

## Supporting Infant and Toddler Peer Relationships

Beth Zack: Hi, everyone. Welcome to Baby Talks. We're happy to have you here with us today to talk about supporting infant and toddler peer relationships. If you're new to Baby Talks, it's a series of webinars for teachers, family child care providers, and home visitors working with infants and toddlers in Early Head Start, while you're in seasonal Head Start, and American Indian and Alaska Native programs. These webinars are designed to introduce you to research about infant and toddler developments. My name is Beth Zack, and I'm here with my colleague, Marley Jarvis.

Marley Jarvis: Hi, everybody. Beth and I, we are from the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning – kind of a mouthful. The acronym there is NCECDTL. We are based at I-LABS, another acronym, which is the Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences at the University of Washington. I-LABS is an NCECDTL partner organization. We are an interdisciplinary research institute dedicated to understanding human learning. We have a special focus on early learning and the brain. You might be thinking, “Isn't it a little early in development to be thinking about peer relationships, especially with infants?”

Beth: Right, but we know that these relationships actually start earlier than we might think. In fact, there's research from the '70s that I uncovered preparing for today, and those researchers found that newborn infants are already influencing their peers in the hospital nursery. They found that those newborns tended to cry more often after hearing another newborn cry compared to when there was silence.

Marley: Beth's taking it way back to the '70s. That begs the question, “Isn't it possible that they were just responding to the noise, the racket from the crying?”

Beth: They thought about that too, and they found out it was more than that because those newborns didn't cry as often when they heard a computer-generated cry. The research suggested that the emotions in one baby were triggering similar emotions in others. It's like they felt an emotional connection to their peers.

Marley: That's really cool.

Beth: I think it really is, at least to me. We know that infants are born with a social connection to adults, but it seems that they have this early connection to their peers too. Of course, that's not to say they don't have a lot of learning and development that happens during infancy and toddlerhood to help support those peer relationships. That's really what we're going to be focused on today: the many ways, the big and small, that children develop skills to support those relationships with their peers.

Before we jump into content, we will go over our learning objectives. The first is to describe how infants and toddlers begin to understand themselves and others. The second is to identify strategies to help infants and toddlers build healthy relationships with their peers, including

children with disabilities, so that all children feel like they belong. We know that building belonging is an important part of supporting children's emotional well-being and the development of healthy peer relationships. Speaking of support, we can't think about peer relationships without going back to those very first relationships with the adults in their lives.

Marley: Yeah, great – so us. It's through their relationships with responsive, caring adults that infants and toddlers really learn to trust and connect with others. This happens in the context of consistent, supportive routines. Over time, that infant-adult relationship – it develops into what researchers call an attachment bond, which you may have heard of before. An attachment bond is a lasting emotional bond that forms between infants and their primary caregivers, which can be parents, education staff, grandparents, and so on.

Beth: Even though we're referring to adults, these early relationships – they can form between infants and older siblings or other relatives too. In many, cultures, families rely on older children in their family or other relatives to care for those younger members. We know that young children can form those same attachment bonds to them too.

Marley: That's such a good point. When children feel safe and secure, they develop the confidence to explore their environment.

Beth: Take a look at this toddler in a group socialization as an example. This toddler knows that his father is going to be there to support him and to keep him safe. Because of that knowledge, he feels safe to explore that playroom and to meet new peers. We know from research that children who experience those warm, positive, responsive relationships with caregivers – they tend to have better social skills. Then those better social skills – well, that's related to more academic success and overall happiness. Children with better social skills – they tend to learn more from their peers and also just to feel better about themselves.

Marley: I like that. I mean, really, infants and toddlers are learning from us. This all makes sense, right? The way adults treat young children – it sets their expectations. It's kind of teaching them skills for how to relate to their peers, right? It's more than just building trust and a connection. Infants and toddlers are learning how to use social cues and language and things like that to communicate what they want and what they need. They're learning how to identify and understand their own, as well as others', emotions. That love and that support that they feel from adults – they're bringing that into the friendships that they're forming.

Beth: Dr. Robert Emde, he's a pioneer in the field of infant and early childhood mental health. He referred to this as, "An effect of relationships on relationships."

Marley: It's linked. Infants and toddlers are learning from us and those relationships, and that's passed on there.

Beth: When we model care and concern with infants and toddlers, then infants and toddlers will learn to show that same care and concern with others, including their peers. Just like this little girl in the photo is helping her peer with his water bottle.

Marley: While they learn what to expect from others, they're also gaining an understanding of their own identity and where they fit in the world.

Beth: Yes, and a family's culture plays a big part here in what their expectations are in relationships as well as a child's sense of identity. Programs have a responsibility to get to know a family better, to understand their values, their expectations around building peer relationships.

Marley: Early relationships support infants and toddlers' social and emotional development, including their relationships with peers and sense of identity and belonging. Both of these pieces are subdomains in the social and emotional development domain of the ELOF, or the Early Learning Outcomes Framework. We've included a link to the ELOF in your resource list and encourage you to check that out.

