Preventing Challenging Behaviors, in partnership with Region 9 Head Start Association
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Hello and welcome to Early Childhood Education at continued.com. My name is Jessica Lewis and I'm happy to welcome you to today's session, titled "Preventing Challenging Behaviors", in partnership with Region Nine Headstart Association. We are very happy to welcome Julie Kurtz here, to share her knowledge and expertise with us. Before we get started, let me tell you a bit about her. Julie Kurtz is an author, national speaker, and expert, who does consulting and training on trauma and social emotional skills. She promotes the concept of optimal brain integration to maximize human growth potential. She is a co-author of "Trauma Informed Practices For Early Childhood Educators", relationship based approaches that support healing and build resilience in young children and is currently writing her second book in the trauma series on culturally responses self care practices for early childhood educators, "Caring for the Self as a Foundation for Equity". Julie is the creator of the phone and tablet application, Trigger Stop, sensory and emotional check in, designed specifically for children ages three to eight years to promote sensory and emotional literacy and to support self regulation. You can read more about Julie on our website. Welcome everyone. Julie, I’m gonna go ahead and turn it over to you now.

Thank you, Jessica. I’m so happy to be here and I’m so grateful for educators out there that are willing to take the time to reflect and build self awareness and have a growth mindset and not land on saying to themselves, "I already know everything. "Why do I need more of this?" Because I think, I’m 52 and I’ve been on this journey, and I keep learning and growing and it’s so amazing because we have this great responsibility to grow humans to be humane and preventing challenging behaviors is one of the biggest topics that I know and the biggest struggle for educators and people who are working with young children. So today we’re gonna begin talking about preventing challenging behaviors and how we do that and how we help children when they do have challenging behaviors and quite frankly, the meaning of challenging behaviors. What is the meaning of all of this and why does it have to happen? So let’s get started. I am going to talk first about the learning outcomes. After this course, you’ll be able to describe the difference between sensory, that is that? Maybe that’s a new concept for many of you, but sensory and emotional literacy. Many of you have been exposed to emotional literacy, maybe you haven’t. Either way, we’re gonna talk about the ability to describe sensory and emotional literacy. After today you'll be able to identify at least one to two strategies to help children identify when their emotions are small, medium or large. Then identify one to two strategies to engage children in building self regulation tools and manage big emotions. Then, name a few strategies to teach children emotional literacy. So let’s get started. A child’s brain is like an iceberg. What do I mean by this? Well, most of what we see, most of what we are faced with is the tip of the iceberg, which is the child’s behavior. That’s often what we see and often what we react to. But underneath that iceberg, are depths and depths and depths of what’s happening inside of that child. It is very common that many of you and myself, were raised to cast the spotlight of our attention outward rather than inward, all the way up to age 18. For example, if you think of Jeremy, he’s seven years old and the day in the life of Jeremy and we walked through the whole day, from the moment he got up to the moment he goes to bed, most of that day, my prediction 95% of that day,
the caregivers, the adults, the teachers, the educators, are casting the spotlight of that child's attention outward. Why did you do that? You need to eat more protein. Did you pack your bag? I got an email from your school that you didn't finish your homework. Oh my goodness, we have a pop quiz now! Who should I play with on the playground? You gotta go to the dentist. You gotta to to the soccer game. Stop fighting with your brother! You need to clean the dishes. You need to do this, you need to do that. Why aren't you getting your homework out? I'm gonna take your video games away. All day, we are directing and correcting and casting the spotlight of a child's attention outward. Then that child grows up into adulthood and is ill equipped to hold a job, to handle difficult relationships, to have a relationship. All because there's this entire universe that lives inside of you, of emotions, sensations, and feelings. They're all small and they're medium and they're large throughout the day, like a roller coaster. When we're not aware of this universe that lives inside of us, it can take over us and hijack us to do things that often hurt others, ourselves and property. Now, that's true for adults and that's true for children.

