

This unedited transcript of an Early Childhood Education webinar on continued® is provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility for the viewer and may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings. This transcript may contain errors. Copying or distributing this transcript without the express written consent of continued® is strictly prohibited. For any questions, please contact ececustomerservice@continued.com.

Trauma-Responsive Family Engagement in Early Childhood

Recorded Aug 25, 2020

Presenter: Julie Nicholson, PhD

continuED Early Childhood Education Course #31907

- [Jessica] Hello and welcome to early childhood education at continued.com. My name is Jessica Lewis and I'm very excited to welcome you to today's session, titled trauma responsive family engagement in early childhood. We are very happy to welcome back Julie Nicholson to share her knowledge and expertise with us. Julie is a professor of practice in the School of Education at Mills College, where she has been a faculty member since 2005 and directed several innovative programs. In addition, she is the author of many journal articles and books. You can read more about Julie on our website. Welcome, everyone, we are so glad you're joining us today. Julie, I'm gonna turn it over to you now.

- Thank you, Jessica. It's wonderful to be here and to have this opportunity to talk with you all about trauma responsive family engagement in early childhood, a topic that is very near and dear to my heart. Okay, I'm going to just share, these are my disclosures. And today in the next hour, we have a few important learning outcomes. So after this course, participants will be able to describe the difference between family involvement and family engagement. You will also be able to identify at least one trauma responsive strategy related to family engagement that will buffer stress and promote coping and resilience for parents and families. You'll also be able to name at least one way to reduce power differentials between parents and families and teachers. Okay, now, before we move forward, I wanna make sure that we all are thinking about how we're defining parents and families in a similar way. This definition comes from the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center at the Office of Head Start and I want to have us think the words parent and family are inclusive and they really respect all caregivers who make a difference in a child's life. So when I'm talking about parents, I'm referring to biological, adoptive and step parents, as well as primary caregivers, such as grandparents and other adult family members and foster or resource parents. When we're talking about families, similarly, we can be talking about biological or non biological, chosen or circumstantial. They're connected through culture, language, tradition, shared experiences, emotional commitment, and mutual support. Okay, so

we're gonna start today by thinking about what is the difference between family involvement and family engagement. And this is really helpful when we think about wanting to bring in a lens that is trauma sensitive, trauma informed and trauma responsive. It's really important that we start by understanding what each of these types of family involvement are and what their benefits and limitations are. So, simply put, parent involvement is often more of a doing to while engagement is a doing with. With involvements, schools tend to lead with their mouth, meaning they generally are telling parents and families what they should be doing. Engagement, on the other hand, has schools and programs leading with their ears, meaning they're listening to parents and family members, their ideas, their contributions and they're by eliciting from the parents and families, what they have found works for them and what is best for their children. Family engagement aims to develop a more genuine partnership.

Okay, let's look at each of those a little bit more carefully. As I go through here, I want you to be thinking about what you're doing currently, what is familiar to you, which one of these or maybe both mirror the kinds of practices that you are most comfortable with and the kinds of practices that you engage more often. Okay, so with parent involvement, let's think about what are some of those features. So as I said, it implies a kind of doing to. So a school that is really striving for an approach to family involvement would have a focus on identifying projects, needs and goals for parents and families and then offering you know, inviting them to participate in those projects, goals and needs. The invitations for parents participation is often one way and the same with the forms of communication. So you might see a program or school exchanging information about a child, offering advice or strategies, recommending resources, sending notes home, sometimes there's automated phone calls that offer any of those kinds of information for families or there might be a project or an event where they're requesting participation or assistance from parents and families. But this is often initiated by those in the program, the teachers, the family engagement coordinator, the administrators. It's often talked about planned at the program site and

initiated in that one direction, from the program to the parent and family. So, parents participate in this way by joining into events, attending meetings, taking advantage of all that is offered by the, let's say early childhood care and environment. And because these events and opportunities are planned by the school site, often it is the school administrators and teachers that determine the topics that they think the families may find the most interesting and the most valuable or the things that they as the administrators and teachers feel is important for parents and families to know. And there's also a focus in family involvement that really stays within the four walls of the school. Meaning the involvement focuses on how can the family support what happens in the building whether people are physically in a building or they are working remotely. The thoughts are focused on how people work as a community in that school, but not necessarily how the school shows up in the larger community. Okay, so those are some of the characteristics of family involvement. Let's look carefully now at family engagement.