Beth: Thanks for pointing that out, Marley, for everyone. I think this is a good spot for us to see some of what we've been talking about in action. As you watch this video, I want you to think about how the adult is creating an attachment bond with baby Logan, who you see in this photo here, and how they're supporting children's developing sense of self. We also included some space in your viewer's guide to jot down any observations. Here we go.

[Video begins]

Teacher 1: [Singing] Hello and how are you? I'm fine. I'm fine. I hope that you are too. Yay! Tomako? OK. [Clapping] Tomako came to school today, school today, school today. Tomako came to school today. Hi, Tomako, hi. Hi, Tomako!

Teacher 2: Hi, Tomako.

Teacher 1: Zori, you look like you're ready.

Teacher 2: Zori, you ready?

Teacher 1: OK. [Singing and clapping] Zori came to school today, school today, school today. Zori came to school today. Hi, Zori, hi. Hi, Zori! All right, Zori. Logan, you ready?

Teacher 2: Say, "I'm always ready, Neece. I'm always ready."

Teacher 1: [Singing and clapping] Logan came to school today, school today, school today. Logan came to school today. Hi, Logan, hi. Hi, Logan! Hi, Logan. Say, "I'm trying to get some teeth in there me. Yes, I am. Yes, I am." [Kissing sounds] Big kisses. Big kisses. Can we turn the page? Oh, you trying to give big kisses? Oh, yeah, big kisses, Logan. Oh, you made the baby happy.

[Video ends]

Beth: Let's talk about all the wonderful things happening in that video. The teacher is nurturing their attachment bond through the wonderful warmth she has in her voice, her facial expressions, and how tuned in she is to Logan. Marley, how was she supporting Logan's developing sense of self?

Marley: She noticed and was excited about what Logan was interested in. In the end, they kiss the baby in the book. She was responsive to all of his nonverbal behavior that he was doing.

Beth: She was showing Logan that he's valued through that caring attention that she gave to him. When children see themselves as valued, they will learn to value and respect their peers in the same way. They also develop pride in their identity, which identity is what makes us us. It includes things like our beliefs, our cultures, our languages, our traits, and how we see ourselves and understand ourselves. A strong sense of self like that provides the foundation for young children's relationships with their peers. Marley, did you notice something else in that video?

Marley: We haven't really talked about this yet, but they're also building belonging in their learning space. They're doing that by connecting children to each other through song. Notice that they're using each child's name there. Education staff, teachers, family child care providers, and home visitors during group socializations – all education staff can create a caring community by connecting with each and every child. The adult's role in supporting infants' and toddlers' peer relationships is going to be a theme here throughout the rest of the webinar. Now, we want to start thinking about how children develop relationships with their peers from the time that they're babies.

Beth: How a baby relates to their peers is going to look different from how a young toddler does. Of course, how a young toddler does is going to look different from a child about to enter preschool. Because of that, we thought today we would highlight a few milestones across those first three years that support the development of peer relationships.

Marley: For each of these milestones, we're going to describe research and touch on children's developing skills that underlie each of those milestones. We're going to share some photos and some videos just so we can see what that milestone looks like. We're going to discuss and show strategies of how adults can support these earliest peer relationships because, really, adults can teach these skills from an early age.

Beth: Which is an important point we want to highlight today because we often get asked, "What happens when a child isn't around peers?" This could be for a number of reasons. It could be extended illness, maybe little or no access, or a pandemic like we've experienced with COVID-19. Disruptions to normal routines and those social rhythms – they can impact how a child relates to their peers. Many of you might still be seeing this firsthand in your learning spaces. The good news is that as Marley mentioned, we can model and teach these social skills. With that patience and support, children can develop the social skills they need for positive peer relationships.

Marley: Infants often get left out of this conversation about early peer relationships, but we're here to tell you that there really is a lot happening during this first year. Infants learn about their social world from watching other people, and that includes watching other infants. This first developmental milestone is that infants show interest in other infants. They do this in a lot of ways.

Beth: They love to look at each other, right? The reason why they can do this is because as their vision develops, those faces that are closest to them – they are coming into better focus. Then, around two to three months, we see those infants smile at their peers, and they'll reach out and touch a peer who's lying next to them on the ground.

Marley: Thinking about their language skills developing further, infants will start to babble at their peers. This is around six to nine months. Of course, infants who are deaf – they're going to babble using their hands in the same ways that hearing babies will babble using their voices.

Beth: So amazing. Then as their motor skills develop, they start using their whole body to engage with peers kind of like you see on the bottom-right photo here, this little baby crawling over the other one. They're learning through movement both on and then eventually with each other. The cool thing is that infants actually show these behaviors around the same time or just a little bit after they show them with adults. We also see peer preferences begin to emerge as early as six months.

Marley: Which maybe seems early. That's kind of impressive.

