



Conversations to Connect: Engaging Families in EI via Videoconferencing

Marilyn Espe-Sherwindt, PhD



mespeshe@kent.edu

Project TREES

Growing in videoconferencing experience and confidence!

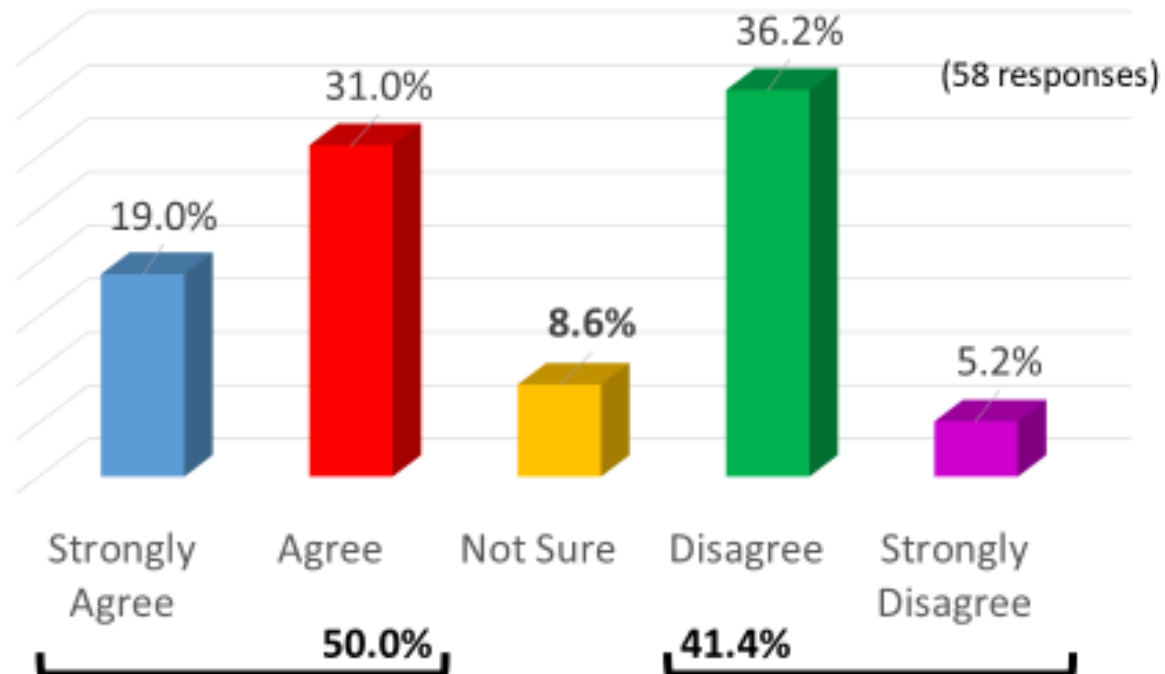


March

September

EI Teams

I still worry about my ability to effectively work with families during virtual home visits.



Today

- Why is engagement worth talking about?
- What is engagement?
- Five more strategies that promote engagement during videoconferencing
- Some final tips about the tech



Poll #1



I AM NOT AN
EARLY BIRD OR A
NIGHT OWL.
I AM SOME FORM
OF PERMANENTLY
EXHAUSTED PIGEON.

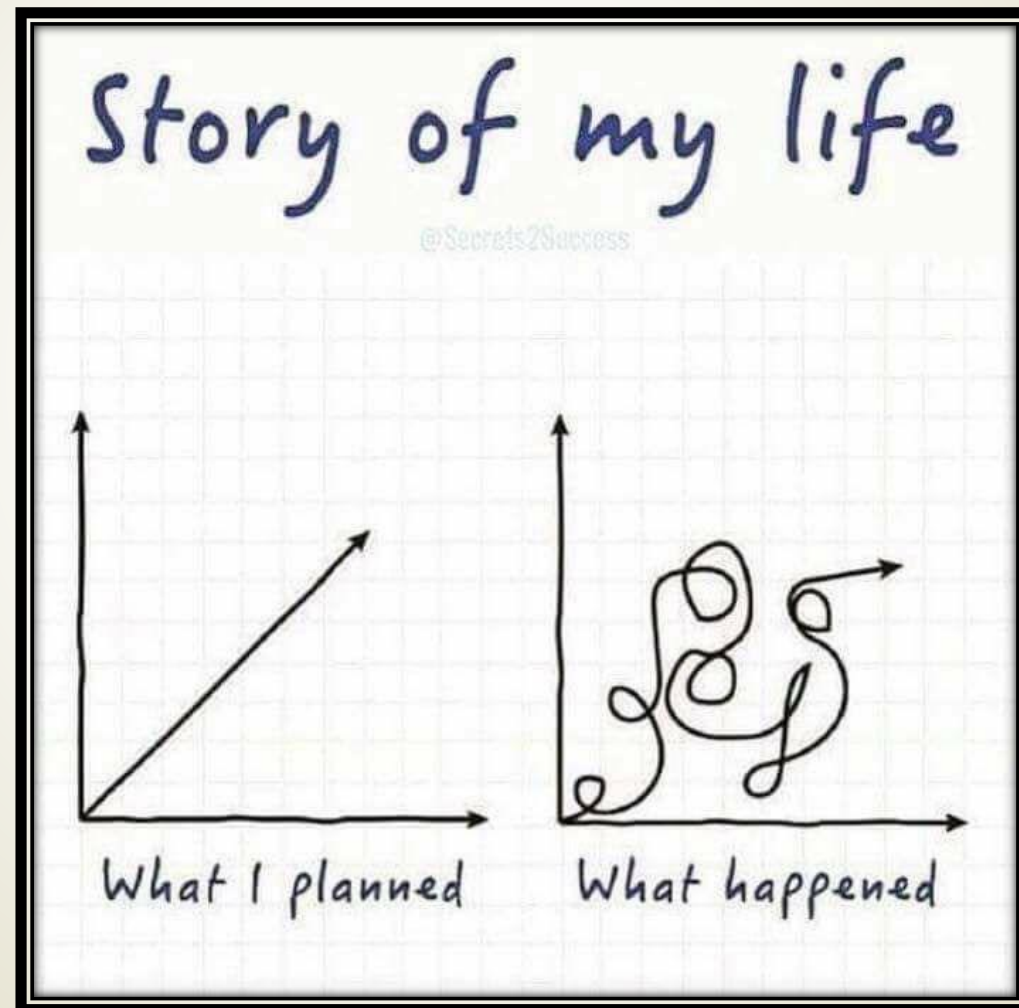
Why is engagement worth talking about?



- 1) The family journey
- 2) The change in EI paradigms
- 3) Engagement and outcomes



1. The Family Journey



“When my son first got diagnosed, we knew we weren’t the first, but we felt alone.”
Parent participating in Project TREES 2017 focus groups



"I felt alone, alone and trapped."
Parent participating in Project TREES 2017 focus groups



João Ferreira
PHOTOGRAPHY

“At night I wake up and worry, what will
happen if I’m not here.”

Parent participating in Project TREES 2017
focus groups





“Your expectations of what your life was going to be like, the picture that you have . . .
that’s the thing you give up, the picture of what it was going to be.”

