

TECHNIQUES FOR HEALING TRAUMA IN OUR KIDS

“All children need to know that they're precious and unique and special. But, a child who comes from a hard place needs to know it more desperately.” — Dr. Karyn Purvis

Five B's of Stress and Trauma

- Brain
- Beliefs
- Body
- Biology
- Behaviors

How is the brain impacted by trauma?

When a child experiences trauma and other risk factors, it can skew the wiring and chemistry of the brain. The lower, more primitive part of the brain can overdevelop from reacting to fear, while the more sophisticated upstairs brain remains underdeveloped. Repeated nurturing experiences can strengthen the upstairs brain, so that the upstairs brain can help regulate the downstairs brain, and there is balance between the two parts of the brain.

If a child spends too much time being afraid, the brain reorganizes itself around the survival response- fight, flight, or freeze- and the downstairs brain is running the show. The prefrontal cortex is especially vulnerable to traumatic experiences; it is important for emotional regulation, mindful awareness, and attachment.

When children experience trauma, the left hemisphere is strong, but the right hemisphere is weak. Children struggle with emotions, sensations, and social situations.

How is the body impacted by trauma?

Considering the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can provide an informative window into the developmental consequences of relational trauma. ACEs include emotional abuse, physical abuse, substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, criminal behavior, and divorce or separation. There have been a number of scientific and medical publications based on the ACE Study that demonstrate a strong correlation between an individual's ACE score and later health outcomes.

Possible Physical and Mental Health Risk Outcomes:

- Severe obesity
- Diabetes
- Depression
- Suicide attempts
- STDs

- Heart disease
- Cancer
- Stroke
- COPD
- Broken bones

How are behaviors impacted by trauma?

Because trauma impacts the brain, body, biology, and beliefs, trauma consequently impacts an individual's behavior.

The attachment cycle shows how connection is crucial for both felt-safety and self-regulations. Parents are not only important for connections, but also for security and regulation.

Disruptions in the attachment cycle occur when caregivers are unavailable, unresponsive, harsh, or abusive. These kinds of experiences program the child's brain so that the child is afraid, stressed, and hypervigilant- their "fight, flight, or freeze" response is overdeveloped, whereas their regulatory response is underdeveloped.

ATTACHMENT STYLE	HISTORY WITH CAREGIVER	INFANT'S STRATEGY WHEN UPSET
Secure	Caregiver consistently, warmly responds when infant is upset	Cries; infant knows that caregiver will soothe
Anxious-Avoidant	Caregiver does not respond in emotionally warm way when infant is upset	Infant has learned not to cry to get needs met
Anxious-Ambivalent	Caregiver inconsistently responds when infant is upset	Infant cries (and is difficult to soothe) in an effort to stay in caregiver's attention
Disorganized	Caregiver is frightening/response is traumatic	Infant has no clear strategy when upset

Secure Attachment:

- I feel protected
- I feel precious
- I feel heard
- My physical needs are taken care of
- My emotional needs are taken care of

Mindfulness Strategies

Being fiercely honest with the past and moving on with compassion.

Self-Awareness

- Based upon how you were cared for, identify the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors you bring to relationships
- Realize how these thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors influence your relationships
- Identify personal triggers
- Practice regulating yourself during times of stress:
 - Say a prayer
 - Take 10 deep breaths
 - Take a walk
 - Drink water
 - Apply your favorite essential oil or lotion
 - Chew gum
 - Squeeze a stress ball
- Stay calm and emotionally present during a child's distress. This allows you to:
 - Think flexibly
 - Creatively solve problems
 - Model compassion
 - Co-regulate with the child

Attunement

- Sensitive caregiving—being aware of the child's cues (jaw clenching, shallow breathing, etc.)
- Seeing the need beneath the child's behavior
- Meeting the need

Engagement Strategies

Nurturing healthy connections and facilitating secure attachments.

Healthy touch

- Chin prompt
- Hand on shoulder
- High fives
- Fist bumps

Eye contact

- Changes brain chemistry
- "I love seeing your eyes!"
- "Are those eyes orange?"

