

## EHS Early Essentials: Webisode 2

[Music and Titles]

Amanda Perez: Hey, I'm Amanda Perez, with the Early Head Start National Resource Center. Welcome back to "Early Essentials."

So, tell me the truth. Does it surprise you how much we talk about relationships? In work with the very youngest children -- including babies in utero -- and their families, there is no more important tool for your work than the relationships that you build. But don't take my word for it. We asked some veteran staff what their biggest lessons were when they first started this work, and they talked about relationships too. Let's hear what they had to say.

Tamara Corbin: So, I've learned how to observe the child and ask the parents a couple of questions on how I can, like, bond with the child a little bit more in the classroom, so the child feel comfort. So, that's what I've done here, myself, learning how to bond with the family and the new child that -- that's in my program.

Rediet Kidane: I didn't know I was gonna get attached with the kids like -- or with their family -- the whole family -- really attached. I -- I was -- I just thought that it was just a job -- just to come work and go, but not just a job. You really attach with the family and with the babies individually.

Amanda: So, we heard a couple of answers there, right, focused on relationships and not just relationships with babies, but also relationships with families. Right now, I'm standing inside the Campagna Center in Alexandria, Virginia. Campagna has an Early Head Start program, and at the heart, you guessed it -- relationships. I wanted to talk with someone here who could help us understand something about that heart. Let's go upstairs and meet her.

I am thrilled to introduce Tammy Mann, who's the president and CEO of the Campagna Center here. Tammy, thank you so much for welcoming us.

Tammy Mann: Thank you, for being here.

Amanda: Well -- and it's such a thrill for me, as you know. Tammy was my first supervisor at the Early Head Start National Resource Center. And one of the things that you taught me, Tammy was how incredibly important relationships are to this work with the very youngest children and their families. And I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about that.

Tammy: Absolutely, and fortunately the science makes it very clear for us, right? Relationships really provide the foundation for children developing security and trust and everything that's needed to really provide the foundation for them to grow and learn. So, it all begins with the connection with adults in their environment.

Amanda: There are a ton of relationships in programs, but in Head Start programs we really talk about that family role as critically important. And we have a question here from a teacher in Oklahoma.

Tiffani Miller: My questions is: Why is working with families so important?

Amanda: So, we know that that's a huge question for teachers in particular. And I wonder what your response is to that.

Tammy: Truthfully, relationships provide the pathway for children to grow and develop. Parents are their child's first and most important teacher. And so, to the extent that in our programs, we really set a foundation of expectation where parents really do understand the critical importance of the role they play in helping to foster their children's learning and development through responding to cues and providing support as they are learning to explore the world around them, it makes a tremendous difference in children's ability to develop confidence, curiosity, and all of the things that really make for a really great start in life.

Amanda: Absolutely, and we actually -- we actually have a caregiver, a seasoned caregiver, who had a response to this as well. So, let's listen to what Myneka had to say.

Myneka Martin: Relationships with families are very important. You must form a relationship so that there's trust between the parent, teacher, and the child. If you don't form a bond with the family, it makes it hard to care for the child. Building a relationship allows the teacher to ask some of the more difficult questions regarding the child. The parent is more open with the teacher when there is a bond, and it makes for a higher-quality experience.

Amanda: That's interesting, the way that she talks about, you have to talk about the difficult stuff as well as the fun stuff.

Tammy: Right. You know, one of the things that listening to that makes me think about is: We're very intentional about how we start off with families; because when you do that, you invite parents into a relationship in a way that really sets the stage for them to be able to engage. It really does make it easier for families to raise difficult questions or for staff members to raise difficult questions, in the context of learning about a child and their development. So, it is about the foundation of trust, but we have to be very intentional as we talk to families about the importance of why we approach our work from that perspective at the outset if we're going to build the right expectation.

Amanda: Absolutely, and, as you say that, we know that that's easier to say sometimes than it is to do.

Tammy: It is. It is.

Amanda: So, we actually talked with Donna, who's a home visitor. And she gave us some tips, some really lovely tips, for starting a relationship with a family. So, let's listen to those.

Donna Leneer: Relationships with families are important, because it helps to make families open up, being easier to trust you, and be willing to participate within the program. Making yourself transparent. People love it when you can relate to a situation. To be able to give your opinion and realize that they are not alone in a situation or experience. Building a bond of trust. Making yourself accountable in your families. Push them enough to make things happen that are realistic in their lives, and be a support, but not a crutch. Finally, acknowledge your families' efforts to be successful in the program. Let them know the change that you see in them, from when they first started until now. Encourage and motivate them to keep going and improving and to make strides to continue.

Amanda: Tammy, when you're touring your centers or your programs, what is it that you're looking for in relationships as you -- as you're in those sites? We have some pictures here. We know that pictures tell a thousand words, right? So, we wanted to look at these and sort of see what kind of comes at you as you're looking at these.

Tammy: Sure.

Amanda: Here's the first picture of this family childcare provider just with this baby nestled against her chest.

Tammy: And the baby looks incredibly comfortable, relaxed, enjoying. And caregiver's smiling, which says that she's really pleased to be holding this baby, right?

Amanda: What do you see here? They're looking at each other.

Tammy: Wow. Look at her eyes. While you can't see the caregiver's eyes, you look at the baby's eyes, and it's clear that she's locked on to something that she sees in her face that's very attractive to her. And the expression is definitely one of mutual joy and engagement, which is lovely. It's exactly what you want to see.

Amanda: Oh, this baby has come back to her shoulder again.

Tammy: Comforted. Secure. Exactly what you want to see with infants. You want to see adults holding them in ways that communicate, "I'm safe."

Amanda: We also have a video here from a home visiting program.

[Video begins]

Amanda: So, the home visitor brought this painting experience for the family. And that toddler is sitting in her mama's lap.