And again, as I go through here, I want you to think about whether any of this is familiar for you and whether you do any of these types of activities or create these experiences for parents and family members. And it's okay if you don't, it might be a learning edge. But let's first just think about those characteristics. So an engagement as I had shared earlier implies a doing with. it's coming together, it suggests this kind of interlocking. And I want us to think about the difference as building a reciprocal partnership where power is shared. And so there's that interlocking. There's a focus on listening and learning about what the family members think, what they dream, what their wishes are, what they worry about. So if we're doing a lot of learning from them, we have to create spaces to ask those kinds of questions, to listen to them and really importantly, to build trust so that they feel safe to share those kinds of very personal ideas and information with us. There's a school that is striving for parent engagement. This is why we say that we will lead with our ears. We're not necessarily going to be planning out all of the things in advance that we think parents and families need to know and learn from us.

Because we are going to be showing up as much, if not more often, to create that space to listen, to learn, to hold back from being an expert in the room, but recognizing that they are experts of their child, that parents and families know what's best for their child and we have a lot that we can listen to and learn from them. So the teaching and learning goes both directions and this is this idea of the interlocking partnership. We wanna be responsive to their language in order to build trust and to really share information back and forth and this is why being culturally responsive and learning about their cultural ways, of knowing their cultural values, their cultural goals for childbearing, for the child's education this is so critical in this work. It makes this work really complex, but also really meaningful when we can learn all of those kinds of things about a family, so that when we are educating and caring for and working with their child, that there's an alignment between our program and what happens in the home with that child and the family. There's a team approach that we make point to check in, to make plans and to think together.

Again, we bring some knowledge and some expertise and so does the family. So really thinking about it in that way. Also, when we're planning ways for the family to show up and to participate in the program, instead of us coming up with the agenda and knowing what would be meaningful and valuable for parents and families and having that sort of one directional communication, we are inviting them to the table or asking them what they would like to see in our events, what they would like to see in terms of parent engagement, how they would like to participate in making decisions at the school site. We create opportunities to build the parents and family members capacity for leadership and truly listen to what they say and make sure that we don't just create the space for them to share what they would like for their child and for their child's program at school, but that we actually act upon that. Because when we listen and then we change what we're doing based on what we hear, that's how we build trust. That's how we show them that we value not just their child and their participation, but actually how they are going to co create and partner with us to create the most

meaningful and effective programs for the children that we are caring for. And then one last thing I'll say about true parent or family engagement is that it tends to focus beyond the four walls of the school. So we think about how the program, the school shows up and is part of a larger community. So how might that school connect with local services, with nonprofit agencies, with other things such as the library, parks, other things in the community, the different houses of worship, other clubs, sites of recreation, all those things that create a healthy community. We think about how does the school and the parents involvement in the school relate to and interlock and connect with those larger parts of our vibrant communities and we bring in some of the issues that go beyond the four walls of the school, when parents bring them up. So such things as we might think about, how to use resources in our community, how to think about complex topics like community violence, housing, food security, food insecurity. So these things that may be part of parents and families and children's lives outside of the four walls of our school, we invite them in and recognize the whole child, the whole family as those authentic way for us to think about supporting and building partnership.

Okay, so let's think about this question together. What strategies do you use that reflect family engagement? And the reason I'm asking you this question is because most of our programs have a long history of being focused on family involvement. And so I want you to turn off the recording for just a moment and reflect on this question, what strategies do you currently use, if any, and it's okay, if you aren't yet here and this is a learning edge for you. But what strategies do you use that reflect family engagement? Okay, actually, I'm gonna go back here for just a second. I want us to think about, there's nothing wrong, I don't wanna create an evaluative statement around family involvement. In fact, family involvement is really important. What research suggest is any way in which we can work with parents and families to have them participating, learning about and supporting the care and education of their young children, research suggests that that is helpful and important. What I do wanna

suggest, though, is that research also points out very clearly that there are additional additive benefits for family engagement. So while family involvement is important, along with family engagement, family engagement is even more beneficial for families. And we can imagine how it sets them up to be participants and partners in their children's education from the earliest years to feel that they have a sense of trust with the institutions where their child is spending so many hours of the day, that they feel a sense that their voice, their ideas, their wishes for their child matter. And we know that when we work in those ways, that it's better for the family member, for the parent, it's better for the child. And because of that, because when we work on building trusting partnerships, it also is much better for the teachers. We hear in research all the time that teachers that are able to lean in and build these kinds of relationships with families feel better about their craft, they feel a stronger sense of efficacy and they feel much happier about the work that they do. They feel like they're making a bigger difference.

