversation with a colleague or a supervisor about it.

And so I think finding that balance between us firing to do something new and something that's a little bit scary and, you know and also giving yourself the chance to you know sort of flop

around with it a little bit as a skill and give yourself a break if it didn't feel like it went really well and then go back and sort of try again. So again I think its individual for different people. Some of these strategies are more comfortable for some people than others and so you're really working within your own, you know, comfort zone and also your kind of risk zone about what you want to do and setting your own timeline and saying okay, well, you know, by the end of this three months I really want to have learned this particular skill and I'm going to focus on that in my own goal setting with my supervisor. So I think we can really also empower ourselves to make those choices and build those skills.

Amanda: I love that idea, really thinking about this and the context of your development plans and sort of how you're professionally moving through your year. Great ideas. David, do we have any questions that have come in?

Operator: Yes, we do have a question over the phone. We'll take our first question, caller please go ahead.

Amanda: Hi, are you out there?

Operator: Caller your line is open.

Female: Oh, I don't think I want my line to be open. I'm sorry I'm just wanting to listen, sorry.

Amanda: Oh.

Operator: Oh okay, alright.

Female: I apologize, I apologize. I missed yesterday and so I was just communicating with Elaine about sitting in on this, so I apologize.

Amanda: Oh fantastic, we're glad to have you.

Female: Oh thank you, do I just star one and, then...

Operator: No, I'll remove you from queue...

Female: Okay...

Operator: Well once again...

Female: ...I'm sorry, David.

Operator: Okay, no problem. And once again, ladies and gentlemen, it's star one if you have a question or comment.

Amanda: Are we still – are we waiting David, we've got a couple more questions here.

Operator: Yes, yes we have no questions in the queue at this time. Actually we do have a question that just came through.

Amanda: Okay, let's hear it.

Operator: Caller please go ahead.

Mary: This is Mary and I wondered how we empower parents that don't want to come to family engagement activities or they don't seem to be interested in their children.

Amanda: Wow, that's a really big question Mary, so let's think about that a little bit. Lisa, would like to take this question?

Lisa: Sure, I love that we're jumping in with the hard questions, right at the very beginning.

Amanda: Right, right.

Lisa: Mary I totally appreciate you asking that question. I think it's important to get you know real with the challenges that we have in programs. and so I guess there's a few thoughts I have and Lara and Amanda certainly jump in and Mary I'd love to hear you know more about where your question comes from. I guess my initial thought is that I really believe that even you know with a parent coming into our program that there's something that they're really interested in and maybe – you know maybe it's their – it's solely their child and getting their child to a you know a safe place where they can have some contact with other children or activities. And so I think that's the starting place for family engagement and just really focusing on the fact that that parent is there with their child and they have some kind of relationship. And kind of starting to build from that kernel, which is kind of the most important kernel, and then sort of going from there.

So I think sometimes when – you know when we're in programs and we're designing activities and we want people to come and we want them to be interested, it gets really frustrating because you know people aren't giving us kind of the feedback that we want and really sort of opening ourselves up to thinking about okay let's broaden our thought about what family engagement is and how we really capitalize on what this parent or family is interested in. Even if it seems like you know they're not engaging with this, there is somewhere that they're sort of starting with just by walking through the door. Lara I don't know if you had experiences within the legacy program if that's – if you have specific skills that you would recommend. Sorry, Amanda I just took over your Amanda role.

Amanda: Go for it.

Lara: I would think – and I completely agree with you, Lisa – that I really believe that all parents want what's best for their child and they want their child to succeed and they want to give them the best. But you know everyone comes in with again different experiences, different history of what's happened in their previous interactions with people or schools. And you know we found in legacy at first that sometimes parents maybe are resistant to starting something new or maybe are concerned that the program may not be something that they want to do or may be different. And I think that it's really about we've seen one of the techniques that – like you were

mentioning, that works well is when you really focus on the child and take it off them. And then you can talk more about them as the relationship builds, but by focusing on that key thing that you both in common and you both want to succeed really helps take a little pressure away and you know help show that you're really someone who can be trusted and someone who is concerned for their welfare and that has helped. And I think just being consistent and there and not getting ruffled maybe by some of the resistance in showing that you're still going to be there even if you might not get the most welcoming behavior from this parent. But that we're here to stay and we're here to support you, we're interested in supporting you and your child. That – I think that goes a long way.

