

Asking Good Questions to Support Children’s Thinking and Learning

Dr. Marley Jarvis: Hi, and welcome to this episode of Front Porch. The Front Porch webinar series – it's a collection of webinars that focuses on current research and evidence-based strategies and practices for teaching preschool-aged children. In general, these webinars are designed to introduce you to some of the research behind the ELOF or the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. This presentation is intended for teachers, providers, administrators, home visitors serving Head Start and child care programs.

Welcome – so glad to have you here today, and let's get started. You're joining me today. My name is Marley Jarvis, and I'm here with the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning. I'm based at the Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences, or I-LABS, which is at the University of Washington in Seattle. We're a partner organization. We're a large research institute. We study many things, but including early learning, child development in the brain. Me and my colleagues – we are all the host of the Front Porch webinar series, so you'll see us here time and again.

The topic for today, for this Front Porch webinar, is conversations with children. How do we help them learn through conversations with us? This includes asking them good questions and also responding to the many, many questions that young children ask us. Kick things off with our learning objective and our agenda for today. Today, you should learn and come away with how to use conversations to support all children's learning. To break this up a little bit, we're going to start with the child's perspective and then jump into thinking more about your perspective, so to you as the adult in these interactions, and how to think of yourself more as a facilitator of conversations. Then lastly, we're going to talk a little bit about responding to the types of many, many questions that children ask, and especially focusing a little bit on some that might be more challenging for adults.

We're going to start, as I said, with the child's perspective and kick things off with a poll here. You should see the poll, and I want you to answer. OK, we know that children ask us many, many questions, especially preschool age. Why are they doing this? I'll give you a few seconds. Some researchers estimate that preschoolers ask as many as 25 questions an hour, so that's a lot. Are they doing this, A, to get your attention, or B, because they're bored, or C, to gain information? The last few seconds to make your selection and hit submit, and we'll move on from there.

The answer is to gain information, so although at the end of a very long day, if you work with preschool-aged children, you might be exhausted answering all these questions. Children are not trying to wear you down with all of their questions. Instead, they have a lot to learn, so research shows that children's questions are not just trying to get the attention of the adults, but really, they're trying to get information from you. They're trying to learn about the world around them, and that's their job at this age. Children are really a lot like scientists. They sort of operate in a similar way, so they ask questions to get information and also to test their theories

about how things work, and that's really how they learn. It's a big part of learning. These conversations that they have with you ... Remember that you're one of these important and trusted adults in their lives. These conversations really support them as they learn.

How does asking questions and having conversations with children help them learn? The ELOF is a great place to start to look at this. One place where children's development is really supported by conversations is within this language and communication section, so along with other subdomains, of course, but this is an example. For example, conversations with adults increases a child's vocabulary, and it builds their communication and speaking skills. They're getting practice, and in this way, having conversations with you, it helps children learn more language. Then, if you think about it, when you have more language, you're better able to express yourself, you're better able to understand your own actions and the actions of others and express your ideas better. There's a lot of really great things that comes out of just simply having more vocabulary and having more language. Another example here is that conversations with young children also supports their social and emotional development. Again, we're thinking about building an increased speaking skills and language skills, and these conversations really help children to build relationships to both with adults but also their peers.

Having better language skills helps children understand and talk about the emotions of themselves as well as others. OK, we're going to jump into spend the rest of the time thinking about ourselves and the adults in these sorts of conversations, so moving from thinking about us as sort of the all-knowing expert to a facilitator or even a co-explorer. This sort of shift in that can really support relationships, and we show you a study that's kind of a nice example of this.