So I wanna leave us with all forms of engaging and participating with families and parents is good. And we wanna strive to move across the continuum from family involvement to making sure that we're balancing that with family engagement. Okay, so let's take a look at this picture. And I wanna ask you, what do you see when you look at this picture? And I'm gonna ask you, why do you think I include this here? So, if we see, if we imagine that we're above the water, we see that shark fin. And I want us to think about that as a metaphor for so often what happens when we are working with families. So with families, we can often focus too much on the behaviors that we find and perceive to be challenging, to be complex, to be frustrating or aggravating or surprising. And when we look at this picture and we realize that tiny shark fin is just a small part of the total fish or the total story. And what I'm here to share with you is that usually that shark fin, the behavior that we're perceiving is challenging and we're gonna talk about that in just a minute. That is communicating a story to us about a parent or a family member that is not feeling safe, is not feeling a sense of inclusion, is not feeling like they are being seen for their capacities and their strengths and for the

whole people that they are. And so what we're gonna do with trauma responsive family engagement is always remember this shark fin is telling us just a little bit of the story. And our work is to build the skills, the stance and the capacity to have patience and persistence and commitment to say what's underneath the water. How can I learn about the rest of the fish, the part underneath the water that's gonna help me understand more about this family and what that behavior is trying to communicate to me so that I can attune to their circumstance and support them and build empathy. Okay, we're gonna take just a brief kind of reminder in thinking about if we're gonna work in that way to build empathy and to look underneath the shark fin, we have to understand a little bit about stress and trauma.

So let's remember, individual trauma results from an event, a series of event or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual to be physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening. And that event, series of events or context, has long term adverse effects on that individual's functioning, their mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well being. And I wanna just remind us, in here, it's talking about how it's something that is experienced by an individual. So we can't look at somebody else or go through an experience with somebody else and determine if they find it to be traumatic. It is something that's very much about how they're perceiving a situation and how they're feeling about something in their bodies. Let's keep thinking about this. Okay, so when we look at the neurobiology of the brain and we recognize and many of you are probably quite familiar with this, but we're gonna link it to this work we have to do with parents and families. So just a quick reminder, the hind brain, the part of our brain that we share with all reptiles on the earth, the part of our brain that we call the alarm center or the smoke detector that is constantly out there looking for danger. And it sends us into that sort of fight flight freeze response if it perceives danger, there's that perception piece. We may not be literally in danger, our life may not literally be threatened, but if we perceive that, if the brain perceives a threat, it will automatically take charge in that alarm center and do all sorts of things, including releasing stress

chemicals to prepare our body for a dangerous situation and to set us up as best as it can for survival. When it does that, it cuts off access to these other parts of the brain, the limbic brain, the part of our brain that we share with all mammals on this earth, the emotional center, the attachment part of our brain, that helps us to experience emotion, to feel a sense of belonging and connection, to develop strong attuned relationships. When the hind brain perceives danger or a threat in the environment, not only does it cut off access in our brain in terms of the neural networks to our limbic brain, but it also cuts off access to the forebrain, our CEO, the air traffic controller. What I like to think of as the thinking part of our brain. And this is what makes us unique as humans, this part of our brain. So this is the area of the brain that really helps us to think abstractly, to sort of think with reason, to plan to control our behavior, that sort of self regulation. To think in flexible ways that cognitive flexibility, to imagine a situation through another perspective which is really important for empathy. To think about a whole series of directions and to follow complex directions, to use language, right? To narrate our experience.

So, let's think about what are brain based ways given the way that our brains have been wired. What are brain based ways to build empathy and to be trauma responsive in our work with parents and families? Okay, look at this photo. When the primitive parts of the brain perceive danger, like I said, they automatically mobilize a strong physiological response. And this is out of our control. It's subconscious that happens in a split second. you can all think of a time when somebody has cut you off on the freeway Or when you find that you're frightened, somebody comes up from behind you when you were just walking on the street, you didn't know they were there. You feel what's happening, all those physiological changes in your body. We can see this in others when a face goes flesh. We can see it and you can sometimes see in young children, their hearts beating right out of their shirts, we can feel our hearts beating quickly. You can see sometimes your palms get sweaty. There's all sorts of physiological responses that are really part of the body preparing us to survive threat.

So that the whitening in the skin that you see in the face and in limbs, that's the redirection of the blood flow, again to sort of protect the organs and keep us alive in the case that we were truly going to be threatened. The fast and shallow breathing. Your pupils dilating, the muscle fibers getting excited, you might see yourself or somebody else in this kind of state. They might be shaking, that's your muscle fibers that are becoming excited and having that fight flight freeze response. Or you can also see that decreased motor movement and almost a disconnection from your body, sometimes feel like you're floating above your body in this again fight flight freeze response of your body trying to protect you from a perceived danger.