So we have to look a little deeper at a child's brain and behavior and say to ourselves, I am not going to just look at the iceberg, the tip of it, which is their behavior. I'm going to look at what is underneath it. The meaning of their behavior, which we'll talk about soon, but I'm also going to help the child by casting the spotlight underneath the iceberg, the outer world, into the inner world. I know, as an adult, one of my responsibilities is to teach children these four steps to prevent challenging behavior. We'll go over these more in depth, but I'll just mention them now. One is teaching sensations and emotions. Step two is teaching when those sensations and emotions are small, medium and large. Three is helping children build a grand self-regulation toolkit. When you're a baby, it's your parent who self-regulates you and your thumb or your pacifier and your bottle. Maybe your fingers. Then as you get older, you get a teddy bear or you get a blanket. You have a few more things, like your bed. Then as you get older, you start to develop a greater self-regulation toolkit until you've got such a big toolkit, you can manage your emotions and not be hijacked by them. The fourth step is being able to problem solve and think things through. Okay, so now we know, let's move beyond the iceberg, the tip of the iceberg and look at the whole child. Your job description, if were the queen of the whole universe, I would change all educators job descriptions and I would say we need to add to every job description that you're a brain architect. A brain architect means that you are directly influencing the growth of a child's brain, both internally and externally by the things that you do. If you're a brain architect, you have a recognition that between the ages of zero and six years old, the child's brain is growing one million neurons per second. No, you didn't hear that wrong. One million neurons per second. The brain grows more between zero and six years old than any other time in their life. You have such power to support the architecture of the brain to be healing and healthy or to not. So your job description is so critical. One of the ways that you can be the best brain architect of growing humans to be humane is to say to yourself, challenging behavior is merely communicating a story or a need. Now, don't laugh, but one of the things that I want to share with you is one day I was so angry at my husband. But I was angry because he was, this was
when my kids were little, my kids are in their mid 20s now, but back when they were little, I can remember the day where he was so involved with all my kids sports activities and work and community events. He was casting the spotlight of his intention everywhere except me. I didn’t realize this, but I had this tea kettle effect happening inside of me. The bubbling up of emotions from green, calm, orange, medium, red, when it starts steaming and the tea kettle starts to scream. I woke up Sunday morning and part of what this bubbling of emotions was is I wasn’t getting any attention. I didn't know it at the time, but I felt unloved and I felt neglected. I woke up Sunday morning and I purposely burned his breakfast and then I flushed the toilet when he was in the shower to make the water go cold. Now, is this healthy? No, this is not a healthy way to communicate that I need love and attention. But you do it, I do it, even as adults, our challenging behavior is communicating a story. Now if my husband came back to me and said to me, "Why you acting all crazy? "Why'd you burn my breakfast?" I would get more triggered. What would be better is for him to say I think that you’re trying to communicate something to me. But most of the time we don’t do that. Children have immature brains. It takes 25 or so years to grow a human to be humane with a fully integrated brain, where all the part are talking to one another. So we can expect that a child’s job description is to have challenging behavior. At least up until they’re 25. So if it’s their job description, it’s our job description as a brain architect to say to ourselves, ah, when this child has challenging behavior they’re communicating something to me.

Now, can you guess what I was communicating to my husband? Was I trying to gain someone or something? Was I trying to avoid someone or something? Was I trying to express a sensation or emotion? Just pause for a moment and think about that. If you guessed that I was trying to gain someone, that’s right, I was trying to gain attention and connection. I was also though, trying to express an emotion of sadness, hurt and neglect. Now, he wasn’t intentionally doing these things but if we want to be healthy adults, we would be able to tune immediately and say instead, I need attention. I feel like I’m being neglected. We need time together. I need love and connection. Now, if we were all raised to teach kids these four steps, if you and I were raised to identify emotions, how small, medium or large they are, then I would have a better chance of tuning in to my own self and communicating in a healthy way. Ah, but we have a chance to teach kids. So the first thing in summary, is a brain architect, what is the meaning of a child’s behavior, underneath that iceberg? The tip of the iceberg’s the behavior and underneath it the child’s trying to gain someone or something, avoid someone or something or express a sensation and emotion. The last thing, before we move on, is paying attention to the fact that not only is behavior communicating something, but you have to be a brain architect and an investigator, which makes it really hard. When my kids were little, I just wanted to push their belly button, have the print out come out and say, I’m trying to avoid doing this chore. I’m trying to avoid circle time. I’m trying to gain connection from you ‘cause you’ve been so busy. I’m angry because they took my toy. So we’re not only a brain architect but now we have to be an investigator and observe children’s behavior. The last thing is not punish, not bribe with rewards. This might push your emotional buttons a little bit to hear this, but I ask you to just sit with it and think why. When you punish, when you offer a sticker,
when you yell at a child, when you criticize, when you are witnessing their challenging behavior, it causes them to be more scared, more terrified and it doesn't teach. Ah, we need to teach. So, let's think about this a little bit more. If a child doesn't know how to read, what do we do? We teach. If a child doesn't know how to swim, what do we do? We teach. If the child doesn't know how to multiply, we teach. If they don't know how to drive then we teach. But for some reason, if a child doesn't know how to behave, we tend to do something else and that's punish. Instead, we want to teach. Social emotional skills, we must teach children it's not something or a skill that you're born with. It's difficult to finish this last sentence because when children have challenging behaviors, they push our emotional buttons and then our emotions rise up from green, small, orange, medium, to red. When the red goes off, it actually activates a built in smoke detector inside of our brain called the amygdala. When the smoke detector goes off in the adult's brain, it sends signals down to a lower part of our brain called our survival brain or our reptile brain and make us want to fight, flight or freeze. Those three F-words we always do when our smoke detector goes off and our emotions rise up to the red zone, is we want to punish to make it stop. We want to yell at them to make it stop. We want to bribe them to make it stop. We want to give them that candy bar to make it stop. But none of those things build that optimal brain integration, that ability to learn how to problem solve and regulate and teach. Teaching social emotional skills proactively, when children are calm, is what actually is going to prevent challenging behaviors all the more often. Challenging behaviors is a child's job description. Teaching is our job description. That, quite frankly, is the way that we'll prevent challenging behaviors.

