



**Classroom Strategies
To Help Children Deal With
Stress & Trauma**



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Objectives



- ◆ Identify causes of stress in the classroom and ways to decrease.
- ◆ Learn strategies to decrease stress in the classroom.
- ◆ Promote positive guidance and supports.
- ◆ Know when and who to call for additional support.

2

Signs of Stress & Trauma



- ◆ Understand the signs of stress and trauma in young children.

3

When Are High Stress Times in the Classroom?



Greetings & Departures Transitions Mealtimes

Diapering & Toileting Playtime Outdoor Play

What Causes Stress in the Classroom?



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Levels of Stress



Normal Stress

Tolerable Stress

- Adversity managed through effective coping skills that are facilitated by supportive adults


Toxic Stress

- Excessive and/or prolonged activation of stress response systems
- Stress that was tolerable with a supportive adult becomes toxic in the absence of the buffering protection of supportive adult caregiver

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Tolerable vs Toxic Stress

Video Clip
Time: 2:25



Harvard University. (2014). In Brief: The Science of Child Development. Center on the Developing Child. Video podcast retrieved from http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/resources/multimedia/videos/inbrief_series/inbrief_science_of_ece/

Nurturing & Responsive Relationships

High quality caregiving is a powerful buffer against toxic stress.





Signs of Trauma in Young Children

Babies	Toddlers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From clingy to flat affect with no joy • Prolonged uncontrollable crying • Doesn't explore • No preferred caregiver • Failure to thrive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biting, kicking, tantrums, unprovoked aggression • Disinterested in toys • Indiscriminate preferences of caregivers. • No appetite
Preschool	School Age
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetitive play about violent event • Sleep troubles or nightmares • Hyper vigilance • Skill regression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades drop • Preoccupied with the trauma • Poor self-esteem • Bedwetting or thumb sucking may reappear

Stress Compromises Learning & Executive Functioning



- ◆ The prefrontal cortex, an essential part of the brain for self regulation, is most affected by early stress.
- ◆ As a result, children in stressful environments find it harder to concentrate, sit still, follow directions, control impulses, or rebound from disappointment.
- ◆ It all makes it hard to learn.

Ways Trauma is Misinterpreted

From Preschool to High School



- ◆ Bad behavior is punished.
- ◆ Children with challenging behavior are expelled.

Trauma is treated as ADHD

- ◆ Fails to understand or follow directions
- ◆ Overreacts to comments from teachers and peers
- ◆ Fails to connect cause and effect
- ◆ Misreads context
- ◆ Is aggressive
- ◆ Zones out
- ◆ Lacks focus
- ◆ Doesn't stay on task
- ◆ Is impulsive
- ◆ Can't sit still
- ◆ Has poor coping skills
- ◆ Loses control of emotions
- ◆ Easily distracted or frustrated



Children Often Present with Behaviors That Look Like a Shark, but If We Look Beneath the Water, We Realize They Are Just Scared Goldfish



Trauma symptoms are often misunderstood as attitude or motivational problems



Refusing to do what adults tell you to do is not an expression of a bad attitude or defiance but of a poorly regulated stress response system and inability to manage anger or strong feelings.

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Often these are kids with a history of toxic stress. Punitive Discipline Doesn't Solve Neurological Problems

Florida Kindergartener Arrested

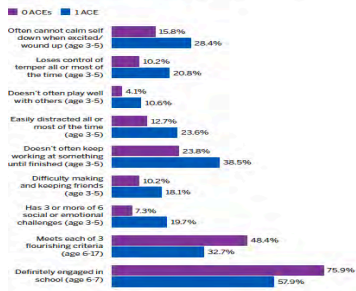


Given the neurological context, suspension or punishment won't do much to improve an inability to self regulate.

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Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Linked to Social Emotional Challenges

FIGURE 1: Prevalence of Social and Emotional Skills and Challenges of Children and Youth, by ACEs



HHS's 2016 National Survey of Children's Health. Bethell, CD, Davis, MB, Gombojav, N, Stumbo, S, Powers, K. Issue Brief: A national and across state profile on adverse childhood experiences among children and possibilities to heal and thrive. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, October 2017.

