Trauma, Toxic Stress and Resilience in Early Childhood

27th NIHSDA Management Training Conference

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Head Start National Center on Early Childhood Health & Wellness

Our Goal:
Fostering a Culture of Health and Wellness for Children, Families, Staff, and Communities

Our Foundation:
School Readiness Begins with Health!
Learning Objectives

Participants will be able to:

PART 1:

1. Define trauma
2. Describe the potential impact of adverse experiences (toxic stress) on young children
3. Identify signs and symptoms of trauma in infants, toddlers and preschoolers
4. Identify steps to support children and families who have experienced trauma.
Learning Objectives

Participants will be able to:

PART 2:

1. Define resilience
2. Identify strategies to build protective factors for young children and their families

What is Trauma?
Trauma occurs...

when frightening events or situations overwhelm a child's ability to cope or deal with what has happened

Group Discussion:

What kinds of potentially traumatic experiences do children and families face in your programs?
Toxic Stress

Positive
Brief increases in heart rate, mild elevations in stress hormone levels.

Tolerable
Serious, temporary stress responses, buffered by supportive relationships.

Toxic
Prolonged activation of stress response systems in the absence of protective relationships.

-experiencing strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity
-can disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems, and
-increase the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment, well into the adult years

What Happens When We Experience Toxic Stress or Trauma?
Stress Responses

FIGHT

FLIGHT

FREEZE

The Body’s Reaction to Stress

Respiración

Sudor

Brazos & Piernas

HEART beats faster

Corazón

LIVER releases sugar into blood for added energy

Hígado

BLOOD PRESSURE rises

Presión arterial

STOMACH vessels constrict to force blood elsewhere

Estomago

ARMS AND LEGS receive extra blood for energy

Brazos & Piernas

Reacción del Cuerpo Humano al Estrés

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Physiological Adaptation to Stress

• Increase immediate availability of energy
• Increase oxygen intake
• Inhibit growth, digestion, reproductive function, pain perception
• Increase blood flow to important flight/flight areas
• Enhancement of memory/performance
• Boost immune function
• Release of mood stabilizers & endorphins

The Impact of Adverse Experiences: Years Later

Lessons from the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)
Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Outcomes
Knowing the Signs & Symptoms
Signs and Symptoms of Trauma in Infants and Toddlers

- Eating & Sleeping disturbance
- Clingy/separation anxiety
- Irritable/difficult to soothe
- Repetitive/post-traumatic play
- Developmental regression
- Language delay
- General fearfulness/new fears
- Easily startled
- Reacting to reminders/trauma triggers
- Difficulty engaging in social interactions through gestures, smiling, cooing
- Persistent self-soothing behaviors, for example, head banging
- Aggression (toddlers)

Signs and Symptoms of Trauma in Preschoolers

- Avoidant, anxious, clingy
- General fearfulness/new fears
- Helplessness, passive
- Restless, impulsive, hyperactive
- Physical symptoms (headache, etc.)
- Inattention, difficulty problem solving
- Irritability
- Aggressive and/or sexualized behavior
- Sadness
- Repetitive/post-traumatic play
- Talking about the traumatic event and reacting to trauma triggers
- Developmental regression
- Poor peer relationships and social problems (controlling/over permissive)
How Can You Help Children Who Have Experienced Trauma?

Impacts of Trauma on Learning

• Persistent fear states in children can interfere with their ability to learn from educational, social, and emotional experiences

• Exposure to trauma can affect their perception of time, cognitive style, affective tone, problem-solving skills, and ability to respond to and understand rules, regulations, and laws

(Perry, 2001)
Summary

• Adverse experiences can impact very young children
• Obtaining mental health services for children and families who have experienced potentially traumatic experiences can help reduce the negative impact of these experiences

Summary

• Understanding signs of trauma helps make sure children who need help receive it
• Help for children who experience trauma includes help for the caregivers and families who care for them
Part II: Supporting Resilience in Early Childhood

Learning Objectives

PART 2:
Participants will be able to:

1. Define resilience
2. Identify strategies to support and promote protective factors in young children
Resilience Defined

- Recovering from or adjusting to misfortune or change
- The ability to bounce back
- Overcoming the odds
Perfectly Resilient Infant or Toddler

Watch the Still Face Clip

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apzXGEbZh0.
Take Care of Yourself

- One-third of Americans are living with extreme stress and nearly half of Americans (48%) believe that their stress has increased over the past five years.

  Report from the American Psychological Association, 2012

Adults Under Chronic Stress

- Are often more irritable
- Are more likely to be inconsistent
- Have less energy
- Lose a feeling of joy of life
Take Care of Yourself: Tips

www.ecmhc.org

Trauma, Brain and Relationships: Helping Children Heal
How Do You Build Protective Factors in Young Children?

Large Group Conversation

• With children?
• With families?