So, when we see these kinds of behaviors and it's not just in others, we want to really, really critically, we need to notice when we are having these fight flight freeze responses and our brainstem is perceiving threat or danger and automatically sending us into those behaviors. We need to notice this in ourselves and we need to notice another in the parents or families that we're working with. It's really the first step is the noticing, before we can get to the strategies that help us buffer stress and promote coping and resilience in others and in ourselves. But for the remainder of our time together, we're gonna talk about when we noticed those stress related behaviors, what are ways that we can respond? What are actions you can take right away that will buffer your stress, the stress of others, promote your ability to cope and their ability to cope and build resilience all around, okay. So, the first one you might have heard about and we talk about this a lot, we talk about it when mirror neurons, when we're thinking about working with children. We talk about it when we're thinking of being, let's say, administrators and supervisors and we're working with supervisees or team members. But today we're gonna think about mirror neurons in your work with family members and parents. So just as a reminder, because humans are relational, we absorb the emotions of those others who are around us. This is why we say that both stress is contagious and also calmness is contagious. Our capacity to immediately and instinctively understand what another is experiencing or feeling and sometimes we

don't get it right, but we often can just kind of intuit if somebody else is feeling sad, if somebody else is feeling angry, and this is due to our mirror neurons. The process in which stress is contagious begins with my mirror neuron, for instance, in your presence. It is absorbing and mirroring back what your emotional state is and vice versa. And this is happening without any sense of my control over this process, without any sense of my ability to... It happens, it just happens without me being aware of it. It's at a subconscious level and I'm not necessarily in control of it, but we can learn to notice it and have more control over it. So if you are working with a parent who is having a traumatic stress response, a flight response, maybe they're yelling, maybe they're accusing you, maybe they're even cursing at you. We know that that traumatic, that stress response, that fight response is going to set off in your mirror neuron system a automatic process of you absorbing that, right?

So if you can be aware and just know that your mirror neuron system could very easily follow them down into that stressed or dysregulated state. But learning about working with the power of your mirror neurons is learning to notice that in your body, you might have that strong reaction, that strong response, you might feel those stress chemicals in your body and your body wants you to have a fight response perhaps in reaction because you're absorbing that state. However, here is the power of your mirror neurons. If you can learn to notice that and build strategies to help calm your stress response. Maybe you take a deep breath and you have a mantra and you say to yourself, a very popular mantra for this kind of moment is QTIP, quit taking it personally. So noticing, this isn't about you, whatever's happening, they're having a stress response and your job is to remain calm and to through your calmness and your mirror neurons guide them back to a regulated state. Not to reason with them, not to problem solve, not to have your own reactive response, but just through learning to be calm and that's all it takes is learning to be calm. It's not an easy thing to do, it takes a lot of practice. But just by being calm, the power of your mirror neurons is going to guide them back to a calm and regulated state. And again, it's not something that you

need to actively control, the only thing you need to do is learn to be calm in the moment. So, when you are calm and regulated, we'll go through this several times. But let's think about what are the things that are gonna help you remain calm and help you calm them. Literally learning to notice and not react, having a strategy that will help you to not react. So a mantra, a deep breath, counting down from 10. Imagining, visualizing that you're in your happy, calm place, maybe you're picturing yourself on a beach in Hawaii. But you're also going to know that they... Remember their parts of their brain are cut off to the attachment part of their brain and to the CEO part of their brain. So you are not gonna use a lot of words. You are going to avoid instructions. You're going to avoid directions, you're going to avoid problem solving, you're just going to... You're also going to avoid giving them the perception that you're abandoning them.

So learning to just stay there, to just take some deep breaths to bear witness and be with them and remain calm, maybe engaging the senses. This is a time where it can be very helpful to say, should we get a glass of water? Should we go out and get one minute of fresh air together? Maybe we could both get a cup of tea and just have that warm water coming through the senses in the body can help to just slow things down. And there's nothing better than just taking long slow, deep breaths for you calming and calming somebody else's stress response system. Now, this is really, really hard work and it's something that is probably one of the most powerful tools that you will build in your trauma responsive tool box for working with anybody, including parents and families. But I wanna ask you to take a minute to think about when you were working with families who are just regulated and reactive. If I said the statement, I typically remain calm and self regulated in this situation. I want you to think to yourself, would you answer yes, this is a strength of mine. Not really, if you were being honest with yourself and being willing to be in that space of learning, taking a risk to be honest and vulnerable about your strengths and your learning edges. Would this be a skill you really need to work on? Or do you see that sometimes this is a strength and sometimes it's an area to work on? So I'm gonna ask you to turn off the recording and just jot