Parent participating in Project TREES 2017 focus groups



“I felt lonely and isolated . . . constantly going to doctors’ appointments, always felt like I was going somewhere, I didn’t really have anyone else to relate to, all my friends were getting excited about their child’s milestones.”

Parent participating in Project TREES 2017 focus groups



“Leaving EI, I felt like a baby bird pushed out of the nest.”
Parent participating in Project TREES 2017 focus groups

2. The shift in paradigms

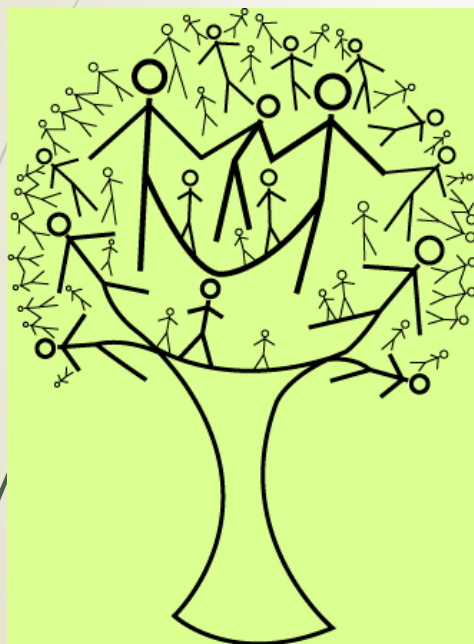
- EI has shifted “from viewing the child with special needs as the key recipient of services to viewing the child’s parents, caregivers and family as the principal recipients of services and supports.”

— Raver & Childress, 2015, p. 32

What is EI in 2020?

16

The different types of parenting supports . . .

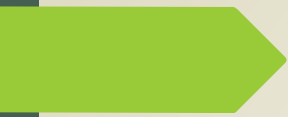


- ▶ provided by early childhood practitioners and other social network members . . .
- ▶ that provide parents the **time, energy, knowledge and skills** . . .
- ▶ to engage their children in everyday child learning opportunities . . .
- ▶ that promote and enhance both child and parent confidence and competence.



Project TREES Definition of Supporting Families

Supporting families is a constellation of beliefs, values, strategies, and relationships that strengthen families during their time in Ohio Early Intervention, enhancing their capacity to flourish and face the future with increased resilience, self-efficacy, well-being and optimism.



➡ “Achieving better child outcomes requires that we pay attention to the adults who care for them.”



-- Jack Shonkoff, 11/13/17

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/>

3. Engagement and Outcomes

- The more engaged families are, the stronger the outcomes.
- Successful EI depends on families being engaged.

-- Peterson, Luze, Eshbaugh, Jeon & Ross Kantz, 2007;
Levine & Keilty, 2017

What is engagement?





22

Poll #2



October, 2019



April, 2020



00:46



vimeo

What is engagement?

23

- Connection, indicating a trust and investment in the EI process
- Characterized by interest, initiation, and active participation by both families AND professionals

-- Peterson, Luze, Eshbaugh, Jeon & Ross Kantz, 2007;
Levine & Keilty, 2017

What is engagement?

24

- The process of engagement happens not only at the beginning of EI but also later on during each intervention visit, regardless of whether you're in the family's home or looking at them on your computer screen
- Engagement is not a destination – it's an ongoing process throughout the family's EI journey
- Engagement is EVERYONE's responsibility

What is engagement?

25

- Characterized by different levels or dimensions:
 - The family is present and available
 - The family is involved
 - The family is applying supports provided (informational, emotional, material – for the child AND family)
 - The family is generalizing (strategies, problem-solving, self-efficacy)

-- Wagner, Spiker, Linn, Gerlach-Downie & Hernandez, 2003; Levine & Keilty, 2017

Hello = Engagement

(Not just during the first moments of getting to know the family, but also during the first moments of each visit)

- Recognize that the family is **already engaged**: they are present and available (either on the phone, across from you in their home, or across from you on the screen)
- Early Intervention AND videoconferencing AND the pandemic are new to families, something they did not expect
- You have your “foot in the door”:

Now what?

Our Foundation for Engaging Families

27

Relational Practices

- Active Listening
- Empathy
- Authenticity
- Credibility
- Honesty
- Understanding
- Interest
- Trust in family competence
- Sharing information



Professional Knowledge

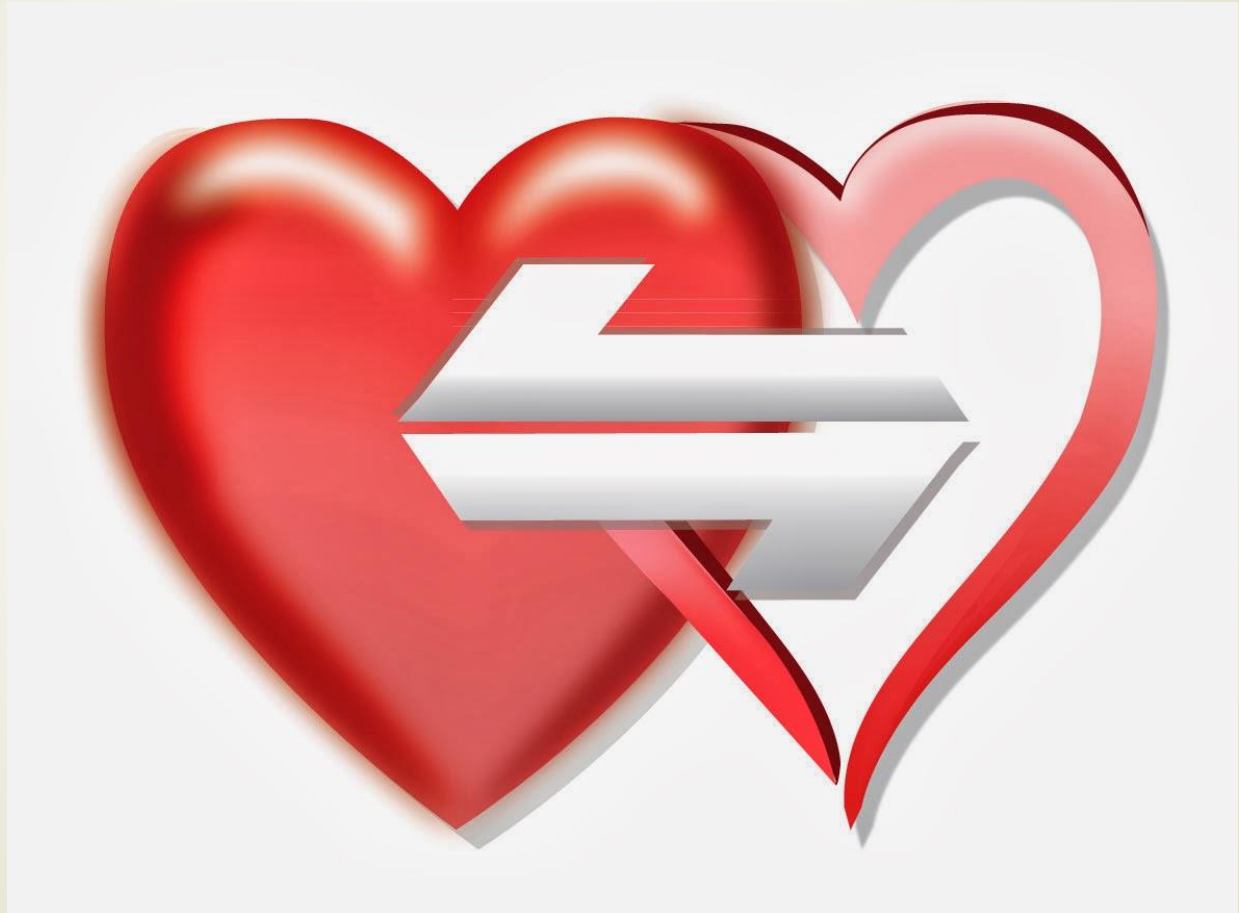
- Training
- Professional experience
- Specialization
- Professional competence
- Knowing and using evidence-based practices

Participatory Practices

- Encouraging families to use their existing knowledge and capabilities
- Helping families learn new skills
- Encouraging parents to make their own decisions

Now What?