Provide Consistent, Responsive Caregiving

• Identify a primary caregiver to increase the level of support and encouragement
• Hold, cuddle and rock children
• Respond gently & quickly to cues (smiles, cries, etc.)
• Talk to children about their emotions
• Stay close by as children interact with one another
• Observe each child’s skills
Provide Predictable Routines & A Safe Environment

- Maintain a predictable schedule
- Provide choices
- Provide a safe place for the child to talk or just relax
- Be sensitive to cues the child gives related to the environment- create a soft, nurturing space

Core Strengths for Children
Developed by Bruce Perry
http://www.childtrauma.org/

- Attachment
- Self Regulation
- Affiliation
- Awareness
- Tolerance
- Respect
Supporting Families with Immediate Needs
Know your community supports for:

• Housing, Food, & Clothing
• Job Training
• Transportation
• Health Care and Insurance
• Child Care subsidy
• What else?

Action Plan: How Will You Support Resilience?

List Two Things You Will Do
NCH Resources

http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/center

- Newsletters
- Online courses
- Webinars
- Fact sheets
- T/TA tools

Next Steps...

Action Planning

Evaluation

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Wrap-Up

• What questions do you still have?
• What will you do differently?
• What will you remember?

To Continue the Discussion, Join MyPeers

Email health@ecetta.info and say “I’d like to join MyPeers”
MyPeers Mental Health Consultation Community

Welcome to the Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Co...
Handout 1: What Causes Trauma?

When do children develop mental health problems as a result of a potentially traumatic experience?

- **History of previous trauma**: An individual who had a previous trauma (i.e. death of a family member, victim of violence/abuse, etc.) may be more likely to be traumatized (i.e. develop mental health problems) as a result of this event/experience.

- **History of mental health problems**: Mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse may become worse after a traumatic experience.

- **Impact or proximity of the experience**: Individuals with significant loss (i.e. a family member’s death, injury to self or others) as a result of the event/experience are more likely to have emotional or social problems after the event. Individuals who had a near death experience as a result of the event are also more likely to develop mental health problems. Individuals who were directly involved in the event (i.e. hurt as a result of the experience) are more likely to develop problems than individuals who witnessed the event and individuals who witnessed the event are more likely to develop problems than individuals who heard the event or were nearby.

- **Family mental health problems**: Individuals who had family members with mental health problems are more likely to develop mental health problems resulting from the experience than individuals with family members without mental health problems.

- **Emotional response**: Emotions such as: extreme fear, guilt, helplessness, and shame negatively impact an individual’s ability to recover from a potentially traumatic experience.

- **Dissociation**: A person who experiences the feeling of not being part of the experience (i.e. feels cut off from his body and his surroundings; feels numb to physical and emotional feelings; feels his is floating outside his body; and/or has no memories of the event) is particularly at risk of developing mental problems as a result of the experience.

- **Temperament/outlook on life**: Individuals who are “happy go lucky” or generally optimistic and are rarely phased by things may be less likely to develop problems than individuals who are often negative or frequently perceive themselves as victims in life.
## Handout 2: Signs & Symptoms of Trauma in Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infants and Toddlers</th>
<th>Preschoolers</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Sadness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty giving consistent and accurate cues to caregivers</td>
<td>Loss of developmental milestones</td>
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<td>Restless, impulsive, hyperactive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persistent self-soothing behaviors, for example, head banging</td>
<td>Physical symptoms (headache, etc.)</td>
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<td>Talking about the traumatic event and reacting to trauma triggers</td>
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<td>Poor peer relationships and social problems (controlling/over permissive)</td>
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Handout 3: Supporting Young Children Who Have Experienced Trauma

Community
Potential Traumatic Experience

Individual Child/Family
Potential Traumatic Experience

No Known Traumatic Experience

Triage
- Mental Health Consultation to assist in determining a child’s needs for further assessment or treatment *
- Acknowledge the experience and offer adults the opportunity to talk about the experience
- Explore the meaning of the experience for child and family
- Offer the opportunity for family or child to receive additional services if they desire

Ongoing Support
- Help children feel safe and secure **
- Offer children multiple opportunities to express their feelings i.e. through play, art, music, dance, etc.
- Staff receive training and consultation

No symptoms of trauma

Showing Symptoms of Trauma

Ask about any potential traumatic experiences

Referral
Follow the program’s policies and procedures for referring a child for further assessment and treatment ***

Mental Health Support
A family may choose to have support in seeking a referral for further assessment and treatment

*Each program should follow their own policies and procedures regarding using their mental health consultant and making referrals to mental health services.

**See the power point presentation, “Trauma and Resilience in Early Childhood” for additional information on how to help children feel safe and secure.

