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Early Childhood Teaching: From Easing Stress to Increasing Engagement

RESPONDING TO CHILDHOOD TRAUMA:
Building Resiliency in Our Children



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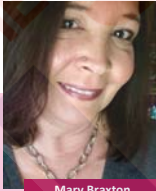
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Our presenters



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Assisting today's presenters

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Today's Objectives

- Acquire facts of childhood trauma and its impact on brain development.
- Learn about typical traumas young children experience and how to identify signs of trauma.
- Obtain strategies to prevent or minimize trauma and its triggers to support young children in the classroom settings.

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Basics of TRAUMA

- Define Trauma
- Understand the impact of trauma on brain development
- Learn how childhood trauma is responded to and stored pre-verbally
- Identify behavioral signs of trauma

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Basics of Trauma

Defining TRAUMA

Trauma is an *individual* response to an Event or enduring condition(s) which we Experience or perceive to be a threat to life, body, to ourselves or a caregiver/family member that overwhelms our ability to function, causing adverse Effects on our wellbeing.

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- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder ("Simple"/Event)
- Complex Trauma - "Developmental" (children)
- "Attachment Trauma"

Helplessness in Harm



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Sequence of BRAIN DEVELOPMENT


BRAINSTEM (BIRTH)	MIDBRAIN/LIMBIC SYSTEM (INFANCY)	CORTEX (PRESCHOOL)
"Language of sensation" survival; regulatory; sensory motor systems	"Language of emotions" feelings alert system attachment	"Language of words" learning, language → self-regulation, planning (executive functions)

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- ★ ALL Early life Experiences *build* brain architecture
- ★ Relationship interactions *create* brain pathways
- ✗ Trauma obstructs healthy development:
 - ✗ causes physiological changes in brain chemistry that *alter* development
 - ✗ disrupts the processing and use of serotonin in the brain

"Children are not resilient, they are malleable"


-Dr. Bruce Perry



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Basics of Trauma

Trauma PHYSIOLOGY



- Primary responses are *instinctual*. THREAT → Releases Energy for 20+ system changes to engage and complete cycle
- “Neural networks”
 - Perceptions, sensations and emotions etch specific neural and behavioral patterns
 - “shaping” → elicit sensations

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Body's Normal Responses to TRAUMA:

Normal RESPONSES

FIGHT	FLIGHT	FREEZE
DEFEND vs. THREAT EMOTION: Anger Screaming Kicking, punching, biting Charging	ESCAPE danger/terror EMOTION: Fear Running Hiding Avoiding	IMMOBILIZE/paralyze/collapse EMOTION: Helplessness, Sad Shock ** Stay completely still, rigid Feign death

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How Trauma is Stored

Procedural MEMORY

(FROM BIRTH)

MEMORY FOR HOW TO DO THINGS

Things the body learns to do, learns how to do.

BIOLOGICAL INSTINCTS/REFLEXES

What our body does in situations of threat, especially mortal threat.
Survival responses: F, F, F

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How Trauma is Stored

Autobiographical MEMORY

(FROM ABOUT THE AGE OF 4)

MEMORIES OR PERSONAL STORIES that have grave significance in our history or development (“personal narrative”)

- Often a turning point
- Are highly emotional
- Are in fragments not yet linked

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Basics of Trauma cont'd.

Types of TRAUMA

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Abuse (betrayal) ▪ Neglect (abandonment) ▪ Exploitation ▪ Accident ** ▪ Illness/Medical procedure** ▪ Violence ▪ Bullying/Harassment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disasters ▪ Relocation - war, terrorism, acculturation ▪ Traumatic grief/separation ▪ Systems: foster care, chaos, insufficiency ▪ Trafficking/Brutality ▪ Others?
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**Most common

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Basics of Trauma cont'd.

PHYSICAL

RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF TRAUMA

- appetite, sleep changes
- aches/pain, itchiness
- poor/uncoordinated/skill regression
- “jumpiness”/easy startle/freeze
- self harm (pulling hair, cutting)
- repetitive aggressive play/talk

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Basics of Trauma cont'd.

