

Infant Mental Health: Supporting Young Children in Foster Care

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Activity

- Think of someone who was really special to you when you were growing up. Write this person's name below. What is/was your relationship to this person?
- What made you think of this person?
- What did this person do that made him/her so important or special to you?



Social and Emotional Development:

- Developmental tasks of children birth to five from an infant mental health perspective:
 - Form Close and Secure Relationships
 - Experience, Regulate and Express Emotions
 - Explore Environment and Learn
- All within the context of family, community and cultural expectations

Definition from Zerotothree.org

(3)



Social and Emotional Development: It's About the Relationship

- Babies Exist and Develop within Relationships
- “There is no such thing as a baby by itself.” D.W. Winnicott
- Early relationships as “protective” or “risk” factors

(4)



Attachment: What Is It?

- The Attachment Relationship
 - Attachment
 - Bonding
 - Attachment relationship
 - Attachment behaviors

(5)



Attachment: What Is It?

- Important Elements of Attachment Relationships
 - Attachment Theory- John Bowlby
 - Biological
 - Develops over time, not instantaneous
 - Unique and specific with each relationship
- Goals of Attachment

(6)



Attachment Classifications

- Secure Attachment (optimal strategy for dealing with stress)
- Insecure Attachment (sub-optimal strategies for dealing with stress)
 - Avoidant
 - Resistant/Ambivalent
 - Disorganized

(7)



The Importance of the Caregiving Relationship

- Through the caregiving relationship, children learn:
 - Safety
 - Trust
 - Representations/Internal Working Models
 - “Who I am”
 - “Who I am in relationships with others”
- Early relationships impact:
 - Brain development
 - School success
 - Friendships and relationships with others

(8)



Trauma and Young Children

- For young children, trauma includes directly experiencing or witnessing an event(s) that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury to the child or others, or a threat to the psychological or physical integrity of the child or others.

(DC0-3R)

(9)



A Traumatic Experience...

- Threatens the life or physical integrity of a child or of someone important to that child
- Potential resulting feelings: **overwhelming terror, horror, and helplessness**
- Overwhelms one’s capacity to cope
 - The National Child Traumatic Stress Network



Complex Trauma

- Describes a child’s exposure to multiple or prolonged traumatic events and the developmental impact.
- May include emotional and psychological abuse, neglect, physical and sexual abuse, and witnessing domestic violence.
- Complex trauma is:
 - Chronic
 - Begins in early childhood
 - Occurs within the child’s primary caregiving system and/or social environment



Potentially Traumatic Experiences for Young Children

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Neglect ▪ Physical Abuse ▪ Sexual Abuse ▪ Born Drug/Alcohol Addicted ▪ **Witness Domestic Violence ▪ Animal Attack | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Witness Community Violence ▪ Accidents ▪ Natural Disasters ▪ Painful Medical Procedures ▪ Separation from/multiple caregivers can be traumatic for infants and young children |
|---|---|

(12)



Complexity of Recognizing Trauma Reactions in Children

- Trauma derails the developmental trajectory
- Trauma in young children can look like other issues
 - The younger a child is, the more challenging it can be to identify what's happening (i.e., trauma, developmental delay, medical/health issue, parent-child relationship issue, etc.)

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Trauma and Young Children

- Most “potent” variable that predicted development of PTSD in infants/toddlers: witness threat to caregiver (Scheeringa & Zeanah, 1995)
- Caring about the child means caring about the caregiver
 - Best outcome predictor for children, how is the caregiver coping?

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Trauma: Supporting Young Children

- Increasing evidence that the younger the child, the more pervasive the post-trauma problems.
- Pre-verbal children recall events in a sensory manner, not with words.
- Predictability and nurturance are key.
- Treatment for caregivers exposed to the trauma is also essential so that they can fully assist the child.

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Supporting Young Children and Families

- Group Care Placements
 - Advocacy- The importance of having an identified go-to person (Emergency when there isn't one)
 - Identifying and supporting consistency, predictability, and emotionally available caregivers
 - Consistency within caregiver roles throughout the daily routine- as much as possible
 - Support of caregiving staff as primary caregivers
- Kinship Placement
 - Strengths
 - Potential Challenges



Trauma: Supporting Young Children in Foster Care

- **All Young Children Need:**
 - **Safety**
 - Re-establish a sense of safety
 - Permanency
 - **Consistency**
 - **Predictability**
 - **An Emotionally Available Caregiver**

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In Consideration of Young Children in Foster Care


- Routine
 - Multiple transitions
 - Caregivers
 - Environments
 - Child care/School settings
 - Visitation
- Anticipatory Guidance/Previewing
 - Particularly within the schedule/routine
 - Identifying new people/what's happening next


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<h2>Trauma: Supporting Young Children</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tune in to the young child's emotional states and needs rather than focusing on behavior (fussiness, crying, aggression, etc.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavior is communication • For young children with trauma histories, behaviors are often symptoms • Support children in getting their needs met by primary caregivers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult balance- it can be done without rejection 	(19)
	

<h2>Trauma: Supporting Young Children</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In every situation, “Who is the child’s go-to person? Does the child have access to this person?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home • Visitation • School • Childcare • Transportation 	(20)
	

<h2>Trauma: Supporting Young Children</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affect • Cues/Miscues • “She just wants attention” • Choices • Safety Narratives 	(21)
	

<h2>Trauma: Supporting Young Children</h2> <p>“Imagine you’ve had the worst day ever... What do you need from your go-to person (secure base)...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies commonly used with young children that can be tweaked to be more supportive.... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Use your words” • Time-outs • Redirection • Labeling emotions....how to make this effective? 	(22)
	

<h2>Supporting Young Children and Families</h2> <p>“Each interaction is an opportunity for you to make children and families feel heard, appreciated, and understood.”</p> <p>- Jeree Pawl & Amy L. Dombro, Learning & Growing Together with Families: Partnering With Parents to Support Young Children’s Development, 2001</p>	
	

<h2>Resources and Community Supports</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counseling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often referred to as Behavioral Health Services or Mental Health Services • Private insurance • AHCCCS • Caregivers/legal guardians make the referral • Providers specializing in children birth-three 	
	

Thoughts? Questions? Thank you!aw

- Birth to Five Helpline/Fussy Baby Program:
 - 1-877-705-KIDS
- Good Fit Counseling Center:
 - 602-200-0434
- The Harris Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Training Institute:
 - www.swhd.org
- IMH training for behavioral health providers in collaboration with MMIC
- Trauma informed care class for foster, kinship, and adoptive families- Free
 - www.swhd.org/traumatraining



Creating a Positive Future for Young Children

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Creating a Positive Future for Young Children

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