Amanda: Well this is Amanda hearing you guys talk, just the idea of that persistence and really sort of thinking with that family about, sort of, over time you know, saying, "Oh," as you, Lisa, "I'm so glad to see you here. You know, here you are with your child," and then just, sort of over time, just continue to really offer that respectful, interested sort of approach to a family. You know, "tell me about what's going on with you and tell me about your baby?" And those kinds of questions can really make a difference for a family over time. But again it takes time to do and it sometimes takes that persistence.

Lara: And I think the fact of...

Lisa: I also think Amanda...oh go ahead.

Lara: Now we're both jumping in.

Lisa: Right.

Amanda: Go ahead, Lara.

Lara: And I think it's hard sometimes to be nonjudgmental in those situations and to always welcome someone back and you know it's hard to kind of put away our own filters on that. But you know, trying not to judge and trying not to feel hurt on our own end, and that's why I think our own reflective supervision is so important for us to be able to manage those emotions that we have and just kind of you know keep welcoming them back and keep trying and not judging and hopefully that relationship will build over time.

Amanda: Nice, and Lisa.

Lisa: Yes, I was just going to say that, again Mary, I don't know your specific situation, but I do think we need to be very aware of staff members also that we're working with families who have a whole set of other things going on in their lives. Right? I mean, they enter our center, we go into their home, or they come to a group. And we're seeing a pretty small slice of their life. And so, you know just really being aware that there may be many other things going on, many other stresses, challenges, and sometimes even something that may need intervention from another professional. So, you know, the question of them not being interested in their child, you know it's possible that they're struggling with some kind of depression or that they've had some

kind of loss in their life. I mean there's all sorts of things that are going on and I think that's one of the things that makes our jobs both really wonderful and really challenging right, is that there's no cookie cutter version for every parent. It'd be really easy if we were like oh, family engagement for all looks exactly the same way. You know, but we have there really individual you know sensitive families that need different things from us. And so you know, I guess I would suggest that you use the skills that you, I'm sure you already have. And that consistency you have in your programs for really keeping an eye on those families who may not be as engaged and wondering and being curious you know within your program and maybe even the family about are there things that they need that prevent them from being engaged with a center. You know, are they having trouble with housing, are they having trouble with food, is there a healthcare issue at home, is there a depression issue at home. You know because those things are going to get in the way of looking like typical engagement in a, in a program.

Amanda: David, do we have any other questions that have come in?

Operator: Yes, we do have another question, caller please go ahead.

Emily: Hi there my name is Emily and I work in an Early Head Start program and my role is really to support teachers and home visitors. And I was just wondering if you have any suggestions or strategies for how to support people who are working with some really emotionally tough families in really hard situations.

Amanda: Thank you, Emily, so that gets to you know --I think that gets a little bit to what Lisa you were describing before in terms of you know we don't always know what's happening, but it sounds like sometimes those things can show up in programs and it can feel like it's really tough. Emily, when you say tough, do you mean, what do you mean by that?

Emily: So I would say families who are really struggling with their own stuff, and you know maybe – you know we have families who are having a really hard time finding housing right now and maybe are having trouble having enough to eat at the end of the month, that sort of thing. And – you know and then how do I support the people who are working with them without – trying to help them still be supportive, but feel supported.

Amanda: So Lisa, do you have thoughts there?