OK, so in this study, the researchers, they created this new toy that the kids in the city had never seen before, so it had to be new. They didn't know how it worked, and it had a bunch of these hidden features, so what you're looking at, it sort of -- There's different color tubes and pipes if you will, and it had all these hidden features. For example, this squeaker here, you could only get it to work if you pulled out that yellow tube that you can kind of see there, just the tiniest little bit of that yellow. If you pulled that yellow tube out of the purple tube, that would make this squeaker work, and then you can also see there's a mirror. There's a little music box and a light, and you couldn't really tell by looking at the toy that it did any of these things. The researcher would play with the toy with the preschool-aged child, but the thing that they would change up is how they talked about it. What they wanted to know in this study is, "How did that end up impacting how the child played with the toy when it was their turn?" In this first scenario – we'll call it explaining – the researcher demonstrated how to pull that yellow tube out from within the purple tube to make the squeaker work. They said something like, "I'm going to show you how my toy works. Watch this!" and then pulled that tube out, and the squeaker worked. Then, they invited the child to play with the toy.

We'll call this other scenario the co-exploring scenario, and in this case, the researcher pretended to accidentally make the squeaker work, so, for example, they said, "Look at this toy I just found." and then, "Huh, did you see that?" after they accidentally made the squeaker work, and then, just as before, they invited the child to play with the toy. How do you think the

children responded to these different scenarios, so how might that have impacted how the children played with it? What was really interesting was that the children in that co-exploring scenario, they played longer with the toy, and they also discovered more. They discovered more of those hidden features. In the explaining scenario, those children didn't play with the toy as long, and they explored less, and they discovered fewer of the toy's kind of secret functions.

What the researchers would conclude here is that, sure, explaining is a really, really effective and efficient method when you're teaching a specific skill, so for example, how to use that squeaker but the sufficient learning kind of comes at a cost, if you will, so children that are less likely to explore more broadly. And, of course, sometimes we really do want to prioritize efficiency, so, for example, things like how to cross a street, thankfully. We don't necessarily want children exploring and finding new ways through trial and error of how to cross the street. We want that to be efficient learning, but we also, sometimes, need to be able to switch over from our expert mode into our co-explorer mode, and this helps us have conversations that help young children grow and be curious which supports their development. Things like, "Ooh, did you see that?" or, "I wonder what this does," or sort of modeling curiosity in this conversation rather than being kind of the all-knowing expert.

There's a 15-minute In-service Suite on STEAM, and that is a great resource to help you think more about kind of these types of questions that can support explanation, including inquiry. This is in your resource list, so just to call out again that you'll want to download that. Tons of good resources for you – just specifically to note that there's a handout that you can share with teachers, family child care providers and so on. There's also some printable inquiry cards that work really well. You can share them, or you can post them around the learning environment, and that these are all really great for home visitors, teachers, and providers to share with parents as well, so in supporting them and asking good questions at home. Check that out. It's a great resource.

In addition to thinking about questions that encourage, you know, this exploration and inquiry side of things, you can also think about, "OK, what are the kinds of questions that might open or extend the conversation versus shut them down?" Some questions, you'll notice if you start paying attention, you ask some kinds of questions and kids sort of just shut down. That's not talking, and then other questions may encourage more dialogue, so we're going to think a little bit about that. Open-ended questions that have many answers, and they tend to be great at continuing a conversation, so here are some examples of some open-ended questions, so things like "What are you working on? What do you think will happen next? What does this remind you of? What changes would you make? What else can you use?" All these are open-ended questions. They're just examples. There are many, but these tend to do really well at continuing conversations.

In general, when we're thinking about questions that continue conversations, they tend to be open-ended, again with many possible answers, so there's not just one right answer there. They

also tend to focus on what that child is interested in the moment, so maybe they're playing in block area, and you're asking about the weather. That's not necessarily following their interest.

You also want to show your own interest, so the adult – their questions that they're asking, if they show their own interest in what the child is doing, that's going to help continue the conversation. You can also think about matching the energy level of the child. Maybe they're really thoughtfully playing with something and kind of quiet. You can kind of match that tone. You can come down to their level, match that sort of inquisitive quiet tone, or if it's got lots of energy, you can join them in that.

On the flip side, we're thinking about closed-ended questions, so closed-ended questions tend to only have kind of one right answer, and they sometimes are intended ... They come across almost like a test, and these tend to stop conversation, so here is some examples: "What is this called? Are you having fun? Did you play in the block area? That's a large tree, isn't it?" And there's nothing wrong, necessarily, with asking close-ended questions. Sometimes, they can kind of break the ice or get a shy child to kind of warm up a little bit, so it's not that you should never use close-ended questions, but it's something to be aware of. If you're trying to extend the conversation with the child that doesn't seem to be working, maybe try switching that up.

