Infant Mental Health
Working with Children & Families Who’ve Experienced Trauma
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The First Three Years of Life

We establish the following templates:
• Our mental model for relationships
• Our mental model of self.
• Our foundation for the ability to attend to and motivate ourselves.
• The way we self-regulate and manage stress.

Conscious Discipline® Brain State Model

The brain always functions as a whole.
Toxic Stress:

In 2005 the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child proposed a scientifically grounded taxonomy of the stress experience to describe the difference between normal challenges a child experiences to challenges that may be threatening to a child's development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Brief increase in heart rate, mild elevation in stress hormone levels</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intermediary</td>
<td>Sustained increase in stress hormone levels without persistent activity in the sympathetic nervous system</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toxic</td>
<td>Prolonged activation of stress response systems in the absence of protective relationships</td>
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Toxic Stress: Impact on Children

- Toxic stress may result in disruption of the child's regulatory system.
- This disruption increases vulnerability to:
  - Ability to detect and respond to emotionally stressful stimuli such as distress cues of others.
  - Externalizing disorders (early onset aggression, oppositional defiant or conduct disorder, disruptive behavior disorder, antisocial behavior).
  - Chronic pain syndromes
  - Immune-related disorders
  - Cognitive deficits
  - Disorganized attachment.

Four types of attachment:

- Secure
- Ambivalent
- Avoidant
- Disorganized

Children who've been traumatized are more likely to suffer from disorganized attachment than the other three.
Disorganized attachment

- Controlling or manipulative relationships.
- Difficulties in intimate relationships
  - Multiple partners
  - Lack of intimacy
  - Abusive
- Negative self concept.
- Problems with affect regulation
- People who have experienced traumatic events in childhood are at increased risk for a host of other problems, impacting all domains of functioning – emotional, cognitive & physiological.

Attunement:

- Being aware of and responsive to someone.
  - It's the road to attachment.
  - Being heard and seen on a very deep level.

What we know about attunement:
- * leads to secure attachment
- * depends on our ability to be present in the moment
- * it's sharing in another person's experience without becoming a part of it.
- * distress is a signal to seek attachment

Social Play:

- is the key to healthy development.
  - Early relationships full of rigidity and negativity contribute to behavior problems later in life.
  - Early relationships full of joy and positivity reduce behavior problems later in school.

What we know about social play:
- * essential for optimal development
- * require attunement for greatest effectiveness.
- * requires us to follow the child's lead
- * based on eye contact, touch, presence and playful situations.
How do we integrate it all?

Healthy attachment via attunement and social play is the key to emotionally healthy children.

- Reduces stress by creating healthy attachments and improving relationships.
- Increases the positive affect and joy between parent and child.
- Integrates attachment, attunement and social play to wire the brain for optimal development.

Supporting the Parent

- Attend to the Parent fully, then repeat back what you think they said.
- Interpret according to the other person's feelings
  - It sounds like you were pretty frustrated when...
- Reflect on what it must be like to be this person & convey understanding.
  - You're going through a lot right now, which must be challenging.
- Ask reflective questions:
  - What do you think it was like for your parent?
  - Tell me what your life is like right now.

How to practice self-care

- Reflective practices/supervision
- Thought stopping/reframing
- Relationships — mutual, long-lasting, back and forth bonds
- Activity — hobbies and recreation
- Initiative — research, asking for help, goal setting, and healing.