

Trauma Informed Interventions for Families with Young Children



1 Support Responsive Relationships

Why?

- o “**Serve and return**” relationships promote healthy **brain development** and buffer against toxic stress
- o Supportive relationships build **neural connections** and **resilience**
- o Children feel supported and encouraged to **continue being curious and reaching out when caregivers are responsive**

How to “Serve and Return”

- o **Notice the serve and share the child’s focus of attention**
Examples of a serve: Child pointing or looking at something, moving arms and legs, saying “look!”, crying when hurt etc.
- o **Return the serve by supporting and encouraging**
Examples of a return: Looking with the child at their object of focus, saying “I see!”, comforting or hugging them when hurt, bringing the object closer
- o **Name the object and take turns with the interaction.**
Respond and wait for child’s response.

2 Strengthen Core Skills

What are core skills and why are they important?

Self-regulation helps us to use the right skills at the right time, manage our responses, and avoid inappropriate responses.
Includes both **automatic** and **intentional** processes.

Executive function skills allow us to remember our goals, resist distractions, and create new plans when things don’t work out.

Core Skills include:
Planning
Focus
Self-Control
Awareness
Flexibility

How to Help Children Develop Core Skills

- o **For infants/young toddlers: Lap games** such as Peekaboo or Trot, Trot to Boston, **hiding** objects under a cloth or cup, **role play** (sweeping, picking up toys, dusting), Itsy Bitsy Spider and other **finger games**, pointing out objects and actions.
- o **For toddlers/preschoolers: Active games** such as freeze dance, throwing and catching a ball, running up an incline. **Song games** such as The Hokey Pokey, I’m a Little Teapot. **Conversations and Storytelling** such as narrating play, talking about feelings, shared experiences. **Matching/Sorting games** such as organizing objects into similar groups, simple puzzles. **Imaginary play**

3 Reduce Sources of Stress

What impact does stress have on the developing brain?

o Poverty, systematic racism, intergenerational trauma, parental substance use disorder and/or mental illness can have an effect on development, especially in **prolonged cases without supportive relationships**.

o Constant activation of physiological stress response systems has a **“wear and tear”** affect on the brain and body, can **impair executive functioning**, and can lead to a **reduced sense of self-efficacy** (the belief that we can do things to change and improve our own lives).

How to Reduce Sources of Stress for Children

- o **Create a calm, organized, and welcoming environment**
- o **Help families strengthen the skills needed** to create a supportive environment with consistent and predictable routines
- o **Routinely ask about and respond to the major stressors** affecting families as part of an assessment process
- o **Provide workers in service programs with the supports they need to manage stress**, such as reasonable case-load/class sizes, responsive supervision, and skill development

Resources

1. Toward a Radical Understanding of Trauma and Trauma Work, Bonnie Burstow: <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/toward-radical-understanding-trauma-and-trauma-work>
2. Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/three-early-childhood-development-principles-improve-child-family-outcomes/#strengthen-skills>
3. PACES Connection: <https://www.pacesconnection.com/g/resource-center>
4. 5 Steps for Serve and Return <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/5-steps-for-brain-building-serve-and-return/>
5. Activities Guide for Enhancing and Practicing Executive Function Skills with Children from Infancy to Adolescence. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/activities-guide-enhancing-and-practicing-executive-function-skills-with-children-from-infancy-to-adolescence/>
6. HOPE: Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences <https://positiveexperience.org/resources/>
7. Toxic Stress <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/>
8. Executive Function and Self-Regulation <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>
9. *Trauma Informed Interventions for Families with Young Children*, lecture by Miriam Silman, MSW. 10/19/2021.