In general, questions that stop conversations, they have a few things in common. Like I said before, sometimes they come across as a test like you're quizzing the child, and they often are rhetorical, or it's sort of like it doesn't matter if the child even responds. They pick up on that, and they might not respond with a lot of -- more than just one word or something like that. They also might be either too simple or too complex, so perhaps the question might not be at an appropriate developmental level for that child's language and communication skills, for example, and this isn't really going to stimulate conversation.

OK, we're going to take a look at an example next. First, we have an example of a pretty short conversation between a teacher and a preschool-aged child named Kelly. The teacher says, "Kelly, what are you working on?" "I don't know." "You don't know?" "No." It's a pretty short conversation, and you'll note that the teacher follows up with a closed question, so it only requires a one-word answer. Again, closed questions, they don't really work well to kind of continue the conversation. OK, here is a second example of where the teacher uses some open-ended questions and also some extension to continue the conversation with the child. The teacher starts, "Kelly, what are you working on?" "I don't know." "You don't know? Tell me about what you're making." "A flower," and then it continues. "Oh, you're making a flower with some petals and some leaves." "Yeah, I love my flower." "I do, too. It looks like a tulip." You'll notice that she has some extensions there that helps continue that conversation, but her follow-up question, that first invitation, was open-ended. She ... "You don't know? Tell me about what you're making," and this elicits a response that she can build on with that extension. She can build on what the child says, so this is a great strategy for continuing conversations with young children: an open-ended question and then some extension.

OK, it's time for us to watch a video, so here is an example of a teacher using a whole suite of strategies, some questions, some not, some extension, and she's in an outdoor play

environment with a small group of preschoolers. As we watch this, pay attention to what kinds of questions she's asking. Are they open? Are they closed, and what else do you notice about -- Are the questions she's asking ... Are they kind of extending conversations? How do the children respond to what kinds of questions she asks?

[Video begins]

Questions that extend the conversation request information that is not already known. Questions that extend the conversation match the children's language abilities. They stimulate creative thinking and new ideas, and questions that extend the conversation demonstrate a genuine interest in the topic. Now, let's listen.

Teacher: How are you getting all this water over there? [Chatter]

Boy #1: It comes with the water. [Chatter]

Boy #2: You don't want to fall in the water.

Teacher: Let me see.

Boy #1: Oh! It went back!

Teacher: Wow! But I see a big difference! Look at this. It's nice, but What's happening to all this water? [Chatter]

Boy #2: Turned into sand!

Teacher: See, it's turning into sand?

Boy #2: Yeah!

Teacher: Muddy and murky water?

Boy #2: Mm-hmm.

Teacher: Mm-hmm.

Boy #3: Why is it ... Why do you think ... Why did it turn into this color?

Teacher: Well, what do you think happened to it?

Boy #3: Well, it's in the sand.

Woman #2: It's got to be lower than the water.

Teacher: It got a little murky from all the dirt? [Chatter]

Boy #1: Putting in the sand, it turns into that.

Teacher: It's very ... It's almost like mud, huh?

Boy #1: Yeah.

Teacher: Oh, yes. Let me see, Anthony. Let me see how it goes down. Over here. Yep. What's making it go down?

Boy #2: The water!

Teacher: The water is making it go down?

Boy #2: Yep.

Teacher: Do you think ... [Chatter]

Boy #3: That is leaking water.

Teacher: It is. Oh, Jason says he's very, very strong.

Boy #2: And it's going to ... It's making a water pool.

Teacher: It is, but look! Look how much is going all the way over there. [Chatter]

Boy #1: Tell my mom something. [Chatter]

Teacher: If you just leave the sand right here without the water, will it go all the way down? What do you think?

Boy #3: It must be that one.

Teacher: You want to try? OK.

Boy #3: Yes.

Teacher: OK, go ahead.