EMOTIONAL

- fearful, anxious, overwhelmed
- irritable, angry, inconsolable
- sad, moody, sullen
- over/under reactive

RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF TRAUMA

- refuse/demand/need more help
- avoidant/clingy
- intense shame or guilt
- dissociation (“numb” or “flat”)



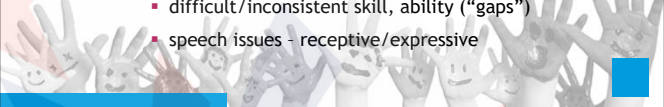
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Basics of Trauma cont'd.

COGNITIVE

- decreased attention, concentration and/or memory problems
- easily distracted
- hypervigilance/hyperarousal
- intrusive thoughts
- difficult/inconsistent skill, ability (“gaps”)
- speech issues - receptive/expressive

RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF TRAUMA



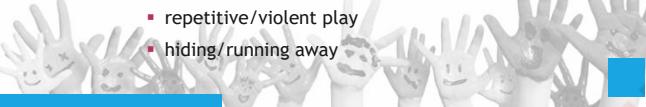
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Basics of Trauma cont'd.

BEHAVIORAL

- over/non compliance, resistance
- aggression/withdrawal
- impulsive
- distrusting
- exaggerations or ‘lying’
- repetitive/violent play
- hiding/running away

RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF TRAUMA



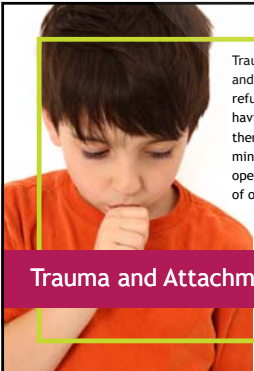
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Effects of TRAUMA ON YOUNG CHILDREN

- ▶ Trauma and Attachment
- ▶ Trauma and Learning



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Trauma affects thinking (→)....disorganized minds...thoughtless and uncaring... Consider though, that some victims...cope by refusing to conceive of their caregiver's thoughts, thus avoiding having to think about their caregiver's wish to harm them...Eventually, they have closed so many doors in their minds they can hardly think about anything." "...leads them to operate on inaccurate assumptions of the thoughts and feelings of others (CC-Fonagy). "...to cope with we all need to be able to think about what other people might be thinking...'read' people.." (CC)

Trauma and Attachment


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“Children in a state of fear retrieve information from the world differently than when calm....s/he lives in an aroused state...in the minute...unable to appreciate the consequences of actions...may react impulsively and not even know why.”
-Perry



Trauma and Learning

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..”these children are prone to experience anything novel, including rules and other protective interventions, as punishments, they tend to regard teachers who try to establish safety as perpetrators.”

—Calmer Classrooms, Van der Kolk

Trauma and Learning

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It's not that they don't *want* to behave, they *can't*.

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SUPPORT

▶ Strategies to Support Young Children



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- A calm, caring, and responsive adult(s) is the KEY to establish healthy development and build resilience.
- Create and ensure safe, stable, responsive environments
- Don't set unrealistic expectations of yourself or the child

What Can We Do?



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- **MIRROR NEURONS** - When two people's eyes meet, they interlink areas of the prefrontal lobe and download inner states into one another.
- When WE are calm, we pass that along!

Positive Relationships → Healthy Brain

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What can we do for all children?

Learning to become:

- Calm
- Confident
- Compassionate

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Trauma Informed CARE What can we do for all children?

- ▶ Take and Make "Universal Precautions"
- ▶ Classroom Environment Considerations
- ▶ Social Climate Strategies
- ▶ Psychological First-Aid
- ▶ Building Support at Your Organization

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Trauma Informed CARE

Universal Precautions What can we do for all children?

- Asks "What happened to you?" vs. "What's wrong with you!"
- Understand and work to Prevent triggers and re-traumatization
- Actively support the healing process
- Identify and build upon personal Strengths using requested resources
- Promote Resilience!!

"How we speak...how we listen...I love you and will protect you."

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Trauma Informed CARE

Classroom Design & ENVIRONMENT What can we do for all children?

- Minimize sensory stimuli (to improve focus)
- Include personal, familiar, cultural items
- Set up defined areas
- Provide soft, cozy, alone, 1-1 space
- Promote independence and choices
- Offer natural and sensory materials
 - Sensory Treasure Chest (Levine, p. 29)
- Allow for movement: in/outdoors
- Foster community: 1-1, small groups

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"Who will care for ME?"