Now, let's pause for a moment. How many of you out there, depending on the state that you're in, I'm from California. So when I was a kid, we have earthquake and fire drills. Some of you have had in you school, other emergency drills based on what types of emergencies you tend to have in your state. Hurricanes or tornadoes perhaps, storms. Now more and more in our country, it's shootings that we get worried about as well. All of these reasons why we do drills is when the child is calm, we're secretly wiring one neuron to the next neuron through practice. Do you know the brain doesn't know the difference between practice and real life? When you practice a skill with a child, you're wiring the brain. One floating neuron connects to another floating neuron and wires. The more you practice, the wiring becomes stronger. So Dr. Daniel Seagal says that neurons that fire together wire together. So the more we practice with children and teach them social emotional skills, the more they'll default to that habit in a real and emotional emergency. The other thing that we have to pay attention to is every child has an invisible voice recorder inside of them. What we say to them becomes their inner voice. Now, this invisible voice recorder is really powerful. I know that my dad criticized me all the time growing up and my internal dialogue, after I left my family, was very negative about myself. I would beat myself up easily. I would talk negative thought about myself. It took a lot of years to rewire this inner recording that came from my dad. So we have to think to ourselves, if a child has an invisible voice recorder inside of them, what do we say to them? Now, the research shows that we correct and direct or criticize children when we're faced with challenging behavior. Or
just criticize and direct throughout the day five times to every time we give a positive or a neutral statement. That means, most children grow up and are raised with an internal voice recording that’s negative. That in turn, impacts what they say to themselves and their behavior. We need to give something that I call, I wrote an article called, "Nutritional Praise Versus Sugar Praise". Sugar praise is when you say, "Good job, "I like the way you did that." Now, that’s not bad, that’s actually wonderful that you’re acknowledging something positive about the child. Keep doing that. Our brains are designed to scan for the negative because we lived in primitive times and those folks who lived in these tribal villages who saw rainbows and unicorns and didn’t ever see danger and their brain was wired to see the positive, were more likely to die, eat poisonous plants, be pillaged by the local tribes. Our brains still have not evolved to scan for the positive. This is even more work.