Voice Quality

- Tone
- Volume
- Cadence

Behavior Matching

- Sitting the same way as child

- Choosing the same color toy, sticker, or crayon as child

Playful Interactions

- Playing games
- Not being afraid to be silly
- Using imaginative play

Connecting with your child is the single most important thing you can do to help your child heal.

Close relationships do not come easily for children who have experienced trauma because they have learned that adults in their lives cannot be trusted to meet their needs.

Connection shows your child they are precious and valued. Once they feel valued by you, they start to feel safe and begin to trust.

The more caregivers practice a skill in a playful manner, the more automated the proper response becomes when it is needed.

EMPOWERING

Sample Content

Ecological Strategies

- Creating felt safety
 - Predictability
 - Routines
 - Rituals
- Transitions
 - Daily transitions
 - Life transitions

Physiological Strategies

- Managing sleep
- Managing hydration
- Managing blood sugar
- Providing regular physical activity
- Meeting nutritional needs
- Healthy touch
- Sensory experiences

There is a difference in the child *being* safe and the child *feeling* safe.

Regulations of the sensory system through relational activity:

Regulation is monitoring and adjusting with the goal of balancing.

We learn regulation through relationship.

Neural pathways depend upon emotion, repetition, myelin, amygdala response, proprioception, relationship, and environment.

Our own personal past experiences and history will influence how we perceive a new experience.

The brain develops in sequence and will heal in sequence.

A child cannot access a part of his/her brain that is not fully developed due to age or traumatic influence.

Activities by Brain Region:

Frontal Cortex

- Timers
- Metronomes
- Crafts
- Early Mozart music

Cortex

- Auditory therapies
- Communication boards
- Visual schedules
- Social stories
- Visual timers

Limbic System

- First-Then sequence reminders
- Organization help
- Parallel games
- Massage
- Physical classroom supports

DE/Cerebellum

- Fine motor games
- Sleep intervention
- Auditory therapies
- Individual sports

Brain Stem

- Rhythmic swinging and activities
- Relational interaction
- Repetitive, repetitive, repetitive
- Simple activities with limited arousal
- Vision exercises
- Oral motor exercises
- Puppets
- Gross-motor games
- Essential oils are less noxious
- Calming input: vanilla and cinnamon
- Alerting input: citrus, floral, and synthetic scents

CORRECTING

Connected Discipline vs. Distancing Discipline

- Time-in vs. time-out
- Bringing the child closer vs. sending him away
- Resolution vs. consequences
- Problem solving vs. lectures and sermons
- Advocacy stance vs. adversary stance
- Focus on the child's preciousness vs. focus on failures

When it's over ...

Outcomes of Connecting Strategies

- Corrected behavior
- Contentment in caregiver and child
- Connection between caregiver and child is deepened

Outcomes of Distancing Strategies

- Deferred behavior waiting to emerge later
- Discontentment in caregiver and child

- Disconnection between caregiver and child is deepened

Proactive Strategies

Life value terms are the language of a trauma-informed culture and include:

- “Gentle and kind”
- “Using your words”
- “Who’s the boss?”
- “With permission and supervision”
- “With respect”

Behavioral scripts are the actions of a trauma-informed culture and include:

- Choices (“You have two choices”)
- Compromises (“Would you like a compromise?”)
- Behavioral re-dos (“Can you try that again with respect?”)

Levels of Response complement the IDEAL Response© and provide a framework for matching adult response to the child’s or adolescent’s behavioral and emotional challenge.

4. Protective engagement
3. Calming engagement
2. Structured engagement
1. Playful engagement

Calming Engagement Plan

What are three things you can do when you feel _____ ?

- Quiet space
- Walk/run
- Muscle movement
- Bouncy ball

Five Questions to Ask Yourself

Am I connected?

Am I empowering?

Am I teaching proactively?

Am I catching it low (Level 1)?

Do I have a plan for calming engagement?