down really honestly for yourself where you would put yourself and give an example of why. Think about yes, if this is a strength of mine, when was the last time you did that? Remind yourself. No, this is a skill I need to work on. Write down what you normally do, what would typically be a reaction. And it depends. Think about what was different in the situation where it was something you were able to do and where it was an area that you weren't... It was an area to work on for you. Okay, so take just a moment to write down some thoughts and reflect on this. Okay, so the power of mirror neurons is a key trauma responsive strategy and remaining common regulated, knowing how to guide a parent or family member back to regulation. That's an important foundation. Having a strength based view is also really essential and you're gonna see, we talked about that in relationship to family engagement. If we're gonna partnership, we have to see that parent and family as having strengths. Because we're in a partnership, we're teaching and learning from one another. But let's think about how that relates to understanding behaviors that we would tug or understand as those fight flight freeze behaviors, that shark fin.

So, if we think about... People have talked about how a trauma informed strategy is looking at some of those behaviors and interrupting ourselves from saying, gosh, what's wrong with her? What's wrong with you? What's wrong with that child? What's wrong with that parent? They just yell all the time or she just always is leaving meetings early or what have you or she shuts down and she won't say anything. We know not to do that. And people have talked a lot about shifting from that kind of a deficit orientation to saying, not what's wrong with you, but what happened to you. Well, that also, that's helpful a little bit to say, I wonder what is leading that person to perceive a sense of threat. However, we can get in a position of sort of suggesting or thinking about people in deficit when we say what's happened to you. We get in a place where we can define people by the stressors and traumas in their life. And we never wanna do that, we are always so much more than the forms of stress and trauma that we experience and often that we don't have control over in our lives. So we wanna

suggest that we move away from even the question of what happened to you is where we stopped and say, no, we wanna think about asking, what is the story you're telling me? When I look at every communication, every behavior, everything you're saying to me, I assume your body is and your brain is doing the best it can to keep you safe, that maybe in the original situation where let's say you have a trauma reminder, maybe that behavior was adaptive and helped you to survive, to protect yourself. It might be that it's not always the most adaptive to use or to have that behavior show up now, but it once was, and it actually might be helpful now. But I'm going to assume good intent, I'm going to assume strength and that there's some rationality, some reason why you are behaving the way you are. And what my job is, is to ask a question, what is your behavior communicating to me about what you're feeling, what you need me to understand and how I have to show up in this space right now to help you feel a sense of safety, to help you feel a sense of me attuning to, not judging you. And to give you that message that I see that you have strengths, you have coping skills, you have resilience and sources of capability that I'm gonna acknowledge, I'm gonna recognize and I wanna learn more about because when we ask what is strong with you and we start to see that, we're gonna begin to build trust. When people don't see we're looking at them and judging them and defining them by those stress related behaviors, but instead looking at them and saying, there's a reason why you are showing up this way and I need to understand that so that I know how to help you and work with you as a partner to feel safe in this space, okay.

Dr. Daniel Siegel talks about how brain based strategies for helping us work with any people in our lives in ways that really helps them to feel in whatever interaction they're in with us, a feeling of safety, of belonging and helping to reduce that stress response reaction so that we can have people show up where all the parts of their brain can be integrated and like Bruce Perry likes to say, their CEO can be open for business. What does he talk about? And some of these strategies you might have heard, but maybe you thought about you haven't necessarily connected to your work with parents and

families and if you have heard these strategies, think about how often you use them 'cause often we learn a lot of things but it's that implementation piece that we need to practice over and over and over and to make it a habit. So he talks about connecting, the right part of the brain is responsible for our emotions, for our connection for that sense of inclusion and belonging. The left is responsible for logical reasoning. So when an adult is in the right side of their brain, maybe their emotions rise up, the emotions are too big, they're becoming dysregulated. We see some of those stress behaviors. Really the only way that we can begin to work with them on rationality to problem solve, to kind of work with them on let's say, following rules or policies or sitting with us and thinking through a situation is if we first connect with the right side of their brain. When we work with adults, we can't work with logical reason until we've helped them calm.