Beth: It does seem early, but it's true. I love to share this research study with you which combines two things that I love, babies and books. In this study, researchers showed six-month-olds and nine-month-olds pictures of infants of different ages. What they found was that the six-month-old showed more interest in those photos of six-month-olds. The nine-month-olds showed more interest in photos of nine-month-olds.

Marley: What you're saying is they preferred to look at peers who were like them.

Beth: Exactly, and they also found this same pattern when they compared crawling and walking infants too. Crawlers preferred to look at crawlers and walking infants preferred to look at other walking infants.

Marley: These remind of baby Logan wanting to kiss the baby in the book in that first video.

Beth: Yes, it was such a sweet thing to do, but even more than that, it's a beautiful example of babies liking to look at other babies. Researchers believe that they do this to better understand themselves and to connect with others.

Marley: Beyond books, we can see actual friendships blooming as early as six months old. Infants engage with familiar and unfamiliar peers in different ways, and they have particular peers that they want to be near. This has been found in other cultures too, such as the kibbutz toddler houses in Israel where children are raised communally.

Beth: Then, by 30 months, there's research that shows that toddlers are beginning to choose friends based on their race. From a racial equity lens, adults have a role in helping infants and toddlers relate to their peers who are racially different from them from the time that they're babies.

Marley: Now that we've talked about some of the research here, let's take a peek at a group of peers in a learning space. As you're watching, you can keep a few questions in mind. What do you notice about how the adult has arranged the environment? Also, how is the adult supporting peer relationships?

Beth: You can use your viewer's guide. There's space in there if you need to jot down any notes. Here we go.

[Video begins]

Teacher 1: Hello, Madison. Cooper, let's go hug Maddie. Hi, Maddie. Maddie? There you go, baby. Do you want to turn?

[Video ends]

Beth: That was a super short clip, but in there was some really nice strategies that we want to highlight. I love how the adult set up that social space so those infants there. They were facing each other. They could see each other, and they could reach out and touch each other. Then, of course, at the beginning there, Maddie has just fallen over, and then there's a peer that's patting her on the head.

Marley: [Laughter] I can't believe how calm Maddie was after that. Some children would be really upset. If that happened to me, you can just remain calm and you can use it as an opportunity to remind children to be gentle with each other or comment on their curiosity. You might say like, "Oh, look. They were curious how you ended up on the ground and they were saying hello."

Beth: This adult model being, caring through both her actions and her calmness. When she helps Maddie up at the end there, Maddie's kind of facing away from that peer group again. But you can hear her ask her if she'd like to turn as she starts to move her around. She's really helping her to reengage.

Marley: She's modeling supportive language when she says, "Let's go help Maddie."

Beth: Our language that we use is so important. Describing how children are relating to each other is another great strategy for supporting early peer relationships.

Marley: Beyond language, you can include books of similar-aged babies in the space, like we mentioned before. You can add large baby-safe mirrors so infants and toddlers can see themselves and their peers. Continue to be warm and caring and responsive to infants' and toddlers' needs.

Beth: Yes, which I'm sure all of you work so hard to do every day.

Marley: We alluded to this with the first milestone, but this next one is all about shared understanding. Not only do infants prefer to look at infants who are like them, but they use the shared understanding of how others are like them to relate to their peers. One of the ways that they do this is through imitation.

Beth: Peer imitation is more than just copying actions. That's part of it too. Children, they imitate to make a social connection with their peers, to initiate interactions, and to create that shared understanding. It's like they're saying, "I understand what you're doing. Look, I can do it too." Now, "Hey, we can do it together."

Marley: Let's talk about some of the developmental milestones that underlie shared understanding and imitation. First, children need to have the motor skills to imitate certain actions, right?

Beth: Right, and then there's another milestone that they need, and that's joint attention skills. Joint attentions – that ability to share their attention between objects and a social partner. It's what allows infants to respond to what an adult or a peer is paying attention to and share what they're interested in in an environment. It's not only important for imitation but also just back and forth interactions.

Let's look at some research now on early peer imitation. Marley, I think you're going to love this one because they trained a 14-month-old to be a model for a series of imitation tasks. Rather than have an adult show different 14- and 18-month-olds how to use different objects, they trained this 14-month-old peer who these children had never met to show them.

Marley: That is really great. I do really love these studies. I can't imagine training a 14-month-old to do this. I have to say, I'm very impressed.

Beth: Back to the study. After they watched that 14-month-old show how to use these different objects, there was a delay of either five minutes or two days. Then, the researchers brought those children back in who were watching, and they gave them the same objects to see if they would play with them in the same way that the peer model did.

Marley: Essentially, they're looking at whether or not they imitated their actions, right?

Beth: Right, and you can see in the photos here in that top row, there is the peer model on the right side. Look how closely the other child is watching. This is a great example of joint attention. Then, on the bottom, you see that same child imitating the peer's actions. What they found was that children imitated the peer's actions with the object after both that five-minute delay and even two days later.

Marley: Wow. That's a pretty amazing example of social learning from peers and pretty young toddlers.