A: Express an Attitude of Caring



-- Levine & Keilty, 2017

Now What?

29

A: Express an Attitude of Caring

- Often families enter EI at the same time they have heard the unexpected news about their child
- “Sometimes, EI professionals can become so focused on the immediacy of promoting child development that the emotional aspect of parenting a child with developmental delays or disabilities is forgotten (Brotherson, et al., 2010; Lee 2015).” (Levine & Keilty, 2017, p. 41)
- Engaging families requires emotional support as much as (if not more than) informational or materials support

-- Levine & Keilty, 2017

© 2013 Kevin Spear www.kevinspear.com



"Wait! Stop! This isn't part of the script."

A: An Attitude of Caring

31

- Why is it so difficult for us to acknowledge and respond to the family's feelings?
 - We might not see it as our responsibility. We might not know what to say. We worry that we might say the wrong thing and make it worse. So we say nothing.
- "The failure to respond to parents' emotions, however, sends its own message – that their feelings are foolish or unimportant to you." (PJ McWilliam, 2010, p. 141)
- "You as professionals have the opportunity to allow us our feelings, even to invite us to 'fall apart' once in a while in the presence of someone who understands and cares. Your compassion and nonjudgmental attitude can be a gift that decreases our sense of isolation, softens our stress . . ." (Fialka, 2001, p. 23)

A: An Attitude of Caring

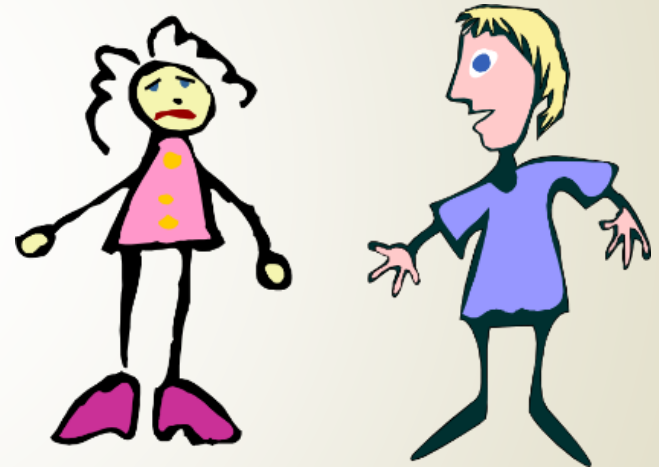
32

- 1) We must resist the urge to encourage parents to look on the bright side. (Brené Brown: Avoid “Well, at least . . .”)
- 2) We must resist the urge to jump in with suggestions on how to fix what is bothering them.
- 3) We want to acknowledge their feelings. Then leave a space of silence for the parent to continue.
- 4) Remember: Acknowledging feelings doesn't mean we are responsible for resolving their worries, fears, anger or sadness.

-- PJ McWilliam, 2010

How Do We Show We Care?

- Words
- The tone of our voice
- Listening between the words
- Facial expressions
- Head movements
- Hand gestures
- Body posture
- Eye contact/eye gaze
- Physical distance from each other
- The context



More on these ideas later!

Now What?

A: Express an Attitude of Caring



“It’s harder to show how much you care when you are less able to see body language. I try to be more obvious with my body language - bigger smiles in response to their comments, more nodding, thumbs up kinds of responses. With videoconferencing, if you speak, the sound can get weird and cut each other off. This can be frustrating and sometimes feel like people are interrupting. So I have to use less “uh huh” kinds of comments as they are speaking and more nodding, smiles, etc. I use more wait time to make sure they have finished their thoughts before I reply.”

A: An Attitude of Caring

35

- Caring is how we begin to engage and connect to families
- “Basically, EI professionals show they care about the family by seeing the world from the family members’ perspectives.” (Levine & Keilty, 2017)



36

Goat?

Poll #3



or Bird?

Now What?

B: Set Shared Expectations



-- Levine & Keilty, 2017

Now What?

38

B: Set Shared Expectations

- Families come to us not knowing much about EI
- We can promote engagement by sharing what EI is and how it works (not just at the beginning but throughout their EI journey)
- However, the key word is SHARED
- We need to understand how EI fits into what parents already know, what they think about parenting, what they think about disability, what they think about child development (not just at the beginning but throughout their EI journey)

-- Levine & Keilty, 2017



Now What?

B: Set Shared Expectations

- What have you been told about your child?
- How does that fit with what you know and believe about your child?
- What do other people say about your child?
- Whose opinion makes the most sense to you?

(McWilliam, Winton & Crais, 1996)

Now What?

B: Set Shared Expectations



“We have conversations at the beginning of working together about how this can look. I ask them what kinds of learners they are and try to offer them more of that type of learning. For observers, I might model more. Readers I give more reading material for them to read on their own and discuss later. Those that like to practice, we set up the devices so I can do more in the moment feedback, coaching, etc. There is wait time to encourage caregivers to share their thoughts – so it doesn’t become me just talking at them.”

“I ask them, ‘Where would you meet with me if I came to your house?’ as a starting point to where they should put their computer/phone...etc...”

Shared Expectations about EI via Videoconferencing

“My child won’t stay engaged with the screen”



PARADIGM SHIFT

- “Hands-on” v. coaching
- In-person v. virtual
- March: No time to “prepare”
- Hard for us, hard for families

Now What?

C: Assure Family Relevance



-- Levine & Keilty, 2017

Now What?

43

C: Assure Family Relevance

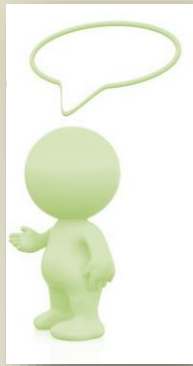
- When we understand what's most important to the family, the family is more likely to be engaged.
 - Why did the family come to EI?
 - What's most important to them?
 - Where do they feel they need the most support right now?
- Not just at the beginning but throughout their EI journey!

-- Levine & Keilty, 2017

Now What?

44

C: Assure Family Relevance



"I always try my best to build rapport with the families at the beginning of each session. I think this is a great time to get to know what's going on so I can individualize and adapt to where the family is today."