Lisa: I do, I mean it's a hard question. I think it's a really important question. I guess the first thing that comes to mind is, you know, thinking about caring for the caregivers that oftentimes the people who do go into homes you know or have people coming into their programs or working with some families who are really, really struggling and it's hard work. You know we sort of put our hearts into it and I think it's really hard if at the end of the day you feel like a family is still really struggling. So I guess I would say for you, Emily, you know, as a supervisor is that my guess is just you know from the tone of your voice and your question it sounds like you're very compassionate and supportive of those staff members, and you know, I guess I would encourage you to continue to use, you know, reflective supervision and conversations

with them kind of about what they need to be – to feel supported by you and just to sort of – you know it doesn't need to get into a therapy session obviously, but just to sort of give them a space to talk about and unload how difficult it is to be in that position with families. I mean, I think sometimes we do our work and we go along and we, you know we have our professional boundaries which are all really important things. But at the end of the day you know we're really working with some pretty emotional situations and we do have – I mean there's certainly resources out there with specific skills in there, I think and strategies you can use. But I also, you know, just kind of that general sense of holding the staff in a way that gives them the space to experience that kind of support.

And then the other thing is being well resourced, you know I think, and I'm sure that you do this as an Early Head Start program already, but you know there's lots of different connected services for people and so your staff feels like they – they're equipped to, you know if somebody comes to them with a really difficult program, they're equipped with a way to say like okay, you know let's make a connection with this other agency and I can support you in this way. And I really think that partnership is so important, so I guess I think about it as a parallel process. Again you know the staff members forming a partnership with the family and then you're forming a partnership with the staff member and really you know that's the cycle that then sort of makes it – you know makes it work and mitigate some of those challenges. You know that's not a real, you know specific hard and fast strategy, but you know again I think it's individual and it's, in my sort of perception, it's very sort of emotion you know based around really supporting people in those hard times.

Amanda: Lara what would you add? Is there anything you would add there?

Lara: I don't know if I would add much else, I think Lisa did a really you know nice job...

Amanda: Yes.

Lara: ...talking about the importance of supervision and having a space to reflect on what's often you know some really intense difficult experiences that our families are dealing with. So I think that like she said it's really important to take care of the caregivers and to have a space to be able to reflect and to make sure we're not carrying all of that load and it's not in fact going home and impacting our relationships in our families as well. But also feeling like you have the right tools to be able to help the families and have resources, so.

Amanda: And I would say – this is Amanda. I guess I would add that the Early Head Start National Resource Center, Emily, has some information that might be helpful to you in terms of thinking about reflective supervision. You can find that on the ECLKC. And I know that the National Center for Parent Family, and Community Engagement also has some tools, like some relationship-based competency kinds of things, that also look at sort of the ways that administrators can support their staff in developing some of these skills and some of the ability to kind of come through this situation and keep moving forward. So thank you so much for that question. David, I think we have time for one more, is there one more in the queue?

Operator: Actually I show we have no further questions in queue.

Amanda: Okay, so let me ask this question. This one came in during registration as well. And this question is what can teachers do? So I think the feeling was we talked yesterday a lot about folks that have their hands on families a lot, but what is it that teachers can do to support families and really feeling competent and confident. And Lisa I don't know if – does it feel comfortable to start with you?

Lisa: Sure, yeah, I mean I'm curious to hear what Lara has to say about specific through a parent child time together in the legacy program, but I'm a former preschool teacher, so this is near and dear to my heart. I think that, I mean, there's a few strategies that, you know, I found really useful. One is really noticing who the child is in a classroom so that you're – and I know that sounds maybe kind of obvious. But I think sometimes we get so busy in our work that we, you know, we're managing and managing. And so one of the things that works really well is just to you know share a behavior that a child did during the day and just share it with the parent, and then kind of let them make some meaning about it, and have a conversation with them about it. So I think oftentimes we're trying to, you know, interpret and you know, give people developmental information.

And I think sometimes we need to hold back a little bit and just give parents a chance to kind of talk about it. And what you'll discover, I think, is that as you share a behavior and give parents a chance to comment on it, excuse me, they'll start to talk about what they see at home, what they've learned at home with their child. And I think as you build that conversation around a child's behavior and skills, it helps parents feel more and more, you know, competent and they can share with you what they really know about their child and you can affirm, yes you're your – you know your child's first teacher and we can learn so much from you. So really thinking about the child kind of as your shared tool to have those conversations. And then obviously also, which I know lots of programs do already is bringing in, you know, activities both from home into school and then vice versa. So really that cross sharing about whether it's an activity or a particular story or cultural tradition. But just really doing that two-way sharing so that there's this sense of kind of pride and ownership around a child learning I think can be really powerful for parents.