Beth: It is, and it goes back to making a connection to peers, so to someone who is like them. Because in a similar study, they compared 14 to 18-month-olds and whether they were more likely to imitate an older peer or an adult. The older peer or adult – they demonstrated different sequences like putting a bear to bed. This time, they found that the toddlers imitated the older peer more often than they imitated the adults.

Marley: I can see the practical application here, especially for family child care providers. Typically, you might have children of different ages in the same learning space there, right? Or even home visitors working with families of children with different ages. This really underscores the importance of encouraging older children to be models for younger children. Infants and toddlers not only learning from the adults in their life, but from the peers too. We can take advantage of that and support that.

Beth: When children imitate their social partners, they're learning not only about themselves and the world. Then, they also see how others are like them.

Marley: What does this look like in real life when researchers aren't training peers as expert models?

Beth: Let's see some toddler imitation in action in the learning spaces. There's going to be two clips. The first is children exploring avocados together. The second is some group music time. As you watch, think about how the adult is supporting imitation and shared understanding. There's space in your viewer's guide to jot down observations.

[Video begins]

Teacher1: Let me see, friends. Oh, you are experimenting with rolling your avocado because it's so round. You too, Mia? You're going to roll it around the table?

Teacher 2: OK, get ready. I'm going to tell you when to stop, and we're going to stop our music and then listen and see if it's quiet. Ready? Stop. Whoa. Wow! It's so quiet. Everybody stopped. OK, now let's follow Edwin. OK, Edwin, you show us what you want to do. Oh, Edwin's doing a rub like this. Follow Edwin.

Child 1: Quiet.

Teacher 2: He's doing a quiet rub. Oh, and he stopped.

[Video ends]

Marley: I really love that. Very short clips, but there's a lot there. In the avocado clip, the adult supports peer imitation through the language that she uses, right? She's making the connection, but they are both rolling their avocados.

Beth: Then in the music time clip, we see the adult serve as a model first for them, but then she gives a child, so Edwin, the opportunity to be a peer model as a way for him to connect with his

peers. She uses language to explain how he's using his instrument. Did you notice how attentive all his peers were? I was so impressed. They were closely watching and imitating his actions.

Marley: There are lots of great strategies. I think it's also a good reminder that children are watching us – the adults too, right? They will imitate how we treat other adults, how we treat their peers, and how we treat their families. It's another reason that it's so important to model kindness, and gentle interactions, and how to take turns and care for each other.

Beth: You can also read books or tell stories that demonstrate the same. We used imitation as an example, but remember, this is about shared understanding too. As adults, we have a role to show that we're willing to listen and understand and learn from children – even the littlest ones, right? Meet them where they are. As you do, you can think about their temperament, their ability level, their culture, and languages, and how that makes them who they are.

Marley: For example, a young child with autism may have a harder time with shared understanding because they typically have difficulty with the kind of joint attention skills. They might need a little bit more support to engage in those back-and-forth interactions with their peers.

Beth: That's a great example. The adult has a role to help each individual child to feel safe in their learning space, so they develop that confidence to explore and engage with their peers. For home visitors, you can encourage families to attend group socializations or other events where children have opportunities to practice skills with their peers.

Marley: OK, so this brings us to our third and final milestone for today, and it's a big one: prosocial behavior. Prosocial behaviors, if you're unfamiliar with that term, that includes a lot of different things. Things like sharing, helping, comforting, and cooperating with each other.

Beth: Did you know that prosocial skills in preschoolers actually begin to develop before most children are two years old?

Marley: Which is really early, right? That's impressive.

Beth: It is, but I mean, again, it's just those first signs. Learning to be prosocial is still a work in progress.

Marley: Absolutely, and it's important to keep in mind there are a lot of cultural differences in why or how we form relationships. For example, the dominant culture in the United States often values independence, which focuses on individual thinking, even assertiveness. But many cultures value interdependence, which favors group thinking and a concern for others. Children in families who value interdependence may have many strengths, including empathy for others and building shared understanding.

Beth: They're prosocial pros.

Marley: Exactly. Think about your own values. Do you tend to value independence or interdependence or maybe both? Our values can really impact how we set up our learning spaces, whether or how we encourage peer interactions – those prosocial behaviors like sharing and cooperation – and how we introduce new children into a group. It also influences how children might interact with their peers too.

Beth: Your role as education staff is to provide that strengths-based approach – so to honor a child and their families, their culture, and their values, like interdependence, for example – to support children as they learn and grow. We know that culture is an integral part of how a child thinks and feels about themselves. Then, how a child thinks about themselves – that influences how they relate to others.

Marley: We can't think about prosocial behavior and how children relate to others without thinking about children's emerging self-awareness during these first three years here.

Beth: That's so true. It's the time when children are beginning to understand that sense of me and mine. We start to hear, "That's mine!" and/or, "Me do it!" Then with that, they begin to develop an awareness that other people can have different thoughts and feelings and wants from their own. This is called theory of mind.