Dr. Jarvis: What did you hear? Some questions were open-ended. There were lots of possible responses. Other questions started with how or why. They guided children to expand their thinking to make connections and comparisons and to explain their ideas, but a conversation isn't all questions. You also heard comments and other thoughtful responses.

[Video ends]

Dr. Jarvis: That, I think, is a really lovely example of a teacher using questions to extend the conversation, and I really like that in the follow-up at the end of the video, they point out that the conversation is not just all questions, so that is really, really important. I think, sometimes, as educators and teachers, we're told over and over and over again to ask lots of questions and talk to children, which is, of course, true, but we can't just pepper them with a string of conversation – of questions, you know? That's not quite an authentic back-and-forth conversation, so I like that she included that here.

There's a resource that I want to make sure to highlight for you that includes the full video that you just watched, so this was just one little clip. Again, it's another 15-minute In-service Suite, and the title of it is "Asking Questions," so clearly really interesting. There's a lot of really great things in there. Again, that's in your resources handout. There's that full video. There's also activities that you can try with your staff or fellow teachers. It can be a really fun thing to try practicing these questions being strategies in a staff meeting, so I recommend that. OK, I've been talking about strategies for asking questions, and also though, that we don't want to pepper children with just a steady stream of questions. What we're aiming for is conversations, so these back-and-forth conversations.

A big part of this is making sure to leave space for that child to respond, so a great strategy here is the CAR method. If you haven't seen this before, I wanted to make sure to share. You follow the CAR: follow the child's lead, and then C is for comment and wait, but A is for ask a question and wait, and then the R stands for respond by adding a little more end wait. A really key thing here is you'll notice that wait is on every single step. Sometimes, it can take children longer to formulate a question or a response than we might be used to, so this can especially be true with children with disabilities or suspected delays or even if the child is learning more than one language. Sometimes, it just depends on the child, so look for nonverbal responses as well, things like, you know, their eye gaze, where they're looking if they're pointing or gesturing. These can all be responses to the question and having a conversation with them. It can tell you a lot of what the child was thinking. Remember, give them space to respond and have a true conversation here.

You might be wondering about how to support conversations with the children who are dual-language learners, especially if you don't share a common language. A few strategies here. One is you want to choose materials that are intrinsically familiar and informative at first, so if a child knows what that thing is, then they can think more about what to do with it, rather than kind of wondering why on earth you handed them this thing that they have no experience with. This is really important for all children as a means to make connections to the real world and integrating prior knowledge, but this is an especially important strategy with children who are learning more than one language.

Another great strategy that I would encourage all staff to do is to learn a few open-ended questions in that child's home language or languages, so ask family members to share with you and help you learn what those are. Think of things that you could use over and over again, so open-ended questions like, "What will happen next? What do we need to make this?" so things

like that that you can learn when it's practiced and use in many different scenarios. It's a great, great strategy.

Whenever possible, be prepared to make an audio or video recording of these interactions, so with permission of course, but recording children's responses. Then, you can have them translated later, and you can see how that back-and-forth action was going so you can plan for any next steps. Children who are dual language learners, they need opportunities to think and explore and discuss, even if the teacher doesn't always understand what the child is saying.

Children with disabilities or suspected delays, like all children, benefit from having conversations with us as well to extend their thinking and learning. This is where Universal Design for Learning comes in, or UDL, and this is just a philosophy for designing learning environments as well as activities, and the point is that these things are accessible by the widest range of child abilities as possible. UDL gives us a really nice framework in thinking about how to create environments that support conversations with all young children, including those with disabilities or suspected delays. A key part of this approach is offering flexibility, so flexibility in the ways children access material, in the way that they might engage with it and the way that they show us what they know. The use of familiar and open-ended materials is a really great strategy here as well as providing choices.

By preschool, many young children come to associate teachers as an authority figure, and they might look to them for answers. They often know that we're expecting certain responses when we ask them questions, and it's important that we reflect on this, so are children playing the "guess what's in my teacher's head" game rather than being curious? We want to reflect on children's answers to our questions. Do they reflect genuine curiosity, or are there times when they're maybe just trying to please you or to get it right? We also need to consider that not all children are going to feel comfortable speaking up as an equal to an adult in charge and just freely asking questions in a learning setting. The relationships between a child and an elder or an adult who's in charge can be deeply cultural, and this is something we need to be aware of.