"I'm cutting parents more slack and encouraging parents to cut themselves more slack because everyone is stressed right now, and no one is at their best when they are stressed. I'm also spending more time talking with parents about engaging activities to do with their children at home since everyone is getting out of the house less often."

"What was a priority before the stay-at-home order may not be a priority right now. Families' priorities have changed. Their 'goals' might be different now."

Now What?

D: Expect Family Engagement



-- Levine & Keilty, 2017

Now What?

D: Expect Family Engagement

- Family engagement depends on families being an active part of the EI process from the very beginning (our use of participatory practices).
- How do we create a shared focus, encourage families to make decisions, and promote family confidence and competence?
- Not just at the beginning but throughout their EI journey!

-- Levine & Keilty, 2017

Now What?

D: Expect Family Engagement



"If I'm struggling to see or hear the parent when they are talking to me or playing with their child, my visit will be less effective, and it can get in the way of relationship building. I've also learned to be conversational and to make sure I'm not talking for too long without stopping to check in with the parent and ask a question or ask for an example. It can be harder to pick up social cues on camera, so those frequent check-ins are important."

"My enthusiasm for their child comes across in my observations of their child and each of them instead of the family observing ME with their child. I think that this can promote MORE empowerment of the parents' ability to work with their child. I have enjoyed the role of less hands on because I feel that the parents I am working with begin feeling more powerful and more able than if they watched me have success with their child."

On a side note . . .

48

More challenging to demonstrate caring, set shared expectations, assure family relevance and expect family engagement

- Paperwork
- Screenings
- Battelle/Bayley

Easier to demonstrate caring, set shared expectations, assure family relevance and expect family engagement

- Conversations/asking about the family's story
- Ecomap
- RBI
- The IFSP



- “Basically, EI professionals show they care about the family by seeing the world from the family members’ perspectives.” (Levine & Keilty, 2017)

5

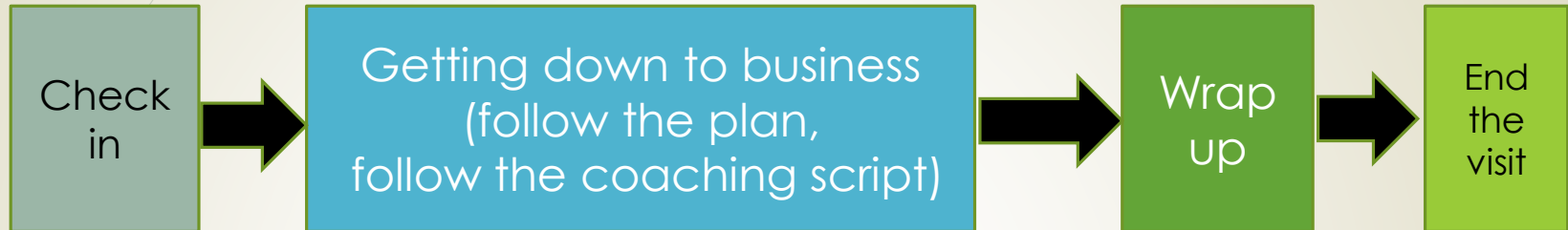
Five more strategies that promote engagement (whether you're physically or virtually in the family's home)



1. “Checking In”

- ✓ 1. An Attitude of Caring
- ✓ 2. Set Shared Expectations
- ✓ 3. Assure Family Relevance
- ✓ 4. Expect Family Engagement

This?



Or this?



1. Checking In

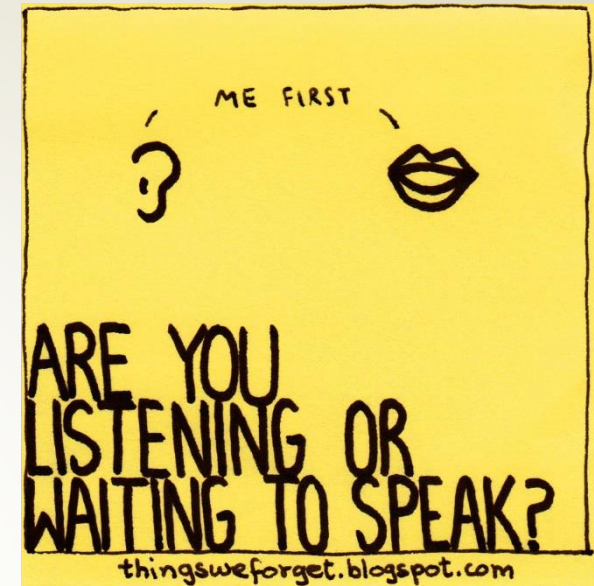


“Checking in is so important. That IS the start of the intervention. And it’s even deeper now. We’re more aware of that now, what it means to families, what it means to us to learn what they’re going through right now.”

“ That’s what EI is. Really listening, checking in. EI isn’t a strategy, isolated in its own silo, here’s your to-do today. It should always be woven into the family’s life. So checking in is the important part, where it give us so many rich, current experiences and we can embed all of our own content into that. That is the goal. Things shouldn’t be isolated.”

“Checking in happens all throughout the visit. Families are always talking about what comes to mind, and we’re tying it to the strategy or plan for today. Some parents might not have much to say at the beginning, but it comes up later.”

“The check-ins support the relationships that we’re building with families. The more you refer back to what the family has shared with you, it shows that you’ve listened and that you care.”



- ✓ 1. An Attitude of Caring
- ✓ 2. Set Shared Expectations
- ✓ 3. Assure Family Relevance
- ✓ 4. Expect Family Engagement