Marley: I can see how this is an important development for children's ability to relate to their peers. When a child understands that their peer is sad because they don't have their favorite teddy bear, they're more likely to show care towards them.

Beth: It supports peer relationships and those prosocial behaviors because they start to begin to put themselves in someone else's shoes. We need to develop these skills to have successful relationships with peers and adults throughout life.

Marley: When children see adults treat them – or their peers or even other adults – with respect, and they have adults find strength in their identity and their culture, they're going to learn to feel that same pride in themselves.

Beth: They'll begin to show those prosocial behaviors and develop that respect for their peers too.

Marley: When we create this type of welcoming learning space, children will feel like they are part of the group, like they belong. When children feel a sense of belonging, it's easier for them to navigate the social environment and develop relationships with their peers.

Beth: I'd love to share some research from a couple of studies on prosocial behavior. This first study is so sweet. It's about 1-year-olds developing care and concern for others. What the researchers did was they took a baby doll and they swaddled it – just like part of its face was peeking out. They hid an audio device inside that swaddle, and it played a recording of a baby crying.

Marley: It both looked and sounded like a real baby.

Beth: Exactly, and then researchers left 1-year-olds alone with this doll and then their parents to see how that toddler would respond to this baby's cries. The baby was just out of the child's reach, but there were comfort items around like a blanket and a stuffed animal. Parents also filled out a questionnaire about a child's social understanding. They answered questions, like "Does your child recognize themselves in photos?" and "Do they say me or mine?"

Marley: OK, so what did they find?

Beth: They found that toddlers responded in different ways. Children who scored higher on social understanding – from that questionnaire that parents filled out – they were more likely to respond with empathy to that baby's distress. They showed concern with their tone of voice, the words they said like cry and sad, facial expressions, such as a furrowed brow or a frown. They pointed to the crying baby, and they were also more likely to offer those comfort items, which brings us back to theory of mind. Some of these children were better able to take the perspective of a crying infant and respond with early forms of empathy here.

Marley: I have to ask like why did some children show this type of prosocial behavior earlier than others.

Beth: To answer that, I want to bring us back to where we started, and that's children's earliest relationships, where researchers have found that the language adults use – it plays an important role in supporting children's empathy skills like helping. I have another study to share, and I promise these are all connected. I'm going to come back to that baby doll study too. In this study, parents – they read different picture books with their 18- to 30-month-old toddlers. The researchers looked at the type of language parents used. They also tested those toddlers to see if they would perform a prosocial helping task. For example, there was an adult who was shivering from cold, and they looked to see if the toddler would bring them a blanket.

Marley: How is the language parents used related to their child's prosocial behavior?

Beth: Those parents who – during the book reading – who asked their child to not only label emotions but just asked questions and talked about emotions with them during the book reading, those children were quicker to help.

Marley: To bring the blanket?

Beth: You got it. They didn't find this relationship for parents who only labeled emotions during book reading without asking their child questions.

Marley: Which is really interesting. Essentially, the type of language and how they used it – the quality, really – is what mattered.

Beth: Right, exactly. To connect this back to that crying pretend baby doll study, it's possible that those children in that study who showed more care and concern for the baby doll, maybe their parents also asked them more questions about emotions like these researchers found.

Marley: Yeah, so the big take home here is that language that adults use – that really matters.

Beth: Right, so I encourage you to talk about not only your own but other people's feelings. Using characters in a book can be a really great place to start. Begin to guide children in their thinking about how they feel and how their peers feel. You can also help families do the same.

Marley: On to my favorite part. Let's take a look at what prosocial behaviors, such as care and helping, what that might look like in your learning space. We're going to watch another video. In this one, we have a 1-year-old interacting with a younger infant who's working on going from tummy time to her hands and knees. As you watch, I want to invite you to think about how the adult is supporting the 1-year-old as she works on her prosocial skills. Again, you could use that viewer's guide of yours to jot down your observations.

[Video begins]

Teacher 1: Goodness, goodness. Are you getting tired? Are you getting tired? You're working so hard up there on your knees. Working so hard. You're working so hard up there on your knees.

Teacher 2: She's going to pat her back.

Teacher 1: Say, "Good job, Ayla." You giving her encouragement there? Say, "Good job, Ayla. I remember when." Say, "Hi, Ayla."

Teacher 2: Say hi.

Teacher 1: Yeah, you're working so hard. Gentle. Gentle. Oh, come on. Say, "Yay, Ayla!" Is the doll from you? Do you want me to read a book to you? Do you want me to say cheese? Are you finished?

[Baby cries]

Teacher 2: You're washing dishes. Washing dishes.

Teacher 1: Oh, are you going to give her a hug? Are you going to give her a hug? Oh, goodness. You're working so hard over there. You're working so hard over there. Now you want to give her a hug? She's licking her bib. Say, "Hi, Ayla." Hi, Ayla. Oh, you're going to give her a hug? You want her to hug you?