Part of building a culture of curiosity of having these sort of curiosity-driven questions means that we, as the adults, need to be accepting of a really wide range of questions and responses from young children. This means you have to take time to connect with families to learn about what their culture is around, asking questions at home and in the community and of adults, and we all ... Staff, as well as parents, we have to make sure that we're comfortable supporting curiosity from all children in whatever way that looks like, not just from those children who happen to interact in ways that we are comfortable or familiar with.

OK, so this last section ... I'm going to give you some strategies, and we're going to think a bit about how to respond to the questions that children might ask. Here is sort of a general strategy. One – listen. Step one, always listen to the child. Just so remember, way back to our poll, children are not just trying to get your attention, but they're actually curious about something, and they're looking for information. It's often a great practice to ask for clarification or expansion of their question as needed. What you want to get at is, "What are they really asking about?" It could buy you a little bit of time to think how you're going to respond, and by

clarifying and trying to figure out what that child is actually curious about, it often shows up that what they're wondering about is perhaps not quite so complicated as you might have feared. For example, you know, if a preschooler asks you, "Where do babies come from?" and you go, "Oh, god," [Laughter] but then it turns out when you ask them some clarifying questions that they just wanted to know where you purchase the new dolls in the classroom. That clarifying piece can be really important before you respond.

Finally, step three is to respond, and you want to give them enough information, but don't go on and on and on with a long story, you know, with the dolls about the many toy stores you had to go to in your area and the rising cost of dolls. Just give them a chance to process and respond and redirect you as needed because maybe that wasn't quite what they were looking for. They were curious about something else. And then repeat because they may have follow-up questions. Again, they're looking for information, and you're helping them learn about the world.

A common question is how to respond, and specifically, how much detail should you give in this response? I said to give them some information, but don't go on and on, so what does that mean? And I'm going to show you all a study that might help with this a little bit. In this study, researchers showed a group of preschoolers ... They're about 4 and 5-year-olds, videos of odd scenarios of sort of strange things in order to prompt questions from the kids. For example, in this one, the children saw a woman pouring ketchup on her ice cream, and then the researchers varied the level of detail in their response and asked how that affected the children's learning.

They had three different responses at different levels of detail, so this level one response with the simplest. "Why did she pour ketchup on her ice cream?" And the level one response was, "It was a mistake." Now, level two, a little bit more detail. "It was a mistake because she thought it was chocolate in the bottle." And then, level three had the most detail. "It was a mistake because she thought it was chocolate in the bottle because the ketchup bottle and the chocolate bottle look the same."

Then, they ask the children to recall the explanation later to kind of see what they learned, and what the study found was that this intermediate, the level two response ... This seemed to be the best for preschool-aged children. This level of detail, you provided an answer. That's important. They're looking for answers about things in the world, but it also included a little bit about why, so a purpose or cause, but not so much detail that they overtax the children. In general, it seems that preschool-aged children not only prefer this middle-ground level of response, but these kinds of explanations actually help them remember the answer and learn from your response, which is the whole point.

I want you to go and find that Q&A widget, if you haven't already, and take some time to share with us using the Q&A widget. I want to hear from you all. Sometimes, children ask us questions that catch us off guard, so I'm curious. Do some questions tend to make you uncomfortable? And if you're willing to share, how you may have responded in that situation. For example, last Christmas, my friend's 5-year-old, he has been into toy trucks for, it feels like, his whole life, so he was at Christmas. He was opening a gift of a toy truck from his grandparents, and

apparently, no longer into truck. Apparently, that's old news because he said, "I don't like this, so why do I have to thank you?" and, of course, right in front of the grandparents. Kids are going to say things that make us uncomfortable, and it's still important to provide answers for them, free of judgment. Young children are bombarded with messages from the world around them, and they're really just trying to make sense of it all. By asking you their question, we have this really wonderful and important opportunity to help them make sense of things. If you haven't already, share out some of your examples of questions that tend to make you uncomfortable using that Q&A widget.