2. Listening

2. Listening “Behind” and “Between” the Words



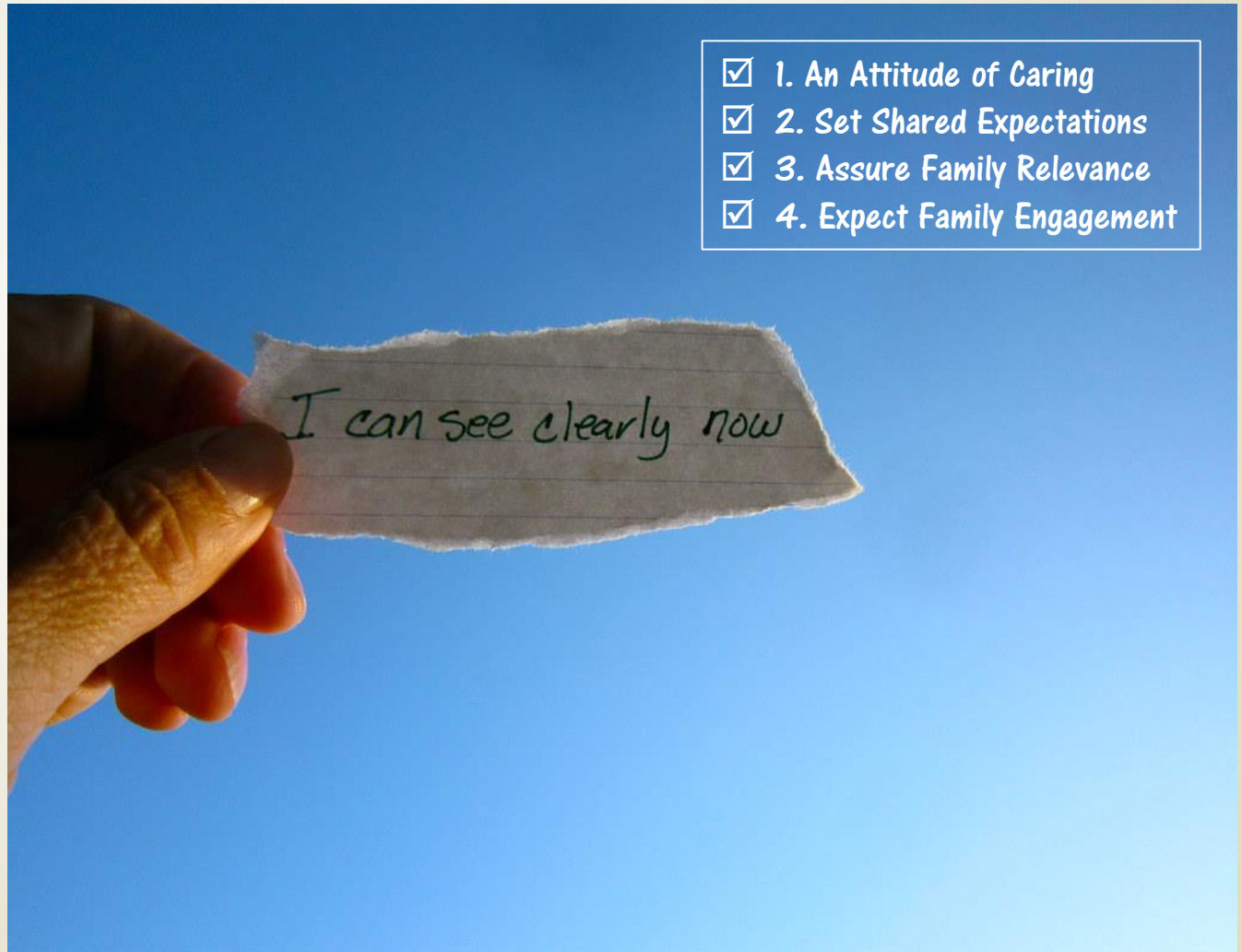
“It can be hard to listen for and respond to feelings, especially when I have my own agenda to get through during the session, but it’s very important because it’s how I built the relationship with the family, and the stronger the relationship, the more effective my intervention will be.”

“I acknowledge them and do not dismiss them. I often say those feelings are valid and are challenging. If these feelings dominate the discussion, I try to ask the families what could I do to help them with this situation.”

“It’s important to respond to the families’ feelings because I want them to understand that the information they share is as important as whatever I might be sharing with them.”

3. Seeing Clearly

- ✓ 1. An Attitude of Caring
- ✓ 2. Set Shared Expectations
- ✓ 3. Assure Family Relevance
- ✓ 4. Expect Family Engagement



3. Seeing Clearly



“I pay attention to what the parent is saying and to how they are saying it. I give them time to talk and try not to rush them or put words in their mouth. I try not to make assumptions. I use reflective comments like, “That sounds really hard” and “Wow, I would be frustrated too.” I also find it effective to share stories about other families I’ve worked with (keeping HIPAA in mind, of course) who’ve dealt with similar challenges so that the parent knows they are not alone.”

“The more I listen and see and understand, the more I can adapt the information I have to share to the needs of their family and child.”

4. “Leaning In”

- ✓ 1. An Attitude of Caring
- ✓ 2. Set Shared Expectations
- ✓ 3. Assure Family Relevance
- ✓ 4. Expect Family Engagement

“In body language, learning forward (in) is generally understood to convey interest and engagement whereas leaning back conveys detachment and lack of interest.”

<http://English.stackexchange.com>



4. Leaning In



“I’ve learned to pay attention to my ‘resting face.’ I’ve worked on the expression I use when I’m just listening to a family – I want them to see how I’m interested in and care about what they are sharing with me. I try to have a warm smile that encourages families to keep sharing and talking with me. And if the tech glitches or freezes, you want to be frozen on screen with a pleasant face.”

“I try to give a lot of nonverbal feedback (nodding, smiling) because sometimes verbal feedback (mmm hmm, yes, I hear you) can cause tech interference, though it depends on the connection.”

“I’ve had families say, ‘I can feel you coming through the computer. You’re really here with me.’”

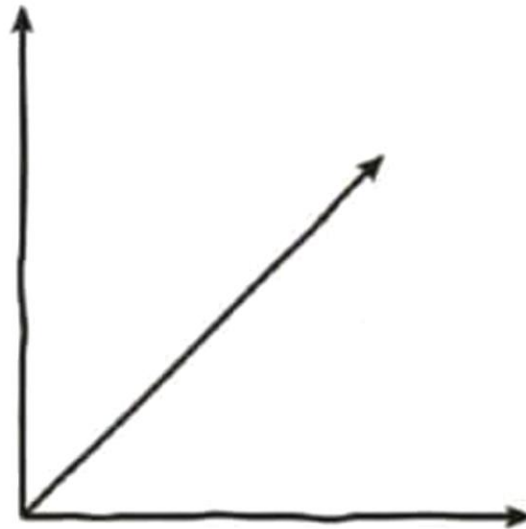
5. Understanding Stress and Learning



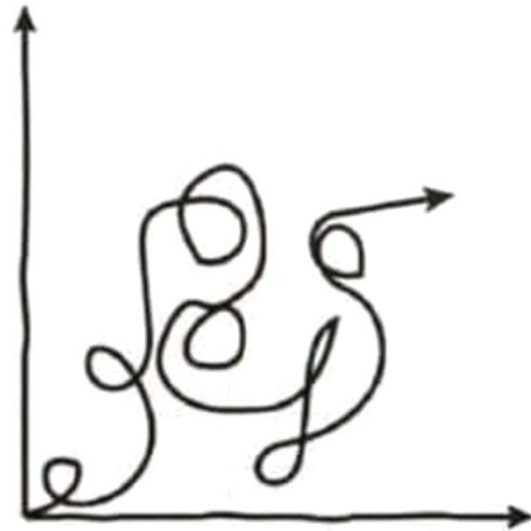
“Our emotional resilience and our ability to learn are inextricably interwoven . . . Stressed brains are resistant to new learning.”