Amanda: Lara is there anything you would add there?

Lara: I think that Lisa really talked about some great things. I think that we often forget sometimes that some of the families we work with don't have a – haven't been recognized for their voice, and for their beautiful opinions, and their thoughts. And so just giving them some voice and asking them what they think about something related to their child or their thoughts on their child and acknowledging their expertise as really something that's very powerful. We also do a lot in group where the group leader will recognize little opportunities or little instances where the child is finding joy in the parent and highlighting that. So the parent is seeing that, and you know, being able to share in that joy with their child and you know, eventually identify

it and you know, increase those opportunities and increase those experiences. I think those things teachers can certainly do in the classroom, as well.

Amanda: Well and as you're describing that Lara it makes me think about the four tips from yesterday right, because I think we heard Lisa really talk about the efficacy piece really supporting that family and understanding you know how important that information is that she brings in or that he brings into the classroom or the family childcare center. You've talked about the parent child relationship and really supporting the family and seeing the incredible things that this baby is doing. And getting her information or his information about how that, about how the night went and those kind of situations that can be really helpful during the childcare day, and then you talked some about responsibility as well Lara in your comments. And we that that's certainly a part of the Head Start program performance standards that we're always trying to capture a family sense of what's happening with this baby. I think the other thing that – what sort of struck me is I was thinking is that – is as I was listening to you talk is that I was thinking about the community building piece and how teachers really do have a role sometimes in connecting families, or can have a role in connecting families who have children in their classroom, and saying you know these kids are really playing together, and if we believe that that is a family empowerment tool to support families and building community and there's a possibility for that in the program. I think that's another way that a teacher can really make a difference.

Lisa: Amanda one quick thing, I know we're running...

Amanda: Yes.

Lisa: ...out of time, but I wanted to say too was that I think sometimes those programs we underestimate the power of play for parents and that the times that I have offered opportunities you know which we might call family engagement opportunities, but opportunities for parents to come in and really either play during the day with their children or come to sort of a, you know a play activity at night, it's kind of amazing because adults don't get to play very often and some adults didn't have a good experience in their own, you know, growing up around play and learning. And so I think being sort of open to think outside of the box about how to get families involved and really share what children are doing at school you know is a really nice way of sort of in a lighthearted way bringing people together. And I've never offered this kind of experience when parents didn't you know end up on the floor with the Play-Doh. You know wanting to take the truck and make the road and, so you have some really great tools I think already you know in your programs that you can use.

Amanda: I love that, the play piece, that's perfect. And it's a great way for us to end. I want to thank you Lisa and Lara. Thank you so much for being with us today and yesterday and for sharing your expertise. Of course, folks know that if they want more information on participating with legacy they can contact you Lara at lpr0@cdc.gov, so that's lpr0@cdc.gov. We didn't get any – or cdc.gov, we didn't any questions about that today, but I know that folks may

be thinking about that as a possibility. If you guys have additional questions we've listed some resources for you in your packets from yesterday on page 11, you'll see them there. And you all know where to find Lisa's National Center for Parent, Family, and Community Engagement and mine, the Early Head Start National Resource Center on the ECLKC. So we hope that you guys will make use of some of the resources that are there. Please take some time to let us know what you thought of today's experience, of yesterday's experience as well. Information on evaluation is in your packet. These events are really for you, so please let us know how we can make them a valuable use of your time.

And before I let you go because I have this time, I want to tell about something coming up. So on December 4, the Early Head Start National Resource Center will be hosting a webinar on supporting babies with special needs and family childcare and home visiting programs. Registration is going on now on the ECLKC, and you can find more information about that on the Early Head Start National Resource Center tab and then if you go to events and conferences you can find more information on that and some future opportunities as well. I want to thank everyone for the questions and comments today and for the participation here. I think Lara, Lisa, and I are so grateful that you are out there doing the work that you do in support of the most vulnerable children and families. And as you're working with them to build confidence and competence we hope that you feel your own confidence and competence as well. And now I'm going to turn it over to David to end the call.

Operator: And that does conclude today's conference.

[End audio]