Helping Children Birth through Age 5 Rebound from Traumatic Experiences: Creating Classrooms That Support Recovery

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What brings us here

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Each year in United States more than five million children experience some extreme traumatic event. (Childtrauma.com)

There is a growing recognition that children are, if anything, more vulnerable to traumatic experiences than adults. (Childtrauma.com)

Poll: Why are you here?
In this session, we will consider...

- How young children might behave after experiencing trauma.
- How to create an emotional environment, a physical environment and classroom structure that supports children who have experienced trauma.

What helps us feel safe and secure?

- People
- Places
- Routines
- Rituals

What keeps us feeling secure?

- People
- Places
- Routines
- Rituals


A traumatic event is...

...an event that causes physical, emotional, or psychological distress or harm. It is an event that is perceived as a threat to one’s safety or to the stability of one’s world.

A traumatic event is an event that causes physical, emotional, or psychological

Some causes of trauma in children under 6

- Abuse
- Sexual assault
- Witnessing interpersonal violence
- Motor vehicle accidents
- Experiences of natural disasters
- Sudden death of a parent
- Invasive medical procedures

Poll: In your own experience working with children, what types of trauma have you witnessed?

Why is this important for us?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (the ACE Study)

For more information: https://www.aap.org/en-us/Documents/ttb_aces_consequences.pdf
Factors affecting children’s reactions

- Whether the event is ongoing
- How close they were to the event
- Whether or not their basic needs are being met
- Their family situation before the event and how family members react to the event
- Their disposition and resiliency

Taking Care of Caregivers

Burnout Reactions:
- Emotional
- Physical
- Cognitive
- Behavioral or social

Think about...

What are some behaviors you have noticed in children who have experienced trauma?

Cognitive

**Birth to Age 2**
- Poor verbal skills
- Memory problems

**Ages 3 to 6**
- Difficulties focusing or learning in school
- Develop learning disabilities
- Poor skill development
**Behavioral**

- Excessive temper
- Seek attention
- Extreme aggression
- Screams/cry
- Startle easily
- Fear of separation
- Irritable, sad, anxious
- Withdraw from activities
- Fear adults who remind them of the trauma

**Ages 3 to 6**

- Additional behaviors
  - Regressive behaviors
  - Verbally abusive
  - Act out in social situations
  - Re-enact the traumatic event
  - Trouble connecting with others
  - Believe they are to blame for the event

**Physiological**

**Birth to Age 2**

- Eating problems
- Sleep problems
- Nightmares

**Ages 3 to 6**

- Stomach aches/headaches
- Sleep problems
- Nightmares
- Wet the bed or self after being toilet trained and other regressive behaviors

**Children’s Thinking**

- Generalize
- Literal
- Egocentric
- Concrete
- Focus on one attribute at a time
- Reality vs. fantasy

**Regardless of the source of the trauma, the way we address child trauma in early childhood programs is very similar.**

**How do we support children in our care?**

- People
- Places
- Routines
- Rituals

Create a classroom community

One-on-one relationships are the basis for feelings of security

Be the anchor

Hold and comfort distressed children

Responding to children in crisis
- These relationships are critical to children’s recovery.
- Children need to know that an adult is in charge and will keep them safe.

Help children feel connected

Make sure each child’s name is included on cubbies, attendance charts, job charts, and sign-in sheets.
Display photos of children with their families

The role of play

Provide props

Give reflective feedback

How to respond when children re-enact traumatic events

Is the play destructive?

- Give reflective feedback on the action.
- Describe the underlying feeling.
- Redirect the behavior.
- Suggest a positive resolution.

Is the play showing hope and moving on?

- Give reflective feedback on the action.
- Describe the underlying feeling.
- Say what you’re going to do or offer ways to extend the play.
Drawing and Painting

- Describe what you see.
- Give positive feedback by doing at least one of the following:
  - Talk about the action.
  - Ask about the process.
  - Ask open-ended questions that encourage children to think and respond.
  - Use language that encourages and supports the children’s efforts.

The fireman needs to save all the people.

We had to sleep in the car because the water came all the way up to here! I was crying.

All the dogs and cats had to stay together in the shelter.

We need more food for the kids.

The bad guy shot him.
I'm making a big bed for me and my baby.

Hurry up! We got to go fast. I got my baby and my suitcase.

The Learning Environment

Try to get back to normal activities. Reestablishing regular routines may be more important than any other intervention.

Materials to help children calm themselves...

Materials to help children express feelings and emotions...

Materials to help children cope with frustration...
Create cozy areas where children can go....

...when they feel stress, anger, fear, or sorrow or when they just need some time alone.

Challenges During Daily Activities

- Arrival
- Group Times
- Choice Time
- Transitions
- Rest Time
- Outdoors

Arrival

Group time

Choice time

“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”

~Mr. Rogers
When to suggest a referral or seek expert advice

- If the distress stays the same or gets more intense over time.
- If the child is a threat to self or others in a way that you cannot manage.

People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel.

~Maya Angelou
Questions?
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