Cozolino, 2013

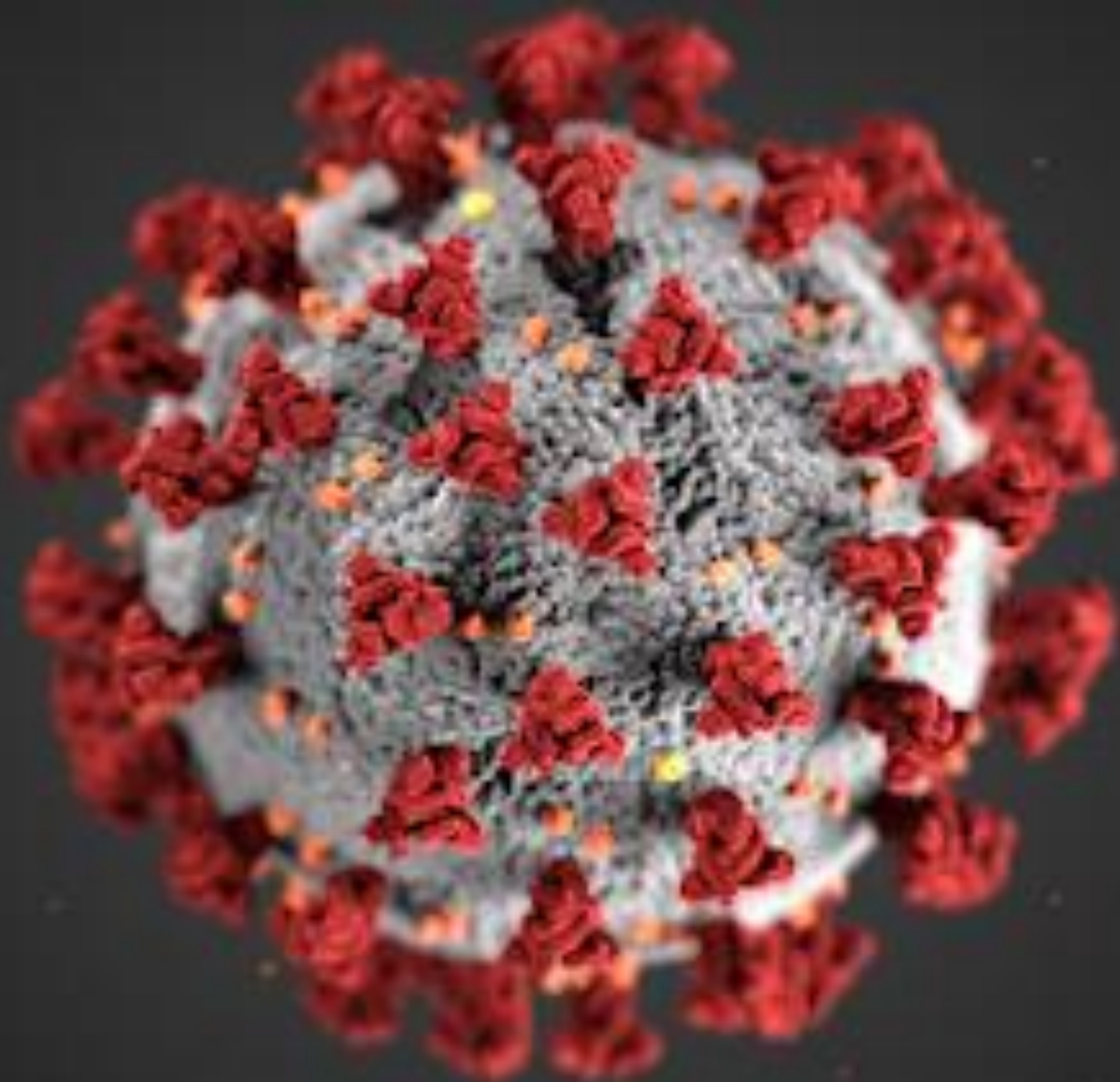
Story of my life



What I planned



What happened

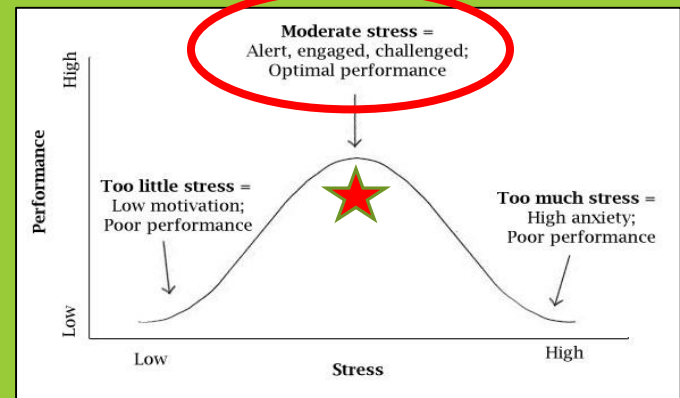


5. When we're working with a learner who is stressed . . .

Social Neuroscience



Trust and a sense of safety



Moderating the stress



Activating cognition and emotion



Together building a new story

“It is becoming increasingly evident that facial expressions, ~~physical contact~~, and eye gaze connect us in constant communication exchanges with those around us. It is within this interpersonal matrix that our brains are built, rebuilt, and regulated.” (Cozolino, 2013, p. 18)



5. Understanding Stress and Learning



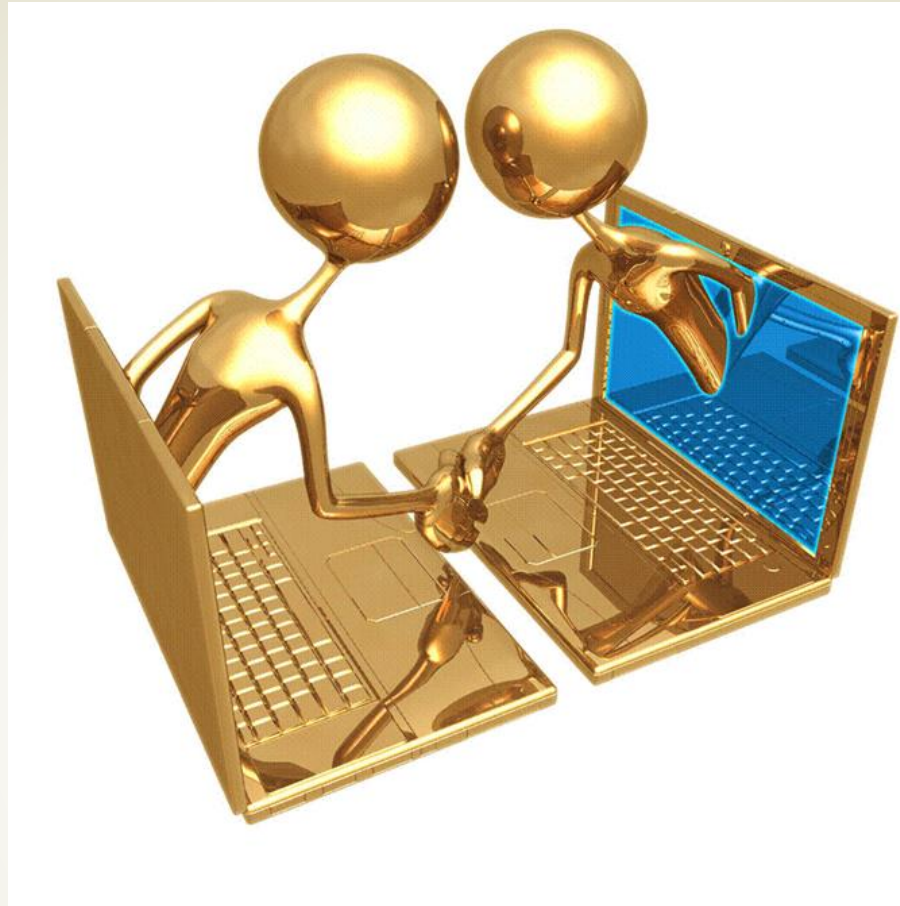
- “Even if I can’t touch and physically play and model with a child, I have been stretched to learn words to describe what I would have tried.”
- “I focus on the parent and what makes them great and what are their strengths to grow **INSTEAD** of taking what my strengths are. The kids don’t live with me. They live with their parents. It does not matter if I can be successful playing with their kids. I’m my own person with my own strengths and weaknesses. My job is **NOT** to make parents and caregivers into **MINI me’s**... it’s to help them be the best parent **THEY** can be. So, my strength needs to be finding the parents’ strengths. Being on virtual visits forced me to look deeper into a parents’ strengths...and begin to trust that different parents in different homes can be successful.”

