

**Trauma and Young Children: Supporting Children and Families Through Relationship-Based Work**

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**The Road Ahead...**

- “Evocative”
- Sensitive and difficult topics
  - Can be triggering
  - Please take care of you
- Hope and Opportunities



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**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




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**Social and Emotional Development: It's About the Relationship**

- “There is no such thing as a baby by itself.”  
D.W. Winnicott
- Early relationships as “protective” or “risk” factors



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**Attachment: What Is It?**

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



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**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



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**Attachment Classifications**

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



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**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



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**Trauma and Young Children**

- What is Trauma?
  - An exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous stimuli overwhelm the infant/young child’s capacity to regulate emotions.

(Early Trauma Treatment Network, ND)



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### 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 

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### Potentially Traumatic Experiences for Young Children

- Neglect
- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Born Drug/Alcohol Addicted
- \*\*Witness Domestic Violence
- Animal Attack
- Witness Community Violence
- Accidents
- Natural Disasters
- Painful Medical Procedures
- Separation from/multiple caregivers can be traumatic for infants and young children



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### Complexity of Recognizing Trauma Reactions in Children

- 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.)
  - Trauma derails the developmental trajectory



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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



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### In Consideration of Young Children in Foster Care

- Routine
- Multiple transitions
  - Caregivers
  - Environments
  - Child care settings
- Visitation
  - Potential experiences and reactions to
    - Pick up and drop off/Before and after visitation
    - Changes in visitation schedule impacting child
    - Potential triggers



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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



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## Kinship Placement

- Potential Challenges
  - Relationship history with the biological parents
    - Shifting priorities
    - Vulnerability of children, they NEED to be the caregiver's priority for safety and to feel safe
  - Limited resources for kinship families
    - Complicated systems
- Strengths
  - Family, community, cultural connection
  - Relationship history



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## Supporting Young Children and Families: What do young children need?

- Establishing a sense of safety
- Consistency, predictability, and an emotionally available caregiver
  - This includes:
    - Consistency and predictability within the daily routines
    - Responsiveness from caregivers
      - Keeping the child safe
      - Reading and responding to child's cues
      - Emotional labeling
      - Reciprocal interactions
      - Comfort, help, affection



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## Promoting Secure Attachments

- Encourage/support the young child to utilize caregiving relationship to get needs met (without rejection)
  - Physical
  - Emotional
  - Relational
- Natural Support Systems for family members in support of the child
  - Research on the impact of support systems and attachment relationships
- Caring about the child means caring about the caregivers



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Supporting Young Children and Families

“Your work is not merely what you do, but *how you are* as you do it.”

- Jeree Pawl & Amy L. Dombro

Learning & Growing Together with Families: Partnering With Parents to Support Young Children’s Development, 2001



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Trauma: Supporting Young Children

- Tune in to the young child’s emotional states and needs **rather than focusing on behavior** (fussiness, crying, aggression, etc.)
- Support children in getting their needs met by primary caregivers
  - Difficult balance- it can be done without rejection



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Supporting Young Children and Families

- When we are supportive, empathic, thoughtful, consistent with parents it supports the parent in providing those same experiences to their child.
  - You may be the first person who followed through, kept the parent in mind, etc.



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### To Take Care We Need to Take Care

- Evocative nature of this work
- Managing our own concerns and reactions
  - Reflective supervision
  - Colleague/team support
- Self-Care
  - Challenges of home visiting




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### Trauma: Supporting Young Children

“Imagine you’ve had the worst day ever... What do you need from your go-to person (secure base)...”

- Strategies commonly used with young children that can be tweaked to be more supportive....
  - “Use your words”
  - Time-outs
  - Redirection
  - Labeling emotions....how to make this effective?



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### Supporting Young Children and Families

“Each interaction is an opportunity for you to make children and families feel heard, appreciated, and understood.”

– Jeree Pawl & Amy L. Dombro, Learning & Growing Together with Families: Partnering With Parents to Support Young Children’s Development, 2001




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Thank you!

- Birth to Five Helpline/Fussy Baby Program:
  - 1-877-705-KIDS
- Good Fit Counseling Center:
  - 602-200-0434
- Smart Support
  - 602-266-5976
- The Harris Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Training Institute:
  - www.swhd.org



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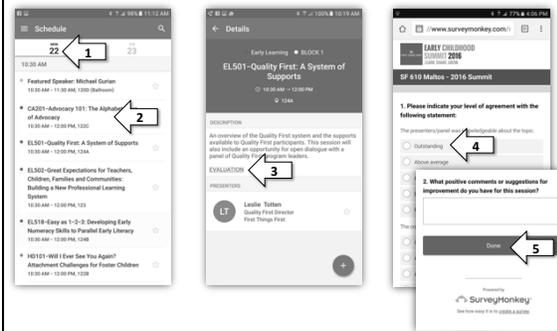
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Complete the Breakout Session Evaluation on the Mobile App



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