*** See “Facilitating a Referral for Mental Health Services for Children and their Families in EHS/HS” for additional information on making referrals.
Handout 4: Protective Factor Characteristics and Tips to Support Protective Factors

Child Protective Factors: Developing characteristics and behaviors within a child that can buffer or prevent the likelihood of risk

- Age appropriate social emotional competence (child)
  - can share thoughts and feelings appropriately
  - responsible for actions (age appropriate)
  - can manage impulses
  - shows compassion for others
- Likable/easy temperament (child)
- Developing sense of humor (child)
- Able to solicit support from nurturing caregivers (child)
- Has a positive or optimistic view of the future (child)
- Attempts to solve problems appropriately (child/family/school)

Family/School/Community Protective Factors: Characteristics within the family or family members, within the school environment and the community which buffer or protect children against the impact of risk factors

- Strong family members who provide unconditional love (family)
- Encouragement for positive behavior (family, community, school)
- Access to safe environment (family/community/school)
- Role models for behavior (family, schools, community)
- Positive trusting relationships outside of family (community/schools)
- Access to quality early care and education (community/school)
- Positive communication (family, community, school)
- Access to support services and concrete assistance in times of need (community)

Caregiving Tips to Support Protective Factors for Children

With Children:

- Give children individual attention
- Use encouraging comments- refraining from negative or sarcastic comments
- Encourage child’s independence and skill development (helping children with self-help skills, problem solve, get what they need)
- Help children develop positive peer relationships
- Encourage children’s ability to be responsible in age appropriate ways (i.e. take care of their belongings, have a classroom job, clean up the toys)
- Foster love for learning and curiosity for discovering
- Promote early literacy
- Teach children to solve conflicts
- Help children develop self-regulation skills
• Assist children to feel valued (when you listen and give your undivided attention to a child he feels important)
• Notice a child’s strengths each day (comment on their efforts and their attempts to problem solve)

With Families:
• Encourage positive parent child relationships and interactions
• Assist families to develop consistent routines and appropriate limits
• Promote social networks among families
• Provide concrete social support when needed
• Offer information about parenting and child development
• Provide information about activities families can to do at home or in the community
• Encourage families to read to their children
• Develop a trusting respectful relationship with each family (greet each family by name, reach out to each family, persist in getting to know each family)

Provide Consistent, Responsive Caregiving:
• Identify a primary caregiver to increase the level of support and encouragement
• Hold, cuddle and rock children
• Respond gently & quickly to cues (smiles, cries, etc.)
• Talk to children about their emotions
• Stay close by as children interact with one another
• Observe each child’s skills

Provide Predictable Routines and a Nurturing Environment:
• Maintain a predictable schedule
• Provide choices
• Provide a safe place for the child to talk or just relax
• Be sensitive to cues the child gives related to the environment- create a soft, nurturing space

Supporting Families with Immediate Needs:
• Be familiar with community supports and services
• Offer onsite food pantries and clothing closets
• Give referrals to specific individuals at service agencies (not just the agencies themselves) and transportation to those agencies, if needed
• Provide immediate assistance and support in the event of an eviction or other emergency
• Support the family throughout a crisis
• Link family members to jobs, job training, transportation, and other means of economic security
• Serve as an access point for health care, child care subsidies, and other services
• Initiate contact or inviting conversation if staff are concerned about a family problem or emergency*

*The strategies in italics are from the Center for the Study of Social Policy’s Strengthening Families Initiative: http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families/resources/body/staff_handout_-_concrete_support.pdf
Handout 5: Taking Care of Yourself: Managing Your Stress

What causes me stress?

How do I know I am feeling stress (where do I feel it in my body)?

When I begin to feel signs of stress, I will...
Devereux Adult Resilience Survey (DARS)
by Mary Mackrain

Take time to reflect and complete each item on the survey below. There are no right answers. Once you have finished, reflect on your strengths and then start small and plan for one or two things that you feel are important to improve. For fun and practical ideas on how to strengthen your protective factors, use the chapters in this book. For a free copy of the DARS visit www.centerforresilientchildren.org.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Not Yet</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I have good friends who support me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I have a mentor or someone who shows me the way.</td>
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<td>3. I provide support to others.</td>
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<td>4. I am empathetic to others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. I trust my close friends.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Internal Beliefs</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. My role as a caregiver is important.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I have personal strengths.</td>
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<td>3. I am creative.</td>
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<td>4. I have strong beliefs.</td>
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<td>5. I am hopeful about the future.</td>
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<td>6. I am lovable.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Initiative</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. I communicate effectively with those around me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I try many different ways to solve a problem.</td>
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<td>3. I have a hobby that I engage in.</td>
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<td>4. I seek out new knowledge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. I am open to new ideas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. I laugh often.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. I am able to say no.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. I can ask for help.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Control</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. I express my emotions.</td>
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<td>2. I set limits for myself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. I am flexible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. I can calm myself down.</td>
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