Now, what do we do to connect with the right side of the brain? We're validating their emotions, we're noticing our tone of voice, we're noticing how our facial expressions are, how we're showing up, we're listening to them. We're giving them that feeling that no matter what they're doing and saying and whatever the stories that they're telling us, that we are listening intently to them without judgment. These are ways that we connect with them on the right side of the brain. These are ways that we help them calm that stress response and guide them back to regulation. And it's only after we connect with the right that we can then begin to engage the part of the CEO part of the brain, that we can explain things, that we can plan, that we can imagine different perspectives, we can reason, we can negotiate. So connect before we redirect. Dr. Daniel Siegel also talks about this strategy, name it to tame it. And we know from a lot of research that just merely assigning a word or a label to something that we feel can calm down that stress response, can calm down our nervous system and can begin the process of returning us to a regulated, calm state. Now, we don't want to tell somebody how they feel. So I wanna be careful in saying we're not going to name it. You know, you're really angry right now, 'cause we thought that might just further

anger somebody. But we can wander with them, we can create a space by saying I'm noticing that you're looking away, I'm noticing that you've just crossed your arms, I'm noticing that your tone of voice is going up, I'm wondering how you're feeling right now. I wonder if you're feeling sad or do you wanna tell me that. We're creating the space for people to name how they feel. By doing that and normalizing this and not bringing judgment, evaluation or shame to this, we're also helping people to feel less like they're not gonna be isolated. Sometimes we hold these feelings inside of us and it can feel very isolating and lonely, to know that we're holding this. So we're also saying, I'm gonna bear witness with you, I'm gonna notice it without judgment and just be here in relationship with you as you name what you're going through. And that can be a very resilience building healing activity or experience for people.

Okay, we have to think about power differentials and we have to, as educators, be aware that power differentials exist between us and the parents and families that we work with. Why is this important and why is this essential to trauma responsive practice? Because just being in our position, even if we don't feel powerful as a provider, as a teacher, as an administrator, because of your position, it can trigger a stress response for a parent or family member and remind them of recent or even past, even from their childhood experiences in school or working within systems where they've had traumatic experiences, where they felt a sense of a total loss of control and powerlessness and fear, these characteristics of trauma. Maybe they didn't feel safe because of racism. Maybe it was class discrimination or being defined through deficit. Nobody saw strengths in them. They were always defined through deficit. Maybe there was a lack of cultural or linguistic alignment of the school. Maybe they were fearful because of their undocumented status. Maybe there was violence in the school community, a school shooting or other kinds of feelings of lack of safety that they had been on the school site. There's many other reasons why they might feel that even just being in the presence of a teacher or on the school campus or engaging in a school activity can trigger that stress response. So we wanna be continually aware of our

positionality and consider how can I work very hard and intentionally to even the playing field? When we think about entering a child's home, we wanna think about that. When we're leading a meeting with a family, how can I level the playing field? How can I create a sense of welcome and reduce that to the best of my ability, the power differential here and create a feeling of welcome. Notice our facial expressions, our tone of voice, the questions that we ask. Again, communicating that we're partners, I'm not better than you, I don't know more than you. I know the things that I know and you know the things you know and we are in relationship and I'm trying to create a partnership where your knowledge, your presence, your wisdom is absolutely as valuable as mine. And I want to create that space to build trust, to earn your trust and to learn from you. Dr. William Ketterer, he's a national expert on reducing anger and violence in schools. And he talks about around power differentials that are really important way to build trust, is to consider the concept of being an invited guest. So he says, "Being an invited guest is taking a stance of humility and needing to earn the trust, to honor parents agency and control." That is that they have choices in how to proceed in the relationship building with you.

So whenever you're discussing feelings or difficult topics around let's say the child's, if there was a challenging incident with the child and their behavior that you are communicating that you are there to serve them, to work on behalf of the family, and that you are gonna ask for their consent. So such things as instead of launching into talking about something. Asking them, may I discuss this topic, this experience that I observed of your child yesterday at school, allowing them to have some voice and power in telling you how they feel about discussing it there. And if they say they're not sure, asking them okay, what would help you feel better about talking about this topic or you come and talk to me when you're ready to talk about this. But recognizing that so often we don't have that, that just questioning, that building in of consent. And when we do that, often just by offering that sense of consent, what we'll find is that families will often be thankful, they'll often say yes. And again, there's that sense of

agency and control that they can opt out when it doesn't feel safe. But when they opt in, we find that they're more engaged. And this is one of these strategies of being an invited guest. It's a way of thinking, a way of being and a way of showing up in relationships that we can practice. And I think you'll see that it makes a really big difference. Now, you're gonna have a handout that is a tip sheet, it has many different kinds of strategies. Some of the ones that I've talked about and a few others that I just wanna briefly remind you when we're thinking about trauma responsive family engagement, what are some of these strategies that are action steps you can take right away? Okay, so we talked about that knowing the difference between family involvement and family engagement and striving to move more of what you do towards family engagement through listening, sharing power and sharing decisions with families and taking that stance of an invited guest and asking for consent. Acknowledging the impact of stress and trauma on behavior, recognizing that all behavior has meaning and that it's telling a story about what they're feeling and what they need from you. And they might be communicating, I'm scared, I don't feel safe, I don't feel a sense of control here.