And now, we'll take some time to look at some strategies for answering questions that may make you uncomfortable. Often, teachers, as well as parents, respond that questions around identity, so things like gender or race, these tend to be a category that makes us the most uncomfortable. For example, "Why does that boy have long hair? Why does her skin look dirty, or why does she look like a man?" and, of course, they always ask these questions when you're in a very busy department store or in front of other people, and it gets the adult kind of flustered. But this kind of curiosity is really a normal part of children's development. Children are working to make meaning at the world around us and also to categorize what they see, so as the trusted adult, how we respond to these questions really, really matters.

OK, so when we have the "What did you just say?" moment when children ask us questions that rattle us or make us uncomfortable, we have to first take a deep breath, so breathe in, breathe out. Any other mindfulness exercises that works for you to settle your nerves. The point here is that we should avoid responding out of anger or shame or – and instead from this more neutral place of curiosity. Adults can often avoid talking about race or ability, for example, just because they're uncomfortable, but when we dodge these questions and avoid them, it can actually increase bias in children. When we don't talk about these differences, it teaches children to ignore them or, worse, that these differences are something to be ashamed about.

Again, that follow-up is important of "What is the child actually asking? What are they actually curious about?" It could buy you a little bit of time, as well as deciding how to respond, doing the mindfulness breathing, and also, it's ... There's no need to launch into a heavy topic if that's not actually what the child is curious about in that moment so that follow-up is really important. Then lastly, we have to listen and respond to what the child is actually asking without judgment, so no indication that what they're asking about is something that they should be ashamed about.

Children naturally notice differences in similarities between people, and I wanted to call your attention to this great resource. Again, I've linked to it in the resource widget. It's a wonderful podcast episode featuring Dr. Rosemarie Allen as a part of the Head Start Heals podcast series, so we're just going to listen to a tiny snippet of it, but the full 20-minute episode is available there in your links. Dr. Allen is the founder, president and CEO of the Center for Equity and Excellence in Denver, Colorado. She's a national expert on implicit bias and culturally responsive practices, and in this specific podcast episode, she shares some really great tips for

developmentally appropriate ways to discuss topics that might be challenging for some adults, such as race.

Before we jump in, also note that this type of discussion, it might be of interest to parents and families in your program as well as the staff consider including talking to children about differences in a future parent meeting or in-home visits, and this can help you help parents navigate responding to the children's questions that they might have at home. OK, we're going to listen to about a 3-minute short clip of this podcast.

[Video begins]

Rosemarie Allen: Children notice difference, and they talk about difference. At about 3 years old, they're beginning to classify objects. They categorize objects and categorize things that are different, the same, what belongs, what doesn't, and because we don't talk about race, they begin to categorize people and place value on people based on the racial cues they get from their environment. The problem with that is that there is no check and balance system. The adults aren't talking about it. The children see it. They see who is preferred. Then, they rely on their own devices to get – categorize people based on different skin tones, different skin color, so we have to talk about it so that we're providing guidance to children as they begin to place value on the color of skin.

We can talk to them very casually about the differences they notice, but what happens is that adults are very uncomfortable talking about race, so they send this message, "It's not OK." There was a "Time Magazine" article that talked about -- the name of the article is "Is My Baby Racist?" and it talks about how many well-meaning white families expose their children to diversity but never talk about diversity. They expose their children to "Dora the Explorer" but never talks about if she has an accent. Where did she learn Spanish? Is she Hispanic? Her skin is brown, just like Juan's, and I wonder if they are from the same place and speak the same Spanish. They never talk about and explore those issues. Even at home, as you're watching TV and there's diversity there, talk about all those levels of diversity. Race is just one, but sometimes we're more comfortable talking about poor children than we are about Black and Brown children and what's happening.