[Video ends]

Beth: Aw, that little pat the toddler gives the baby as she checks in with her. She kind of gets on her level to look at her face. This is a wonderful example of a 1-year-old showing care and concern for a younger peer, who in this situation, was working on a new, challenging motor skill.

Marley: Yeah, the dreaded tummy time. The adult there used language that was positive and encouraging, but with both the baby and that older child, the 1-year-old. She encouraged the older child to interact with her younger peer, used words – kind of modeling for her, “Say, ‘hi!’” – and the actions of waving. She did a really great job of acknowledging the 1-year-old's prosocial behavior while giving her a gentle reminder to be gentle when needed. She, of course, had that warm smile and the soft tone of voice, which is great.

Beth: I think it's safe to say this little girl has adults in her life who model kind, caring behaviors to her and her peers.

Marley: I think so too. We'll see this behavior all the time in a 1-year-old or even a 3-year-old. Eh, maybe not.

Beth: No.

Marley: But young toddlers are already showing, a lot of these early prosocial behaviors like concern for others. We do see that.

Beth: We want to move on to another type of prosocial behavior that we start to see in toddlers. That's turn-taking and cooperation.

Marley: Great, I'm glad that we're talking about this because parallel play is often emphasized with this age group and it's important and absolutely does happen. We do want to make clear that peer relationships is more than just playing side to side.

Beth: Research shows that even 1-year-olds – they play cooperative games with peers. These games often require shared understanding and even turn-taking. Even though children are in these early stages of prosocial skills, they can still engage in this way. Also, because they haven't, it's a good reminder that because they haven't mastered turn-taking or sharing, we also shouldn't expect them to, right? They're not going to do this all the time.

Marley: In fact, Zero to Three has conducted a parent survey, and they found that parents thought that toddlers can share or take turns well before they're developmentally able to. There are practical implications here. Our expectations can change how we view behaviors. When adults understand that toddlers are still working on these skills, they're going to be a little better able to provide the support that children need.

Beth: That's right, and then those adults and older peers can continue to be wonderful models to support the development of these behaviors over time. We're going to share two more video clips here that are highlighting turn-taking. In these, we invite you to think about how the first clip is different from the second. There is space in your viewer's guide where you can write down what you notice. Here we go.

[Video begins]

Teacher 1: Find another block inside the basket. Ryan, if you want to build a tower and knock it down, you can build your own tower.

Child 1: Thank you, Marcos.

Teacher 1: Marcos. Oh, I liked how you said, "Thank you, Marcos." That was ...

[Sneezing]

Child 2: Don't knock my tower down.

Teacher 1: If ... Or whatever. Oh, look at Marcos, how many blocks he's put. Are you guys taking turns? Would you like to have a turn? OK, Caden's turn. Now whose turn is it to put one on top?

Child 1: It's Marcos'.

Teacher 1: It's Marcos' turn. Marcos, did you hear that? He said it's your turn.

Child 3: I make a [Inaudible] in the house.

Teacher 1: Your turn. Wow! Your turn.

[Video ends]

Beth: Marley, do you want to get us started? What did you notice about the differences of these two videos?

Marley: In the first one, the adult is scaffolding the interaction, right? She's doing that using both language and her actions by physically handing Marco a block. She's doing that ... She's helping show the children just how turn-taking works. Sometimes children need that extra support. Of course, sometimes they don't, as you might have noticed in that second video, which we included because those toddlers – they found a social rhythm on their own while playing with the ball run. They're essentially taking turns without speaking a word.

Beth: Right, and I bet they've had that type of support, adult support, that you saw in the first video, in the past. I'm sure there are times where they still need that extra support too.

Marley: That's a great reminder. Prosocial behaviors are still very much a work in progress through toddlerhood and beyond.

Marley: We have scaffolding turn-taking, both verbally and nonverbally, as a strategy here to support early peer relationships. How else, Beth, can adults support turn-taking and cooperation in young adults or young children?

Beth: One of the biggest things you can do ...

Marley: And adults at that.

Beth: I know. [Laughter] Praise those prosocial behaviors when you see them, which we saw the adult do in the video. It's also helpful to create small groups and design spaces for children to play together. Like in this photo, those boys are helping each other – photo on the left, sorry – the boys are helping each other pour sand through a funnel into a container. I mean, this is cooperation at its finest here.

Marley: Yeah. [Laughter] You can also provide opportunities for collaborative games and activities, so things like drawing on a big sheet of paper together or playing with a parachute – these other photos here. In the parachute photo, you might have noticed that there are toddlers and preschoolers playing together. It's a really fun way to involve peers at different ages. Again, great strategy for family child care homes. What other materials do you use in your space to encourage cooperation and turn-taking?

Beth: Right, yeah, we'd love for you to think about this now or come back and think about it later. There's space for you to write it down in your viewer's guide. We talked about some of the joys during those times of seeing those emerging prosocial skills. But with those joys, there are also conflicts during this time period.