We actually have to make this a part of our practice, to scan for children’s positive traits. What’s the difference between sugar praise and nutritional praise? Nutritional praise is when we give more information. Here’s an example of nutritional praise. Sweetie, you gave your friend a tissue when they were crying, that was being so friendly. Oh my goodness, you pushed your chair in after you ate, no one’s gonna trip on it, that’s being so safe. You sneezed in your elbow, that was being really healthy. You’re not gonna spread your germs. Do you see what I’m saying? Through the day we can description more specifically, not just what we observe the child doing, but the why behind it. Then, the child internalizes, ah, when I did this I’m friendly. When I did this I’m respectful. And then their internal voice becomes one of self efficacy, self esteem and one with a more specific internal dialogue rather than just, I’m a good job. Or I should do that because that parent likes it or that adult likes it or that teacher likes it. So, nutritional praise versus sugary praise. Sugary praise is not bad, it's fine. You can always say hey, Maria good job! And then add the why behind it after. When you brought your papers to the front, you were being so respectful. Those kinds of examples would be adding on at the end of good job. Okay, so the way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice. Now, we want to learn four steps. Today you’re gonna walk away learning four steps to teaching children and teaching them and growing them and being a brain architect to be humane. Identifying sensations and emotions is the first one. The second of four steps to teach is identifying, helping children identify when those sensations in their body, or their emotions, are small, green, medium, orange, or large, red. This is very complex. First step, you have to learn all the feeling and sensation words. Second step, then you have to identify gosh darn it, when those are small, medium are large inside of me. Then the third step, is when I have identified, then my sensations or emotions are in that orange zone or red zone, I have to pick a self regulation strategy to calm my red zone down to the green zone. Because if I act on my red zone, I always hurt others, myself or property. So one of the things we want to support kids in, is if they can recognize, ah, I'm in the orange zone, I need to pick a self regulation strategy out of my self regulation tool kit, then children will be more apt to calm their self down. The fourth and final step to teach all children, and when I say all children, children with histories of trauma, children with special needs, children with mental health vulnerabilities, and children who are typically
developing, the last step is teaching them, once their brain is calm, their emotions are calm and their sensations are down to green again, they can then think, think, think of a solution. That involves practicing over and over the difference types of solutions that don’t hurt myself, others, or property. So let’s talk about step one, helping children identify their sensations and emotions. Sensory and emotional literacy is the ability to identify sensation words and emotional words, identify sensations and emotions inside myself, and identify when sensations and emotions are small, medium, or large. Now let’s try to understand, through this grid in front of us. If you’re watching the screen, if not, I’ll describe. There are one, two, three, four columns. The far left column is titled trigger. It’s a triggering event that triggers our emotions. Could be a trauma trigger or reminder. It could be an emotional trigger. For that child it’s a trigger. Here's an example of a trigger, a stranger enters the classroom. I'll never forget, I walked into a classroom and they didn’t introduce me and the child came up to me and asked me who I was and I told him. He said, "Did you see that spider over there? "I hope he eats you up and makes you dead.” This is an example of a child who was triggered by my presence. I was a stranger and I represented to him danger.

So let’s look at what can happen inside of the brains and bodies of a child when the stranger walks into the class and there’s a trigger emotionally for them. The second column is about sensations. Sensations are when you feel stressed, your body physiologically sends you a clue. Your stomach hurts or is nauseous. Your heart starts racing. You feel like there’s a volcano inside of your head. Maybe your head starts pounding, your jaw starts clenching. Or your hands and palms are sweaty. These are sensations. For this child, they had butterflies in their stomach. That was the sensation. As we move to the third column, it’s called emotions. This child had the emotion fear and then there’s thoughts that we can have when we get triggered. Oh my God, they might hurt me. So this is what is underneath the iceberg. The triggering event is the stranger enters the class but we don’t see that. The sensation is what’s happening in the child’s body and maybe all we see is that they have their hand on their stomach. The emotion fear, maybe all we see is their face clenched up or their fists. The thoughts, we often don’t see, they might hurt me. The only thing we see is this triggered or challenging behavior. When we only react to the challenging behavior, rather than the story that’s happening underneath the child, we’re missing a big opportunity to help them use their words, help name what they’re experiencing and help to co-regulate and calm them down, feel safe again so that they can think more clearly. Let’s look at the next one, the triggering event is nap time. You announce to your classroom, “It’s nap time!” For this particular child, the sensation in their body is more frozen, like an ice cube or an iceberg. It feels like their feet stop moving, they have no thoughts or words. They can’t move, they become immobile. The emotion they have is scared or they’re frightened. The though this child has, I’m not safe, someone may hurt me if I sleep. All we see as adults, is the surface or the tip of the iceberg, which is this triggered, challenging behavior. When all we do is react to the challenging behavior with threats and bribes, we not only don’t teach, but we can scare the child more and we don’t seize the opportunity to be a brain architect by tuning them inward. Sweetie, I see that your body looks frozen right now. I’m wondering if you’re scared? I
want you to know that you're safe, there's nothing dangerous. I'm gonna sit here with you till you fall asleep. Then I'm gonna be here when you get up and we're gonna have a snack and lunchtime. When we do things like that, we help the child feel safe again and we help to co-regulate them. Instead, that strategy that I just used, really was a strategy that addressed the whole underneath that tip of the iceberg. The things we can't see but we can guess. Now breaking it down in this next slide a little bit more. There's a difference between sensations and feelings. When sensations or feelings are triggered by an event, there's a release or charge of energy that happens within our body. In fact, when we have emotional buttons pushed we release toxic stress chemicals to the hypothalamus pituitary adrenal axis, which sends stress chemicals through our body, which tells us we need to fight, flight and freeze and also sends messages that we're not safe and we're in danger.