Tammy: Mm-hmm. And I notice that the home visitor is really sort of at a comfortable -- she's close, but she's clearly allowing the mom and the baby to experience the activity together.

[Video ends]

Tammy: Clearly, the mother was connected with her daughter as she was exploring the different colors and paints, and the home visitor had sort of a supportive stance in the context of that interaction. And that's what we want to see. Right? Parents are allowing us into the privacy of their homes and giving us access to their everyday experiences. And I think as a home visitor coming in and really being able to allow the parent to be in the driver's seat as they're interacting and supporting their child's learning is exactly what we hope for.

Amanda: This is one of the things that Tammy, again, talked to me about when we first started together. Jeree Pawl -- lovely Jeree Pawl has a wonderful platinum rule of work with the very youngest children and families. And what she says is "Do unto others as you would have others do unto others" Tammy, as you think about that, what does that mean to you? And what does it mean in particular to folks who are new to this work?

Tammy: Yes. Well, I mean, at the heart of it, how we are is important as what we do. And, if we really want to inspire our staff to work with parents in ways that invite them to build relationships that are founded on trust, we need to make sure they have models for what that looks like, right? So, we want parents to be responsive. We want parents to be able to read cues. We need to demonstrate that in our work as we support families, so this idea of really doing unto others as we want to see others doing unto others is about sort of living the work in action and providing a way for people to really see and experience that, so they can then deliver those kinds of experiences.

Amanda: There is a parallel process, what we refer to as the parallel process there.

Tammy: Without question.

Amanda: Yeah, and I think that that gets us to what can be so important, that we are really joining with other folks to hold this baby and support this baby as he or she grows, yeah?

Tammy: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Amanda: Yeah. So, we have a question -- another question from a new staff member.

Ally Meese: I have eight children in my classroom, and I am the primary caregiver for four of them. What does that mean to be a primary caregiver?

Amanda: Tammy, what is a primary caregiver, and why is that important?

Tammy: The idea of being able to really learn about a child's individual temperament, having one adult who is able to actually zero in and sort of learn that baby; it doesn't mean that they're not going to be able to interact with others but that there is one special adult who that child can count on to understand and be there to really respond to them as they're interacting in the environment.

Amanda: Well, and as you're saying that, it makes me wonder, because you are running a program that has all three program options, right?

Tammy: That's right.

Amanda: So, you have family childcare; you have home visiting, you have center-based care. You also have services to expectant families. And some of the things that you describe are really relevant to all of those program options. Can you talk about how some of those concepts might apply over those three?

Tammy: Absolutely. I mean, I think it goes back to this notion of relationships. Regardless of the option through which you're delivering service, if you think about the primacy of adults being more comfortable responding to someone that knows them, that understands them, that has established a certain level of trust with them, you're going to be better positioned to be able to support that family, especially if things come up that are very difficult, that are very unexpected. So, it doesn't matter what the option. The idea of really wanting to have an individual that that family knows they can count on becomes really important.

Amanda: You know, things don't always go smoothly. But there's an opportunity in those relationships to have some repair that can really be instructive for folks moving forward.

Tammy: Yes, when there's trust -- I mean, I think that's what makes that possible, right? If you think about a child that might be frustrated, because maybe there's a toy they want to get access to, and they're not able to do it, because somebody else has that toy, and you think about what it takes -- how that child's likely to respond to an individual that they know understands their ways and comes over and helps to support them such that they can move on. And I just -- I think this whole idea of trust, establishing a foundation for being able to deal with tough spots, is really very relevant, whether we're talking children or adults.

Amanda: We have more questions from the field. We have a question here from a family support worker.

Kellie Miller: What are some ways to encourage participation during a home visit?

Tammy: Wow.

Amanda: What would you say?

Tammy: Well, you know, it sort of reminds me of the importance of meeting families where they are; that's at the heart of it. You know, you may come in with an agenda; but if you're not able to really pause, observe, take stock of where is this family and what's going to make best sense as a place to begin, sometimes we unintentionally can push families away.

Amanda: Well, and that was a question about families and relationships with families. We also have a question about relationships with children; so, let's listen to that one.

Debra Kelly: How do I start to build a relationship with a really shy child?

Tammy: Sometimes there can be biases towards children that may not be as apt to reach out and engage with the world immediately, right? And so, in the same way we want to meet adults where they are, we want to be able to meet children where they are. And if we're attentive, if we're observant, children will give us feedback in ways that helps us know we can move closer or we should take a step back and pause, because maybe the child needs a little bit of time to adjust -- whether we're trying to introduce a toy or draw their attention to something that maybe in the environment, just being able to really read the cues of the child and use that as our guide. We all have our individual temperaments that sort of influence how we interact with the world.

Amanda: Yeah. Absolutely. We have a teacher in Florida who has some other things to share too.

Barbara Bell: I start building a relationship with a child who's very shy, by making them feel welcome and by offering a calming support. I observe what interests the child, then I create opportunities to build on emerging skills. I make sure my classroom is warm and inviting.

Amanda: So, that really gets to a lot of the pieces that you were saying, really observing that child and cue-reading.

Tammy: Absolutely. It's critical.

Amanda: So, I want to thank everyone for those fantastic questions today, and absolutely the staff, the veteran staff who wrote in with those strategies that I think will be really helpful to folks. Tammy, I am so sorry we are out of time together. It has been such a pleasure; thank you so much for letting us come and spend this time with you and learn from you.

Tammy: Oh, it's my pleasure. You know I love this work. It really is sort of what keeps me going, so I appreciate you coming by to spend some time; thank you so much.

Amanda: So glad you were here with us today. The bottom line is that this work requires those relationships. They're not just the heart here at Campagna -- they're the heart for all of us.

[Music and end titles]