Marley: Conflicts between peers absolutely do happen, but they can also help children learn and grow. A big part of the learning process is how adults support children when conflicts arise. Build children's language skills and emotional understanding. These things help, but talking about people's feelings throughout the day, not just when conflict shows up, continue to build children's self-awareness by talking about concepts, like yours versus mine and talking about how a child's actions maybe made a peer feel. Having this awareness is an important part of empathy and learning to care for others.

Beth: Sometimes it's helpful to let children figure out those conflicts on their own if they're not hurting each other. We like to say be a sportscaster. Describe what's happening either as the conflict unfolds or as they're working on solutions, but don't solve those problems for them. Then, younger children – they might need a little bit more of your support, so you could offer some solutions to try. Children, they build confidence in who they are and their abilities when we give them that space to work through problems or to choose solutions on their own. That confidence will carry over into their relationships with peers and adults too.

Marley: OK, so it's time to look at some of the conflicts that arise on the regular with toddlers. In this case, it's from peers just sort of being in another child's space. There's two conflicts that you're going to see happen in this video that we're going to watch. See if you notice them both.

Beth: Right, and just pay attention to how the adult responds and supports those peer interactions. As before, there's space for you in your viewer's guide. Let's take a look.

[Video begins]

Teacher 1: There's a baby on the floor. Baby is laughing. Baby bucket fills up more.

Teacher 2: Are you all done, Yaya? Oh, we went together. All done. Oh, say, "Too close, Macy." Here, Macy. I think she's trying to tell you. You're going to make a choice in a second Vanilla Bean. Maybe you, me, and Yaya can play together.

Teacher 1: Baby's getting sleepy. It's time for nighty night. See baby's bucket. It's filled with love and light.

Teacher 2: Where's everybody?

Teacher 1: That and ...

Teacher 2: What do you have?

Teacher 1: That's Linus and his family.

Teacher 2: Oh, do you want to read this book? OK, Tree's done, again.

Teacher 1: Hank, I think Maddie was sitting there. Maddie is saying, "My choice, Hank." That is Hank. Say, "My choice, Hank." Here, Nellie. I'm going to help Hank really quick. Maddie was in that chair first. Here, Hank. I'm going to help you. One, two, three. Would you like to sit on a pillow or in the cozy? Let's go find more.

[Video ends]

Beth: Props to all you education staff out there. There is a lot to navigate, right? What I loved was that the teacher was in tune with the children's temperaments and their preferences. That first conflict occurred on the floor, so Macy joined the little girl sitting on the teacher's lap. The other little girl kind of wiggles, and she pushes Macy away. The adult stays calm and she's a sportscaster. She says, "I think your peer is telling you that you're too close." She also doesn't immediately remove Macy. Macy also wanted to listen to the story. Instead, she pauses, and that pause is what allowed the children to kind of settle into their spots there and for her to continue on.

Marley: Right, and then that second conflict happens when the little girl, Maddie, who was by the chair – she stands up from her chair, and her peer, Hank, kind of sneaks in behind, and she tries to sit back down. "Oh, no!" She sort of expresses that she doesn't like this. The teacher's giving Maddie words like, "It's my choice," that she can use with Hank. Of course, Maddie's still developing the language skills here to communicate that, and the teacher's still doing that, giving her a kind of modeling of the language that she can use. Eventually, she does step in to help Hank find a different spot. These are minor conflicts, but this teacher still uses them as teaching moments, really. She's building children's relationship skills in these conflict times.

Beth: Right,. I love that. I want to do a quick resource shout-out here for addressing conflicts and challenging behaviors. We have a whole Baby Talks webinar that was devoted to addressing infant and toddler behaviors that challenge adults. This is also available in the iPD. Then, our friends at Teacher Time recently delivered a webinar on problem-solving and

relationship skills with infants and toddlers. These are wonderful resources that we linked for you in your viewer's guide and encourage you to check them out if you're looking for more info in that area. Even though these conflicts are bound to happen, we can create these prosocial environments to support infants' early peer relationships. To do that, we need to think about not only the physical environment but that social environment too.

Marley: We already talked about the physical environment a bit, like having materials and toys that help cooperative activities. We also need to think about how accessible those materials are to children with disabilities or suspected delays. Are they able to participate alongside their peers, and if not, how can you adapt the materials, or the activity, or the space so they can?

Beth: Part of creating physical environments is setting up space for two so children can have that one-on-one time to get to know each other and play with different peers. For the home visitors with us, you can think about setting up those same spaces for small group time during group socializations.

Marley: That's great. Let's talk more about the social environment now.

Beth: It's about creating environments that build belonging for all children. When children feel safe and seen and understood – that's when they develop the confidence and pride in their relationships and their abilities and their identities. They develop a healthy sense of self, and their peer relationships thrive.

Marley: What you can do is you can design activities so children have the chance to engage with all of their peers in their learning space. Remember, this is especially important for including children with disabilities or suspected delays and encouraging peer relationships between all children. Having children of different ability levels within the same learning space is really important. That alone is not enough to promote peer relationships. There has to really be intention on how you support interactions between all children.