We shush children because of our own discomfort, but the way you can talk to them when they notice, "Well her skin is brown. I don't like brown," and you can say, "Well, what color is your skin, and do you like brown the color or the skin? Tell me more about this. Let's talk about it," which usually, they begin to notice before they place the value on. "How come his hair looks like a sponge?" "Because his hair has very tight curls, and your hair has no curls at all. Let's go find a book and look at ... Let's look for curly hair and straight hair," and then you could even have a poll. Let's see. "How many have curly hair? How many have straight hair?" You just make it a part of the everyday learning environment, but in order to do that, we have to be very comfortable because if not, we're going to silence children and leave them to their own devices.

Dr. Jarvis: I encourage you to go listen to the rest of that podcast. Again, the link is in your resources widget. It's about 20 minutes. It's a great conversation. I mentioned that this topic responding to children's questions – about differences that they notice – can be something that's really helpful to talk with about parents, and the rest of that podcast includes some really great tips for talking with families and parents about this, so be sure and check that out.

Also, one of the things she talked about later in the podcast is this treasure chest. Think about coming up with some responses in advance, so filling your treasure chest with these responses and practice. Some of her examples of treasure-chest responses around – specifically around talking to your children about race – include, "Brown skin just means that she has more melanin. Underneath, we're all the same. Yes, that looks different," or "Yes, our skin comes in all different colors, and we all look beautiful."

Whatever the kinds of questions that tend to kind of catch you off guard -- Of course, we can't predict all questions that children are going to ask, but some reflection there about what kinds of questions that children ask tend to make you comfortable as the adult. Try and come up with some example responses that you can lean on. Really, really important here is that you practice talking about topics that make you uncomfortable. It's going to get easier over time. I promise.

And then, lastly, it's really important that we have diversity represented in the people and materials in the learning environment, but don't stop there. Some teachers, in particular white teachers, tend to be uncomfortable talking about race, so while they may put up posters and have dolls and have toys that reflect many types of people and many skin colors, which is fantastic, they end up not actually talking about race with children, and when children are curious and start asking questions, they either avoid those questions or often, what happens is they might ignore it and change the topic when it comes up. All staff can benefit from having these sort of treasure chest or sentence starters, so you might even put up prompts around the room where it's relevant to support staff in having these conversations.

Conversation starters can be things like maybe in the doll area. Maybe if you have diverse-looking dolls with different types of skin color, a conversation starter might be, "We all have different skin colors from the amounts of melanin that we have. See how my skin is a little darker than her skin? Isn't that cool? All skin colors are beautiful." Having these kinds of conversations is really, really key. It helps young children sort out the differences that they naturally notice between people. When we don't talk about it, or we shy away from their questions, children tend to come up with their own explanations, and research shows that this often increases racist or biased thinking. Take advantage of the opportunity and have these conversations with young children when they show curiosity about what they see – to respond to their questions and proactively have some of these conversations.

OK. Bringing it all together at the end of our webinar here before we go to your questions. Some of these key ingredients around having conversations with young children: listen and wait. These are so key, so it's really important to listen actively to children and give them time to respond and show you what you're interested. Remember, it's a back-and-forth.

Modeling curiosity and being that co-explorer sometimes rather than the all-knowing adult expert ... This can really help children explore and show us what they find interesting and can build that curiosity culture.

We also want to think about lots of different ways for children to engage and express their ideas, so lots of different materials that are diverse and flexible in their use. There should be multiple ways for children to engage with the materials and express their ideas. Also remember that open-ended questions can also help children express themselves.

OK, and then, lastly, we talked about how children may ask questions that make you a little uncomfortable, and that's OK. That's a totally natural part of child development, but it's also on you, as the adult, to self-regulate and take a deep breath and to respond to what they're actually asking without judgment. Some good strategies here to provide materials that give them an opportunity to learn about other children who may be different or have different experiences than them and to have those conversations. Children are constantly learning and figuring out how the world works, and these conversations with you, the trusted adults in their lives, is a really key part of how they do that. OK.

Then lastly, I'm going to invite you to join us for the next in the Front Porch webinar series, so we're going to be talking a lot about outdoor learning environments. The next one coming up is on March 17th. Thank you all so much for joining us, and we hope to see you at our next Front Porch, and thank you for all that you do.