One of the ways that our body expresses this charging event is through sensations in our body, which is an energy charge that the body experiences or feels, like my head hurts, I have a pit in my stomach. I'm shaky. Your body is really communicating the intensity of that experience. Feelings, feelings are the words that describe how you feel. Like we said, they can be mad, angry, sad, but they can also be small, medium or large. Out of our book, Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators, we talk about this particular slide. Sensory language in the left column. Feeling language in the right. It would be wonderful to teach kids both sensory language, so they can recognize the sensory symptoms in their body as a clue that they might have a button pushed or feeling language. So we teach both sensory and feeling language. Sensory language is like, does it feel like butterflies are in your chest? Bumblebees are buzzing in your stomach? Do you feel jumpy like a frog? Do you feel slow like a turtle? It's tuning them into the body and feeling language scared, anxious, nervous, panicked, stressed. Those are language words that identify emotions. So we want to teach children both. One way we can encourage sensory recognition is to tune children into their body sensations. When you notice a child's face is all scrunched up or their fists are clenched, or you know, when my kids were little, they would rub their eyes. Sometimes my partner, he wouldn’t read those clues so he would keep wrestling with them or playing with them. Then they would go over the top of being overstimulated. So sometimes it’s really important to read the physiological clues, 'cause that’s all we’re getting. But we can help tune children in by saying it looks like your body may be tired. When that happened to you, I see your holding your stomach. I'm wondering if it feels like a volcano or bumblebees in your stomach. Helping them pay attention. A classroom called Deansa Child Development Center, courtesy of Lakshmi, she came to one of my trainings and she implemented this sensory practice. She told the children, "Oh children, we have been learning about feelings. "Now we're gonna learn about sensations in our body "connected to those feelings." So she pulled out a bin filled with objects. She said, "You see this shell? "Sometimes our body feels prickly inside. "Do you see this race car? "Sometimes we feel like racing away, running away." It's like flight, afford flight. "Do you see this frog? "Sometimes we feel jumpy or we're jumping out of our skin. "We can't sit still. "Do you see this little mini-rocking chair? "Sometimes we feel rocky and shaky." That cardboard brown material in the photo,
comes on the corner of a television in the mail. It’s like a lumpy and bumpy piece of cardboard. Sometimes we feel lumpy, bumps inside of us. Do you see the twisted coil without sharp edges? Sometimes we’re all twisty, twisted up inside. Do you see this heavy rock? Sometimes we feel heavy rocks on our shoulders and our head and our heart, our stomach, our feet. What about this empty container? Sometimes, this is like a freeze, F-word freeze, sometimes we feel nothing. Do you see this little chip clip, children? Feel it on your finger, see how it’s tight? Sometimes we feel tightness in our body. Then, teacher Lakshmi would read Gilbert the Gray and Tickly Octopus and she would have a feelings face chart and ask the kids to guess what the characters were feeling. Then, pull out a sensory object to guess what sensations they might have in their body. Over time, she can expand that learning for the children, to wonder when they had that sensation or that feeling. Promoting sensory awareness, emotional awareness and body awareness. It’s a wonderful example. So, on this slide you’ll see several examples of different ways you can teach kids sensory language. My tummy feels like a roller coaster. My insides are twisted. I feel cold, hot. My heart is heavy. My brain feels like a rocket ship. My fists are tight. I feel sweaty. I feel like my mouth is like a cotton ball. These are examples of helping kids use visual images they’re familiar with to name the sensations in their body.