Beth: Yes, absolutely. This last video we have to share with you illustrates just that. You're going to see a physical therapist working on a child's motor skills in a toddler learning space. As you watch, I invite you to think about how that therapist is using both the social and the physical environment to support peer relationships and build belonging. I encourage you to use your viewer's guide to jot down notes and then we also have a link to the school video available for you in your resource list. Let's take a look here.

[Video begins]

[Music]

Announcer: This segment shows physical therapy with a child with a fairly severe neurological impairment. I found in this 2-year-old classroom, that using the free play time is a great opportunity to work on some of the floor skills that we're working on. The child spends a good part of his day in adapted equipment, whether it's an adapted positioning chair or a stander.

But it's important that he has some time to get out on the floor and where he can move around the most easily. You can see how these young, rather rambunctious classmates can easily be encouraged to participate and how much they're enjoying participating in Jake's therapy time. Jake, at the same time, feels very much at home with his classmates there. He can hear their voices and hear his teachers' voices. With his rolling, currently without some facilitation, he's just rolling pretty haphazardly. But one of his goals is to try and get him to roll towards either a familiar voice or a familiar toy making a recognizable sound.

Teacher 1: We could play with the game or we could do an exercise. Exercise with the pillows? Gyden, do you remember how to get a pillow, yesterday? Do you want to go get a pillow? We can do an exercise. Everybody can go get a pillow.

Announcer: You'll see that this child has a strong extensor thrust pattern. One of the things that we work on consistently is to try and strengthen his neck and trunk flexors. In addition to working on this during his therapy time, we have also taught the teachers to do the same up-up activity during diaper changing, or I should say after diaper changing, both to encourage use of the proper muscle pattern, but also to try and recognize up-up as the cue that he is to do that pattern.

Teacher 1: Oh, you're having trouble finding your pillow. There you go, OK. Legs up. Legs up. That's ... Legs up, Riley. Oh, good job! Good job! Yeah. Oops, careful. Wow, we got to keep our feet out of people's faces. Oh.

Teacher 2: There you go. Straight up, Shane. Straight up.

Teacher 1: Now see if you can put your feet back. Then we're going to sit up. OK. I'm going to do Riley, first, OK? We're going to go up, up, up with those tummy muscles. And down. Did you want to come up?

Child 1: I want to.

Teacher 1: But can you come up by yourself? You can come up all by yourself. There you rolled over. OK, it's Jakey's turn. OK, you think Jakey can come up?

Child 2: Yes.

Teacher 1: Let's [inaudible] to come up, up, up. Jake, can you come up, up, up? Ready? Up, up, up. Up, up, up. That's right, up, Jakey. Oh, good job! That was a good job.

[Music]

[Video ends]

Beth: Wow, this video always makes me smile. It's just a wonderful example of integrating an inclusive activity into the learning space. I feel like there's so much to talk about here. Marley, what's something that stood out to you?

Marley: My first thought – I love this video – is that planning is really key to supporting inclusive peer relationships. We wouldn't see this type of inclusion in an embedded instruction without coordination and planning between the physical therapist, the teachers, the program, and probably the family too.

Beth: Right, and they also had to think about that physical space, so having enough space to do Jake's exercises and to make sure there was room for all the children to join which gets us at the social component too.

Marley: We saw some really incredible peer interactions there, including many of the things we talked about today like peer modeling, imitation, shared understanding. This all happened because of the supportive adult, right? In this case, it was the physical therapist. She really nurtured positive interactions between all the children there by including them in Jake's exercises. She made it fun.

Beth: Right, I love the strategy because we know from research that toddlers love to move together. We mentioned this for our first developmental milestone. One of the ways they connect and communicate with each other is they do this by running, and laughing, and rolling, like we saw. Lastly, I want to emphasize that she showed each of those children that they were valued. She gave them time and attention and care, and she's really creating a space for all those children to feel like they belong.

Marley: Absolutely, this is a great model for creating equitable learning spaces where adults use inclusive practices that build children's prosocial and friendship skills.

Beth: I love that we ended on that note, because it essentially brings us right back to where we began, again: emphasizing the essential role that adults play in supporting infant and toddler peer relationships. The way adults treat young children. It sets their expectations, and it teaches them skills about how to relate to peers and other adults too.

Marley: Children learn so much about themselves and other people through these peer relationships, and they learn prosocial behaviors like cooperation and concern for others. They gain practice working with others. That includes working through conflict, like we talked about, and sharing ideas. In supportive environments, they start to understand what it feels like to belong.

Beth: Thanks for that recap for us, Marley. I want to leave you with one final thought. These early peer relationships – they lay the foundation for the quality of children's future peer relationships. It's extra-important to invest in peer relationships from the time children are babies, really. With that, I want to thank you again for joining us today. We'll be back again in July at the same time to talk about making play accessible to all children. We hope to see you then.