HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH STRESS AND TRAUMA BY BECOMING AN ALLY

Bridge the Relationship Gap

Presentation Notes

Presentation materials and videos available online:
www.drlangworthy.com/presentationmaterials
My book (and audiobook!)
www.drlangworthy.com/book

Let me know your thoughts!
I’m @DrLangworthy on Twitter

POLL
“We need never be hopeless, because we can never be irreparably broken.”
~John Green

What is trauma?

Two requirements
1. Situation of perceived injury/death to self or others
2. Response includes fear, helplessness, and/or horror

What are ACEs?

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Biological signs of threat

• “Fight or Flight”
  – Adrenaline rush
    • Increased heart rate, blood pressure, breathing
  – Cortisol release
    • Increases blood sugar, slows down digestion, inhibits immune system

Different levels of stress

• Stress
  – Positive Stress
    • Moderate, short-lived (e.g. giving presentation)
  – Tolerable Stress
    • Intense, but limited time periods (e.g. death of loved one)
  – Toxic Stress
    • Strong, frequent, chronic, uncontrollable (e.g. abuse, neglect)
What happens to the brain?

- Stress Response System
  - Fight/flee
- Cognitive Systems
  - Decision making
- Why stress matters
  - Timeline of development
  - Overpowering

Children with a history of physical abuse

Typically developing children

Children with a history of physical abuse

Angry!

Angry!
Typically developing children

Children with a history of physical abuse

Angry! Angry!

Adaptive in one context...

...disruptive in another
Plasticity & Growth

Brain is malleable, plastic early in life

Brain is more susceptible to negative effects of stress...

...but also more resilient

What is resilience?

Relationships Matter

Daily, positive interactions with care providers can help build children’s resilience to stress

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What’s wrong with you?
vs
What happened to you?

Shift focus from the behavior, to understanding the why behind the behavior.

“What the hell’s the matter with him?”
“What is ‘the matter with him’; … it’s everything around him.”
The End Games, T. Michael Martin, 2013, p. 104

Developmental Repair
Reorganizing and changing our understanding of challenging behaviors

Malice
Stress

What does trauma look like?

- Infants
  - Disruption to sleep, eating
- Toddlers/preschoolers
  - Recklessness, little focused exploration, excessive self-care
Arousal: What to do

- Ensure safety
- Be a quiet, nearby presence
- Lower tone of voice
- Acknowledge and identify emotions
- Ride the wave, revisit the rules

“I see you are not okay. I will stay here with you to keep you safe.”

Thinking: What to Do

- Give permission for arousal to end
- Work together
- Recognize and identify their thoughts
- Intention vs action
- Interest over blame

“You’re thinking I wanted to hurt you, but I don’t. It was an accident that you got hurt and I’m sorry it happened. I didn’t want that to happen to you.”
Feeling: What to do

• Give words to feelings
• Describe discrete emotions
• Degrees of emotion
• Emotion regulation

“It’s okay to be a lot sad right now. I don’t think sad will be forever, but it’s a big feeling right now.”

Acting: What to do

• What do they want?
• Suggest alternative solutions for next time
• Willingness vs coercion

“You can’t climb on the furniture. I know rules are hard. I can help you with that rule so you and I can read or play a game. You choose.”

Parents under Stress

• May be experiencing their own trauma
  – Experience their own children as a threat
  – Difficulty controlling emotions
  – Unhealthy coping
  – Be distrusting of others
Helping families manage stress

• Predictability
  – Being consistent, present, clear
• Controllability
  – Provide families choices and autonomy
• Social supports
  – Work with families, not on families

Context is everything

*Understand* a family’s contexts then

*Create* a new context

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Building healthy bodies, minds, learners

The partnerships have completely turned our building around. Vento used to be a really hard place because we did not have the systems in place to meet the needs of the kids. Now we have. With those systems in place, it has helped create a positive and safe learning environment. Family Innovations, Second Harvest and University of Minnesota, have all helped us do that!

– Principal Masini

z.umn.edu/vento
Thank you!

Presentation Materials:
www.drlangworthy.com/presentationmaterials

Book:
www.drlangworthy.com/book

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Thank you!