When we use these concepts in our work with families – whether we're physically in the family's living room or seeing their living room on our computer screen – we are connecting with families, promoting family engagement building strong, supportive relationships, creating the context for learning, and enhancing the family's feelings of self-efficacy and well-being.

65


The biggest surprise for me has been that I am able to form relationships with my tele families that are just as strong as the relationships I form with my in-person families. I can't believe how connected I feel to some of my tele families who I have never met in person! It's pretty incredible.





Some Final Tips about the Tech

Build Your Video Conferencing Skills: For Home Visitors - And Everyone Else!

This entertaining video presents important tips for improving your video conferencing skills. The lighthearted narration and whimsical illustrations can help you identify key technical, environmental, and interactional aspects to keep in mind. Download the accompanying  [one-page checklist](#) to assess your skills while watching the video.



<https://youtu.be/NOFszpSwxBs>

Build Your Video Conferencing Skills! For Home Visitors - and Everyone Else!

Self-Assessment Checklist

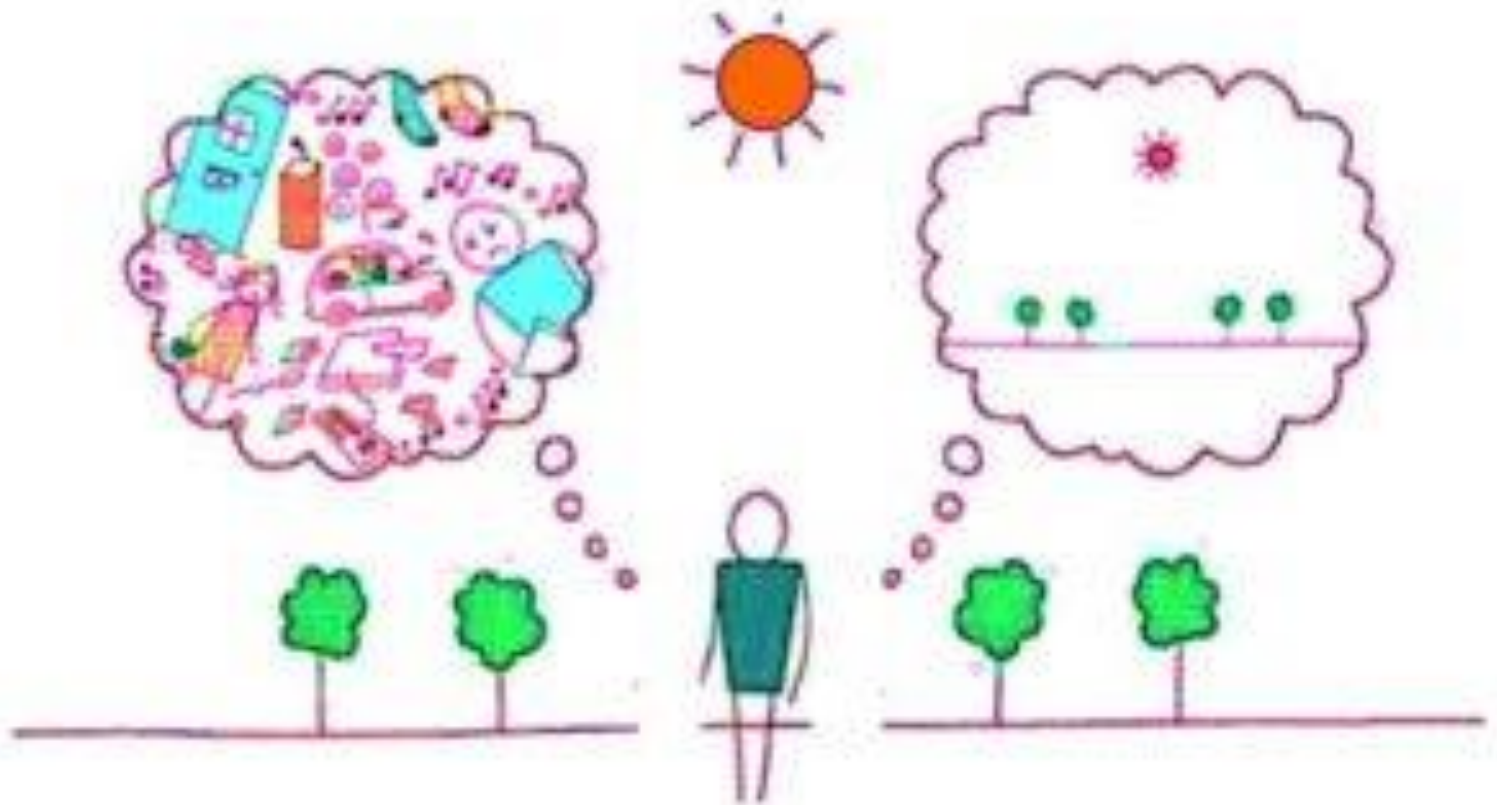
By Larry Edelman larry.edelman@cuanschutz.edu

Illustrations By Sam Bartlett sambartlett.com



Recommended Tips	I do this well!	I should work on this!
Technical Stuff		
1. Use a computer		
2. Use the right video app		
3. Maximize your bandwidth		
4. Turn off other apps		
5. Produce good-enough audio		
6. Make sure you can hear		
7. Produce good enough video		
8. Get ready before the call		

Mind Full, or Mindful?



"I need to spend 10-15 minutes before each session, not only to go over what we planned, but also to clear my head."

Your Environment		
9. Protect others' privacy		
10. Let there be light		
11. Minimize unwanted noise		
12. Eye to eye		
13. What's in back?		

Working from Home

71

It's been a long week.



Tips from EI teams at FCLC

- Getting ready for the visit
 - What's in front of you and what's behind you in the background
- Privacy during the visit
 - Headphones, doors closed
- Handling the interruptions on your end
 - Alert the family that it's possible
 - Narrate when it happens
 - Make it a positive
- Relationships and engagement can become even stronger
 - Families know they're not alone in their struggles
 - An opportunity for understanding, "grace," and mutual "joy amidst the chaos"

Interactions		
14. Be yourself		
15. Maintain eye contact		
16. Pay attention to non-verbal communication		
17. Take turns		
18. Do. Not. Multitask.		

For more information on using video conferencing for home visits, please refer to [Video Conferencing 101: Guidance for early interventionists on using video conference for home visits \(and other purposes\) during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

Conversations to engage and connect require synchrony: the interplay of talk, gestures, movement and timing.

- We are social animals
- We depend on physical/nonverbal gestures: eye contact, hugs, handshakes, being in close proximity, singing together, eating together
- Engagement & connection depend on cues (often subtle and tiny) when we are talking together
- If we're physically not in the same room, how do we make those cues explicit?