- Policies & Procedures: systems that support interactions, calm down
- Expectations: STRENGTHS based
- Routines: Be predictable! AM/PM Rituals
- Listen and Observe: triggers, supports
- Identify and Label Emotions - Accept feelings!
- Answer tough questions simply and honestly
- PLAY: allows child control, power, safety, processing, independence

The Social Environment


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- *Guidance* - Use a soft, CALM, neutral voice (non-threatening)
- Set clear, firm limits and use Logical (Natural) consequences - Tell them what to do: "Walk"
- Help children comply, use humor and creativity; provide choices
- Give Positive recognition and promote helping/leadership roles

Psychological First-Aid

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- Model and teach regulation skills: "Smell the flowers, blow out the candle."
- Foster Community - Cooperation, Compassion, Understanding, Social skills
- Use TOUCH when accepted (mad vs sad); SMILE!!!
- Offer breaks: in/out of the classroom
- Pick Your Battles: Stay Calm, Be Patient

Building Support at Your Organization

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Healing TRAUMA
IN YOUNG CHILDREN




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- It is easily triggered
- It is signaled by Both Obvious and subtle Signs
- We can learn to look at signs/ signals as a possible need to repair/recover from trauma

When Trauma is Not Healed...



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To heal from trauma, the child must Complete the cycle in the presence of a calm, confident, compassionate container.

-Levine & Kline, 2008, p. 39

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"The energy that needs to be released is survival energy."

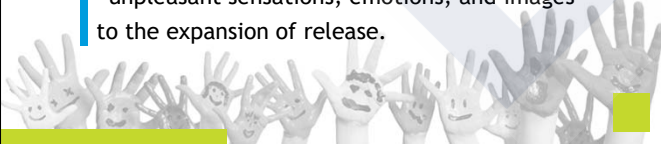
-Levine & Kline, 2008, p. 39

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Healing Trauma in Young Children

"PENDULATION"

"Pendulation" is the process of restoring the child's natural resilience by assisting in completing the energy cycle, moving through "unpleasant sensations, emotions, and images" to the expansion of release.




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"When we are vulnerable, we benefit most from feeling a connection with a calm person who is confident of what to do and is able to convey a sense of safety and compassion."

-Levine & Kline, 2008

Healing Trauma in Young Children



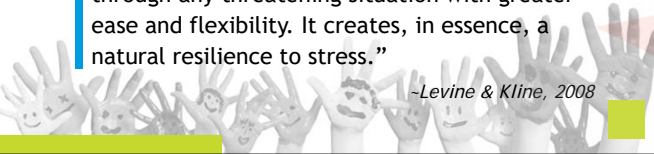
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Healing Trauma in Young Children

Resolving a Stress REACTION

“Resolving a stress reaction does much more than eliminate the likelihood of developing trauma later in life. It also fosters an ability to move through any threatening situation with greater ease and flexibility. It creates, in essence, a natural resilience to stress.”

-Levine & Kline, 2008




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Resources

1. National Traumatic Stress Network - <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/child-trauma-toolkit-educators>
2. "Have You Seen Me?" - <http://beaconhouse.org.uk/useful-resources/>
3. "Building Resilience" - <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/357-building-resilience>
4. Aces Connection Resource Center - Trauma Informed Guides, Presentations, & Self-Assessment Tools <https://www.acesconnection.com/g/resource-center/blog/resource-list-topic-trauma-informed-practice>
5. Childcare Aware of America - <https://usa.childcareaware.org/>
6. Levine, P. A., & Kline, M. (2008). *Trauma-proofing your kids: A parents guide for instilling confidence, joy and resilience*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
7. Sorrels, B. (2015). *Reaching and Teaching Children Exposed to Trauma*. Gryphon House.
8. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, by van der Kolk M.D., Bessel, Penguin Books, New York, NY 2014

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NEXT webinar

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHING: From Easing Stress to Increasing Engagement

Key Strategies for Successfully Creating a Productive Early Childhood Classroom

Wednesday, November 13, 2019 @ 1:00 PM ET

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