So this requires that we use strategies to manage our own stress and our own reactivity so that we can show up in a way that builds that attunement, that builds that message of I'm here, I'm with you, we're in this together, I want to understand and I wanna earn your trust to build empathy. Using the power of mirror neurons, we talked a lot about that. And just recognizing at all times that both stress and calmness are contagious. Using a strength based approach, really, really critical. Every parent and family should hear from us in small and in everyday and consistent ways that we see what they're doing, what's right with them. We see their coping, we see their strengths, we acknowledge them and we're inspired by that. Not only for the parent and family member, but for the child, they should feel that we observe that, we look for those strengths. They're gonna be more willing to trust us and lean into those areas of vulnerability and the areas in need of support if they feel not defined by stress and

trauma or deficit, but that we see their wholeness, their whole humanity. Recognizing that brain based communication will buffer stress. So knowing when the adult is in the right side of their brain when they've had the activation of that stress response, that we know we need to use those brain based strategies that Dr. Daniel Siegel teaches us about before we can get to the CEO, before we can shift over to those left brain activities. And a lot of this is just listening, validating, staying with them, communicating that we don't judge them, that we understand and we're in this together. That is really, really critical. We didn't talk about this, but it's essential to protective factors that come giving parents and families, connecting them and building communities. I guess we talked a little bit about that sense of family engagement, inviting them to co plan, co design and have a true voice at building events and experiences that ask for an invite, family and parent participation. That's really important. But also to help them find social supports in the community, connecting to family playgroups, to food pantries, to information about affordable housing, job training, diaper distribution, faith based organizations. And to do this with using our parents that can become ambassadors for one another.

They can often... If we create the space for parent ambassadors to support one another in finding these resources and connecting to these community elders and sort of knowledge keepers and support systems and structures. That's beautiful because now we're supporting their engagement and we're using their voice and their strengths to also co create and connect families to have this strong sense of community not only within our school, but also outside of the four walls of our program. Also, we haven't talked enough about this, but the importance of one of the most visible ways that we need to connect parents and families and honor their full essence of who they are in the life of their child is making sure that we are linguistically and culturally responsive and that their language and cultural values and beliefs have a role in our programs and in our schools. So you know, there's lots of small and large ways we can do this, learning nursery rhymes, folktales, games from the families, having them share

commonly used words in their languages that they speak in the home and integrating those, making sure that our books and our curricular materials and things represent the languages and cultural values and cultural practices of the children in our families. We want everybody to see mirrors as well as the windows and sliding doors. So mirrors they see things in the room and in our program, in our curriculum that reflect back to them what's familiar, what is mirroring back their cultural and language experiences, but also those windows and sliding doors where they see other ways of knowing other languages, other cultural ways of being. We want families to experience both windows and mirrors and sliding doors. Okay, we're gonna try to put this all together now in a final Vignette where we try to integrate this. So let's think about Isabel, who's a single parent with three children ages four, seven and 12. Since COVID-19 shelter in place, she's had to stay home with her three children while still working her job as a call agent with a phone company. She responded to initial attempts by the school to reach out, but now she won't respond to any of the school district's voicemails or outreach text messages and has not participated with her children in any online virtual education despite being offered computers for each of her children.

I'm gonna ask you to turn off your recording and jot down some ideas in response to this question. What trauma responsive resilience building family engagement strategies could you use to support Isabel and this family? Think about this Vignette and take a few minutes to share some thoughts that come to your mind. Okay, you wrote down some ideas you had and I'm gonna share just a few ideas that come to mind for me. Some of these, you might have written down, some might be different. But let's think about how we could apply many of the ideas that we've thought about together in bringing a trauma informed or trauma responsive lens to our work with parents like Isabel and her children. Okay, let's think about this. So, the first thing that came to my mind was that we would want to attune to her situation. Our goal is to build understanding and empathy. So, you know, I was thinking we want to acknowledge that even a very small request from us to her, we're reaching out maybe we have a

short text message, we're not asking much, we think, that even that might be just too much for Isabelle with all of the things that are on her plate right now. So we wanna communicate messages that emphasize we care about you Isabelle, we care about your child, your children, you matter to us. You're an important part of this class. But we wanna reduce or eliminate even small demands or what we perceive to be small demands. So really, we just wanna bear witness and give those messages without saying, you don't need to call back, we just want you to know we're thinking about you. So we're also giving her that sense of agency and control, recognizing that we're gonna allow her to call or to be back in touch with us when that works for her. So that sense of the invited guests, right? But we wanna tell her we care about you. We also want to think about what do we know about her situation? What kinds of stressors and responsibilities might she be managing? Do we know anybody in our school community who might be in spaces she's in, who might attend her same church service, who might... The children might play together, who might have that sense of trust and be in relationship with her and might be hearing from her? Are there others who might be able to inform us about the kinds of supports and resources and communication strategies that would be most effective and what might not be effective?

