Supporting Young Children in the Face of the Coronavirus

Early Childhood Training & Consultation
“Supporting Social and Emotional Development in Children”

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What is Trauma?

- Definition - Center from Nonviolence and Social Justice
  - used to describe experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and distressing, and that overwhelm people’s ability to cope, leaving them powerless.

If she can’t cope, how am I supposed to?
Why talk about this now?

- We are in the midst of a global pandemic (exposure to an overwhelming event). We are being asked to socially isolate in our homes which significantly changes the needs of children who are now spending all of their time at home instead of in the classroom.
- We need to understand how stress/trauma impacts our students/our children so we can explain it to them in a language they can understand, normalize their responses and help them feel safe.
- How we respond can impact how a child responds.
- We also need to understand what is happening in our own bodies so we can recognize signs of our own stress/vicarious trauma/burnout.
The good news...

Studies have revealed that brain chemistry in traumatized children can also be changed as they are “immersed in an emotionally safe, sensory-rich, attachment-rich environment” thus changing their behaviors.

Dr. Bruce Perry, a leading expert in childhood trauma, found that it is the “ongoing daily interactions with loving, emotionally responsive and caring adults- (teacher, caregiver, aunt, grandfather) that bring about healing.

It becomes important to create environments which help children to heal and focus on relationships. Children can be resilient and do well despite significant adversity.

During this time when we are being asked to be socially distant we can still find ways to be socially connected and emotionally close.

Barbara Sorrels, EdD, author of *Reaching and Teaching Children Exposed to Trauma*
How do we support children?

4 Components to Creating a Responsive & Nurturing Climate

1. Establish Safety
   structure + routine = predictability & safety

2. Form a Relationship
   consistency + gentle understanding = trust

3. Find the Good
   notice strengths + reinforce = positive behavior

4. Lend Emotional Support
   verbal praise + physical warmth = ego growth
Offering Support

- Remember- children are looking at us to see how we are coping. They can sense our own level of stress.

- Before you can offer support, check yourself first…
  - Am I in control of my emotions? Am I calm?
  - What is my face and body language saying?
  - Our calmness can help a child to regulate and relax.
WHAT CAN WE DO TO MANAGE ANXIETY?

- Avoid excessive exposure to the news/media coverage
- Create a routine and a schedule, children benefit from predictability
- Add time in the day for exercise and self-care
- Reassure children that they are safe
- Create opportunities for fun family time (family meals, games, puzzles, walks, movie nights, dance, laugh, sing.)
- Stay connected with others (phone calls, text, social and virtual media platforms).
- Think about the ways that you share information with children and how much you share. Remember, children respond differently based upon their age. (Reference to The National Child Traumatic Stress Network- guide on helping children cope.)
Teach Children to Express Emotions

- Talk to children about their feelings. Validate and identify their feelings for them.
- Read books about feelings or social stories.
- Model expressing your emotions.
- Engage in making an emotion book.
- Make sure they know that their feelings are always okay, but how they express them might not always acceptable.
Strategies for Managing Negative Feelings

- Teach children breathing techniques like sniff the flower, blow out the candle.
- Make them a “mad space” where they can punch or yell into a pillow, stomp their feet, or rip scrap paper.
- Let them know it’s ok to take some space or take a break.
- Create a calm down area.
- Try calm down yoga.
- Add more sensory/tactile exploration opportunities.
- Teach self-regulation. (Engage in games such as Freeze Dance, Simon Says, march like an animal.)
- Create a sensory box with items they can touch/hold.
Quiet/Cozy Corners ~ Alone Spaces
Reframe our thoughts...

Mindset Shift During a Pandemic

I'm stuck at home ➔ I get to be SAFE in my home and spend time with my family

I will get sick ➔ I will self-isolate and wash my hands, this will significantly DECREASE my chances of getting sick

I will run out of items at home during self-isolation ➔ I have prepared for this and I will use my items wisely. I have everything I NEED for now

Everything is shutting down, I'm panicking ➔ The most IMPORTANT places, such as medical centers, pharmacies and grocery stores, remain open

There is too much uncertainty right now ➔ While I can’t control the situation around me, I CAN control my actions. Doing breathwork, calling loved ones, getting enough sleep and proper nutrition, prayer, and doing activities I love at home will all help during this time
Take-Away Messages

• Seek help if you notice increased symptoms of anxiety, depression or have concerns of self-harm.
• Many clinical therapists are providing therapy remotely with the aid of virtual platforms.
• Make sure to have reasonable expectations. It is okay to take a break!
• Provide lots of targeted praise for positive behaviors.
• Support your child’s social/emotional development by reading and using emotions vocabulary daily. (Keeping in mind developmental age.)
• During this time of increased screen time, it is even more important to engage and connect with children.
• Tomorrow is a new day!
Take care of you!

Taking care of you means the people in your life will receive the best of you, rather than what’s left of you...

~ Carl Bryan, Tennis Coach


https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/