Now Jessica mentioned in my bio, I have created an app called Trigger Stop: Sensory and Emotional Check in. It’s for children ages three to eight years old, developmentally and at the top left of the Trigger Stop app you can see these two photos. These are my nephews. I’ve gotten permission from their parents to use these photos. At the very top left is child can choose the color of the body that they want. They can be white or yellow or brown or black. That changes the color of the body. The thermometer on the left, the child can move the thermometer from green to blue to orange or red. Green represents calm, regulated, cool as a cucumber, I’m flexible, easy going. Then feeling faces come at the top. The child can drag the cartoon feeling faces to show you what they’re feeling. There’s also a camera icon and the child can take a picture of their face to practice when they’re calm, making those feeling faces. On the right hand column, are sensory images that represent that green zone. Rainbows, hearts, suns, flowers, puppy dogs. As you move it to blue, you get freeze images. Icebergs, snails, cloud with ice chips, Frosty the snow person or a snowflake. As you move it to orange, it represents flight. Flight is like roller coasters and a jet plane and a rocket ship and a little child riding away on a bicycle or a race car. Horse galloping away. Red zone, those big emotions of fight, have images like dinosaurs, explosions, lightening bolts, volcanoes, a fire in flames. So the child can communicate to you verbally or nonverbally, the sensations in their body. Or the feelings, or take a photo of their own feeling face. Now, the best way to use this app is to proactively practice with children when they’re calm. Read books, guess what the characters might be feeling. Over time, the child will actually use the app. You can prompt them to use the app to communicate with you. Another wonderful resource is Gabby Garcia’s book, "Listening to my Body". One of the very few books I see out there that teaches kids about three to eight years old, sensory and emotional literacy. It’s a wonderful book. It also tunes kids inward to listen to their body. Their breath, their heart beat, what their muscles are
feeling like, or their belly, their energy level, the temperature of their skin. There are practice activities at the bottom of every few pages, where you can practice with kids. For example, rub your hands together for 15 seconds right now, if you’re not driving. Rub your hands together for 15 seconds. I’m doing it too if you can hear that sound. Now after you stop, what do you feel? Did you guess maybe tingly or warm? That’s one of the activities in the book that helps kids tune in to sensory language. So I highly recommend this book for teaching sensory and emotional literacy. Emotional literacy, we need to introduce to kids feeling charts, but introduce to them one to four feelings at a time. This is a classroom, it was so wonderful, they had kids check in. They have their names, you can’t see it off to the side. Every morning with their parent, how they’re feeling, which feeling, and then throughout the day they get to move their feeling when their feelings change. To teach kids that feelings change, they don’t stay the same. Teaching kids emotions, another way to do that, is wonder how the child is experiencing their affective state in that moment. I wonder if you feel sad right now. It appears you might be frustrated. We want to try to stay away from saying, “You’re mad.” “You’re frustrated.” But instead, take a wondering stance, guess, and see if we can get them to validate it. Here’s a great chart that comes from the book, "The Zones of Regulation" for ages like three to 99. This book introduces a feeling language chart, like the red zone is mad, angry, terrified, disgusted, for example, scared.

The green zone is happy, calm, easy going, joyful, peaceful. The blue zone is kind of when you get down and stuck and frozen, like sad, tired, sick, bored, moving like a snail. The yellow zone is more like frustration and worry, scared, annoyed, confused, impatient, on edge. So this is another way, this is geared a little bit to the older children group, but I thing this is really valuable to see different ways we can introduce feeling language. Step two in our four step process, identify whether sensations or emotions inside of me are small green, like a mouse, medium like a cat, orange, or large, red like a lion. Introducing a feelings thermometer can help kids identify whether I’m in the green zone, the orange zone, or the red zone. Now we start to teach kids to use the thermometer. If you laminate a thermometer like this, with a Velcro arrow, you can help kids read books, guess what the characters are feeling by pointing to the feelings chart and then, subsequently go to the sensory chart, have kids point to the sensations and then identify whether they’re small, medium and large. There is a woman, Karen Van Patten at El Dorado County Office of Ed, she made this for me. We highlighted this in our book. It says, "I feel," and the child gets to move the feeling to underneath I feel, and in this case it’s angry. "I can," and then it gives them an idea of what they can do to regulate their emotions. This one says squeeze a ball. Once I’m calmed down, am I ready to return? Do I feel focused? Thumbs up. Step three, when my emotions are in that orange or red zone, in a perfect world, it would be best for kids to identify the orange zone. Once we get in the red zone, that’s when it’s hard to come back. We’re kind of hurting ourselves, others or property. So catching our zone in the orange and bringing us back to green sooner, is a much better strategy, but we have to get really good at that by practicing over and over and over. Then, I can pick a self regulation strategy to calm those big emotions. I want to go back for a second. I’m sorry, I want to give an adult example. I want to talk about a time and something that happened to
me. I had been doing training after training and I didn't have any restorative time. So I think my emotions were rising up from expending all that energy into the red zone. All I looked forward to was the Saturday. I was gonna spend Saturday with my husband. It was gonna be this restorative time. I couldn't wait. Saturday morning came, I woke up, and there was like a dark stormy cloud around my head. Emotionally. I started, I was on edge. Let's think of the four clues, sensations in your body. I remember my neck was up to my ears and just tense, like a knot, like a knotted thing kind of around my neck and my head and everything was tense. Then my emotions, I was irritable and on edge about everything. My behavior, I was criticizing everything that my husband did. Why'd you put my laptop cord here? You don't love me, this is proof. These waffles you made are so soggy! Don't you know how to make waffles? Well, about 15 minutes into this, and what you need to know is I've spent a lifetime practicing these skills. I'd say, I usually say about 10 minutes into it, but probably my husband would say 30, but either way, either way, I recognized oh no, I am in the red zone. I am so out of control right now. I'm like, really just, in that red zone and my thoughts were like he couldn't do anything right. So those were my four clues. I said to him, "Oh my gosh, I am out of control right now. "I need to go do something to take care of myself." So for me, I went on an eight mile hike, I came back, I took a 20 minute nap. Then I walked down the stairs to meet him for dinner and I said, "You are the most beautiful person "I've ever seen." Now, did he change? No, my zone changed. The glasses I was wearing changed from red zone glasses to green zone. So the more we teach kids this, the more they'll grow up to be adults to catch themselves much sooner when they're in that zone and being able to bring themselves back down before they do harm.