So we can think about where, who, if anybody is she connected to in the community. Maybe there's an elder in the community that she connects with, that we could sort of share, we're here when she's ready. But again, sort of thinking about it may not be that she has that trust with us, she might have it with somebody else and we might be able to share with them that we are available if and when she ready. We can notice and tune in how we're feeling. Are we feeling triggered in any way by her not responding to us? We can think about the situation through her perspective and make sure that we are not taking her lack of response as a personal rejection. Remember that Q tip? Quit taking it personally. We can notice, if we do find it triggering, that we're not hearing back from her and we're angry or having any kind of stress response to notice our

bodies, how we're holding that, how we're feeling about it, and find our own strategies and sources of support to help us work through that. So that this doesn't, our defensiveness and our reactivity can be interrupted and we can get back to just imagining and focusing on the situation from her perspective. Maybe this is breathing, counting, visualizations, like I said, mantras talking things over with a supervisor or a colleague or a partner or so on, going on a walk. But doing what we have to do to stop our own stress response from interrupting our ability to attune and build understanding and empathy. And then thinking about what are the strengths and coping skills she's bringing to this? Are there ways that we can acknowledge this in our communication with her? It looks like... You know, I see that you are prioritizing your family's needs, I'm inspired by your strength and your coping skills at this difficult time. I saw that you picked up your child's homework packet when you arrived the other day at school and I just wanted you to know that you are managing so much and I am so glad that you're in the school and I'm here with you and supporting you.

But these kinds of messages that we see their skills, we see their strengths, we see what she is doing as opposed to focusing on what she's not doing, according to our agenda. The culture and language, using interpreters, translating messages, making sure that our communication is home are as much as possible in her first language, her primary language. And recognizing that self care and coping strategies are going to be influenced by cultural traditions and beliefs. And so if we were to think about connecting her and offering resources in the community to support her, are we thinking about those kinds of things? What are the aligned cultural and linguistic resources that would make sense for Isabel and her family based on what we know about her and her background, the language she speaks, the cultural beliefs and traditions that we know and we might not have that information. But if we can, it would be really helpful to think about that and offering supports. And then also just communicating finally that sense that we know she has wisdom, we know that she knows what her child needs, what their worries and fears are, what her own and her child's strengths and coping skills are

and that we're here to earn her trust and to learn from her. And to have that offer, that invited guest, I would like to have permission when you have the time and availability to have a few minutes to talk with you, to learn from you about how to support your family and be part of the the team to support your child through this time of change and uncertainty. Those are just a few of the ideas I wrote down and again, you might have others and there's many more.

But I think how I wanna close today is just to think about keeping in mind our foundations of trauma responsive practice, attuned responsive relationships, creating safety and predictability, understanding stress and trauma when interpreting behavior and communication with parents and families, focusing on strengths, interrupting when we focus on deficits or find ourselves thinking about deficits and supporting the management of big emotions, often by giving a sense of agency and control.

So I know that's a lot to think about. Again, identify your strengths and do more of that. Identify your learning edges and just find one bite size action, one small way to start one strategy that you can act upon tomorrow. And I wanna thank you for taking on and thinking about such an important topic. If you wanna contact or join the Center for Optimal Brain Integration Community, here's our website, our Facebook, our Instagram and email. There's lots of free resources that you can download. We'd love to hear from you. And a lot of the ideas that I talked about today are talked about in our first two books. We're actually writing the next one in the series now, which is focused on trauma responsive family engagement practices. And I want to just end with a giant thank you and best of luck on your journey in becoming trauma responsive in your family engagement. The parents and families you're working with are so fortunate to have you in partnership with them. Thank you.

- [Jessica] Thank you so much, Julie. This was wonderful and I love learning about the difference in family involvement versus family engagement. I think those two things are something that people have used interchangeably. So I really appreciate this and all the other wonderful information you've shared with us today. I wanna thank everybody for joining us. We hope you'll come back and see us soon. Everybody have a great day.