If during the majority of the visit the camera is only on the child,
you can't see the family, and they may not be able to easily see you.
It may be harder to read each other's cues.
It may be harder to maintain "connection."
It may be harder to know if the family is engaged.

Conversations to engage and connect require synchrony: the interplay of talk, gestures, movement and timing.

- Use a platform that is less likely to freeze or have delays
- Make sure the family is able to see you
 - Prop your laptop so that you're looking in a straight, horizontal line
 - Your face should be lit from the front
 - Your face should take up enough of the screen that the family can see your "nonverbals" but not so close to cause psychological discomfort!
 - Be animated. Use clear facial expressions. Use gestures to avoid being just a talking head reading the news.

Conversations to connect require synchrony: the interplay of talk, gestures, movement and timing.

- Make sure you are able to see the family, not just the child
 - It's okay to "experiment" with the family about the best place and lighting for their screen
 - It's okay to ask the family at any point to either move the screen or their own positions so you can see each other
 - It's important that you can see the family's faces and their "nonverbal"
 - Listen for feelings, not just for facts
 - "How do you feel about this" is often not a request for feelings but a different way of asking "What do you think about this"



“It’s still the same as face to face intervention in terms of what your goals are in working with and coaching families. It can be more tiring though because it’s exhausting to be engaged with the screen and “on” all the time. In a face to face session, you are able to easily disengage from the focus and conversation with the caregivers and naturally take a break from conversation when you look at or interact with the child. In videoconferencing, you have to constantly be focused on the screen for the entire session – there isn’t the opportunity to shift away because it makes you appear disinterested, aloof, uncaring, etc. This could then affect rapport and the relationship.”

Conversations to engage and connect need to be more intentional, planful, “in tune” and focused during a videoconference. That’s hard work, both physically and emotionally! That’s why videoconferencing can be exhausting! And . . .



It isn't just families who are stressed and exhausted right now. We are, too!







Welcome To
UNCERTAINTY

2020

Est. ~~2008~~



We thought it would be this . . .

But it's this



**KEEP
CALM**

AND

**MARATH
ON**

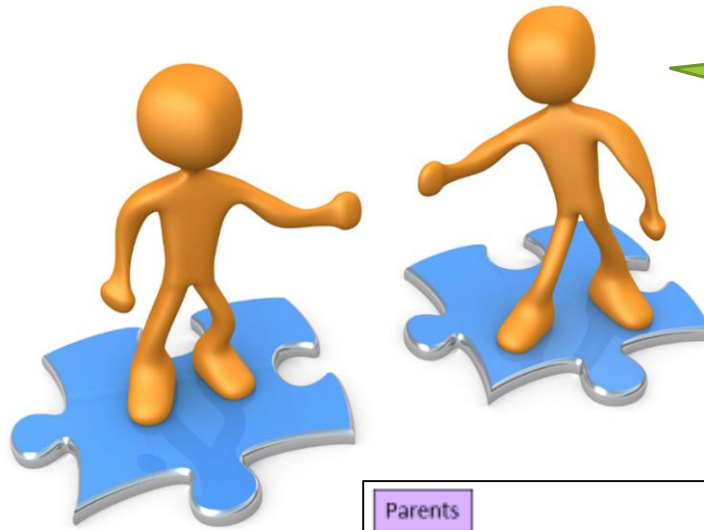
Training for a Marathon



- Find a good training plan.
- Fear will replace excitement.
- Running is hard. Your feet may hurt.
- Learn how to fuel your body (and mind!).
- Rest and recovery are non-negotiable.
- Everything can go wrong during 26.2 miles.
- Life goes on!
- Build your mental game. You are stronger than you think.
- You can do this! And you already are!

<https://www.active.com/running/articles/9-things-no-one-tells-you-about-training-for-a-marathon>

<https://www.self.com/story/how-to-train-for-a-marathon-if-never-run-one-before>

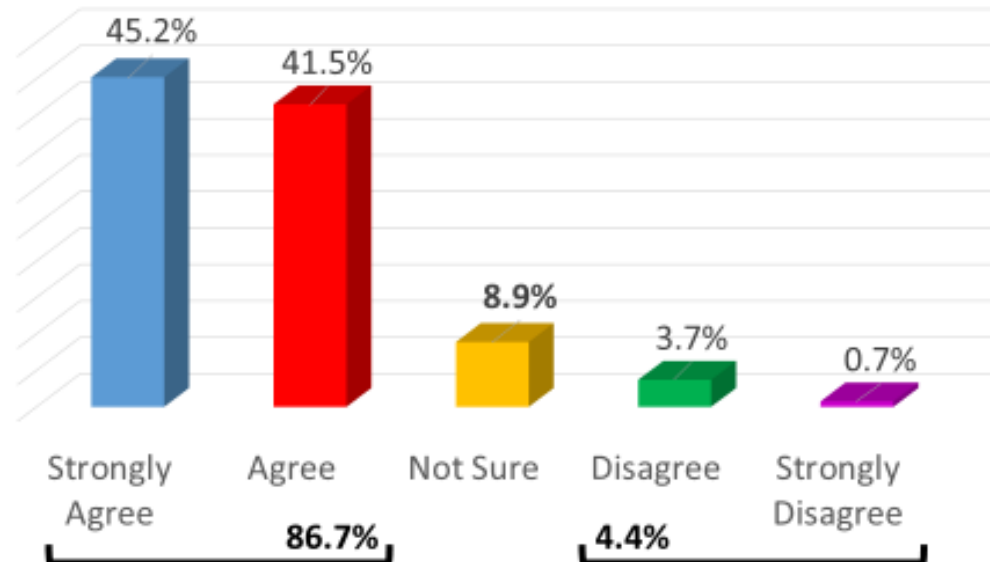


"I'm not sure I can engage families if I'm not in their home."

Parents

Receiving EI services via the internet did not interfere with my relationship with my provider.

(135 responses)





Relationships are just as strong

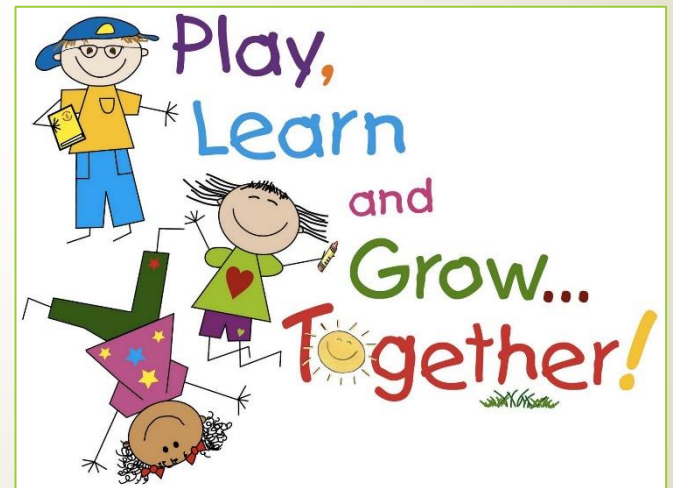


Professionals become better “coaches”

What We're Learning about EI via Videoconferencing



Families are empowered



Children make similar progress
(sometimes even more!)



What are your thoughts about this morning?
Anything I can explain more clearly?
Which pieces and parts will be most useful to you?



THANK YOU!