One of the ways we can help children regulate is through the breath. Now, let's look at this scientifically first. When you inhale, you stimulate the sympathetic nervous system, which makes your heart increase. It's called the accelerator. So take a deep breath in, when you do that, you're stimulating your sympathetic nervous system, which is like the accelerator of your body. When you exhale, you stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, which decreases, like the brakes, how fast your heart beats. So the more anxious you get or nervous you get, the more in breaths you take, which subsequently act to cause you more anxiety. The more out breaths you take, the more you're slowing yourself down. Like for example, if you're bored in a training and you yawn, it's because you're taking an in breath, naturally trying to wake yourself up and stimulate yourself. So, in calm individuals, the inhale and the exhale are working at a 50 mile and hour pace. You're in the zone, right. You have a sense of well being. One of the things you can do to help calm and regulate yourself and that you can teach children, is how to use their breathing in a way to calm themselves. Breath is the remote control for self regulation. But you have to learn how to use belly breaths rather than chest breathing. Belly breaths is when you... If you were to lay flat on the floor, and you can teach children this, lay flat on the floor, put a teddy bear or a tissue box or a book on top of your belly. Pretend your belly's a balloon. When you take that deep breath in the balloon should blow up. It's like you're breathing air in and blowing your balloon up. When you breathe out, the book or the stuffed animal or the tissue box, should go down. So when you use breath like that, called diaphragmic breathing, you
can help yourself and children calm the regulatory system. There’s a wonderful video up next by Elmo. Sesame Street has a series of social emotional and trauma informed videos. I’d like you to just pause for a moment, click the link, watch the video and come back and join us. Think for a moment after you watch that, what you learned. Ah, Elmo was like me. That morning I woke on Saturday morning, he turned into a monster. After he did his belly breathing, he calmed back down and felt like himself again. This is a wonderful video to show children. It’s a wonderful video to help them regulate and calm. We can think of so many other ways that we can teach kids proactively when they're calm, how to use their breath. It’s like that emergency responder first aid kit, what tools are we gonna help children use to regulate themselves in the middle of an emotional emergency. Here are some other ideas to teach children to use their breath. Feathers, this is a great visual for children. If you give two children, you partner them together. One has a feather and you have them blow it off their hand. You have to take a deep breath in. Blow the feather. The other child has to catch it. Stuffed animals or breathing buddies. This is what we just talked about, lying down on your back. Have them make the bear or the breathing buddy go up and down. Wouldn’t it be great if you had a breathing buddy in the classroom or in your small family child care home or your classroom setting? You tell them that this is Buddy breathing bear. When you need to take a deep breath, you can go and Buddy will help you breathe and calm down. Another classroom got a big sloth. Huge sloth! The kids would go sit with the sloth, 'cause sloth is one of the slowest animals in the world, so when you're all revved up emotionally, you go breathe with the sloth.

These are creative visuals to help kids calm and breathe. You can teach them the balloon breaths. Breathe in, blow the balloon up. Smell the flower or blow out the candle. Smell the flower, blow out the candle. Practice those kinds of activities with children. If you're working with infants, most of the way we regulate infants is through us. We walk them, we rock them, we hold them, we read a book, we hum or sing and we talk in a soothing voice. So infants don’t often calm themselves. We calm them. They rely on us to be the co-regulator of their internal world. In fact, one really important concept for you to remember with all children is you’re the external Wi-Fi to the internal world of a child. You know how when your cell phone says low charge? And you panic and you plug it into the wall and then it gets charged back up? That’s what kids do with us all day. They become disregulated and then they come to us, to plug in to us. They use our calm. They use our sense of safety. They use our presence to plug in and calm themselves down. Toddlers and preschoolers, we can begin to teach them other strategies, like you can play with clay, play with sand, you can blow bubbles, you can take belly breaths. There are some wonderful resources that I want to recommend to you today to help kids manage big emotions and with self regulation skills. These are photo shots of the book that you can refer to later. They’re all found on Amazon. I’m sure other locations as well. The first one is called, "Calm Down Time". It’s for infants and toddlers, mostly toddlers. It’s a very short book that teaches them how they can calm their own bodies down. Every child needs a safe person, that’s you, an object, maybe their teddy bear or a place they can go to calm themselves down. "Breathe Like a Bear" is wonderful because each page has a different story. Like for
example, in "Breathe Like a Bear" they have a soup story and you take the kids through a very simple activity. Hold your favorite bowl of hot soup in your hands. Okay, sniff your soup, what does it smell like? Okay, it’s too hot to eat, so we have to blow, to cool it down. They have different stories in there like that. "Mind Bubbles" I love because it teaches kids that emotions are small, medium and large. But eventually, the bubbles pop and emotion always goes away. We just need to buy some time with a self regulation strategy. Then there’s "Yoga Pretzels" and "Mindful Kid" decks. Those are separate decks you can purchase for kids age four to 104. Each card has either a mindfulness or a movement activity that help kids focus on kindness, calming their bodies, regulating their bodies. These are wonderful tools and resources for children to promote self regulation, 'cause when they actually have huge emotions, they have a higher likelihood of doing that new habit you’ve taught them and you can prevent challenging behaviors when you teach those steps. The last step, when children become disregulated, always the number one goal is to calm their emotionally disregulated brains and bodies through you, through a safe place, through safe objects or safe activities, like blowing bubbles or breathing. Once they’re downstairs emotionally reactive brain is calm, then you can finally help them think, think, think of a solution. When a child became disregulated, they had a problem. They wanted something, they were trying to avoid something. They’re trying to gain something or express an emotion. But they can find a way to solve their problem.

On the website, Challengingbehaviors.org, also on another website, www.cainclusion.org, there are these templates that you can print out. First, there’s Tucker the Turtle. Tucker the Turtle can be printed and laminated as a story with subsequent activities and Tucker the Turtle teaches children how you can tuck in your shell, count to three, take three deep breaths and when you’re calm, come out of your shell and think, think, think of a solution. There are also these wonderful solution kit cards. You can laminate them. They’re small cards, medium cards, large cards. You can create your own magical solution kit in a brief case, a box, post it on the wall so when children get calm, they take their breaths, they’re ready to solve their problem, they can go to the solution cards and actually explore with you a way they can solve their problem that doesn’t hurt themselves, others or property. For example, get a teacher, ask nicely, ignore them, say please, trade, share, tell them please stop or play together. And they even have these cards in English, Chinese, Spanish. We have a resource page with you with many resources that I mentioned. The www.cainclusion.org is where you can find Tucker the Turtle, feeling faces, all for free. Tucker the Turtle has a companion, its female version is Sonya the Snail. You’ve got the solution kit cards, self regulation activities and ideas. Those same things can be found in different versions on www.challengingbehavior.org. Then there’s the csefel.vanderbilt.edu website. There’s my app, Trigger Stop: Sensory and Emotional Check in for kids three to eight. But then there’s another wonderful app called Stop, Breath, Think for adults or older children. It actually walks you through checking in where in your body sensations you’re feeling. Check in with your feelings, so it’s sensory and emotional check in for older kids and adults. Then it gives you a self regulating, mindful activity or a meditation that you can use to calm your over regulated
brain. These are wonderful resources. If you want to learn more about trauma, you're welcome to check out my book, "Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators" or we talked about this today, the Zones of Regulation book. It's a curriculum designed to foster self regulation, emotional literacy, and emotional control. Thank you so much for joining me today and for being a brain architect. I'm so honored that I could be a part of your journey for just a brief moment. I wish you the best of look and on this note, what I ask you, is if you can walk away with one thing today it's what is the meaning of the child's behavior. Just hold that mantra in your mind. You, everything you do, makes a lot difference in the life of a child. Thank you so much.

- [Jessica] Thank you Julie. This was just fabulous. I know that working with children with challenging behaviors is one of the biggest frustrations of early childhood providers. So this is our most popular topic, most requested topic. I think there are a lot of things in here that hopefully, our members that are watching this, helps you guys can take this information and utilize it. I love all the breathing techniques. Another one that I heard that I love is to pretend you just got fresh baked cookies out of the oven. So you smell on them and breathe in then you have to blow on them because they're too hot to eat.

- [Julie] Oh, love it!

- [Jessica] Yes, I heard that one and love that one too. So great ideas! The apps are exciting. I was checking them out as I was listening. So all of you out there listening, I really hope that you'll take some time to utilize some of these tools that she told you about and techniques to help children that you work with to make their lives and days easier, as well as yours. Thank you again Julie, so much for sharing all of this wonderful information. We appreciate your time and your expertise. Everyone, have a great day.