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Parents Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Linked to Children's Behavioral Problems

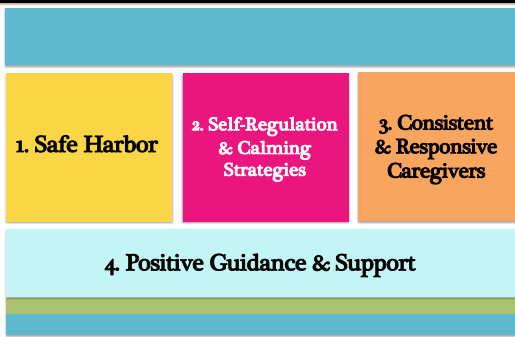
Children of parents with a history of 4 or more ACEs had on average:

- 2.3-point higher score on the Behavior Problem Index
- 2.1 times higher odds of hyperactivity
- 4.2 times higher odds of an emotional disturbance diagnosis than children of parents with no ACEs.



Journal of American Academy of Pediatrics (July 2018). Parents' Adverse Childhood Experiences and Their Children's Behavioral Health Problems

Helping Children Deal With Stress & Trauma



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1. Safe Harbor

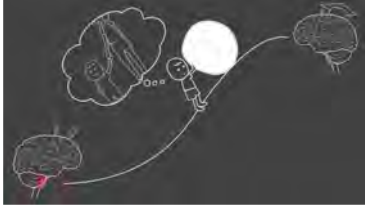
A feeling of physical and emotional safety



Learning Brain vs Survival Brain

Children learn best when they feel safe.

Time: 1:07 min




Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KogaUANGvpA>

Need for Safety & Secure Base




Bowlby's Key Concepts:

- ◆ **Proximity:** The desire to be near the people we care about.
- ◆ **Secure Base:** The attachment figure is a base of safety & security from which the child can explore.
- ◆ **Safe Haven:** Returning to the attachment figure for comfort and safety when scared.
- ◆ **Separation Distress:** Anxiety that occurs in the absence of the attachment figure.



Secure Base


- ◆ **Proximity:** Dad stays in sight while child explores
- ◆ **Secure Base:** Dad is a base of safety & security from which the child can explore.
- ◆ **Safe Haven:** Dad reassures son when he returns

Proximity

What can caregivers do in the classroom to be a secure base?

- ★ **Stay in sight while child explores.**
I can see you want to explore the new playground. I'm right here, if you need me.
- ★ **Stay close by.**
This is a new room; I will hold you for awhile longer.
- ★ **Reassure child's fears to create a Safe Haven.**
I'm here. The dog won't hurt you.
- ★ **Do what you say you will.**
I will be done in 3 minutes. Let's set the timer. I will be here when you wake up for nap.



Predictable Schedule & Routines

What can caregivers do in the classroom to be a secure base?

- ★ **Post chart of daily routines (snack, naptime, meals, recess, etc.).**
After nap is snack time, and then we will go outside.
- ★ **Organize the environment.**
Look at the label on this toy shelf. Everything has a place.






Keep the Environment Safe

What can caregivers do in the classroom to be a secure base?

- ★ **Reinforce classroom safety.**
This is a safe place. I will be here with you. This toy is broken so I'm throwing it away so no one gets hurt. No throwing blocks. I need to keep the block area safe for everyone to play.





2. Self-Regulation & Calming Strategies

Build A Common Calming Language

I can see you have some 'big feelings' today. Let's go to the 'calm-down box.' Would you like some 'calm-down' toys?

"Calm down. Stop. Breathe. Count. You will be fine."

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Talk About Feelings & What to Do

You are angry that your friend took your toy. What should we do next?

Encourage Comfort Items

Do you want to bring your blanket today?

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Redirect to a Quiet Spot

Looks like you could use some quiet time to calm down and organize your feelings.

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Encourage Art, Singing & Play

Play is outlet for expressing fears and emotions

Singing reduces stress, elevates "feel good" endorphins in the brain, improves mood

A drawing can tell a story about our internal life that isn't accessible in words.

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Games Increase Self-Regulation

Hokey Pokey; Head, Shoulders, Knees & Toes; Mother, May I? Simon Says?



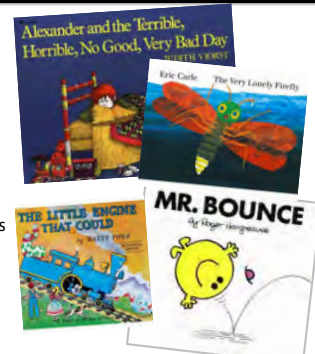
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Books Show How to Cope

Different characters teach positive social and emotional values:

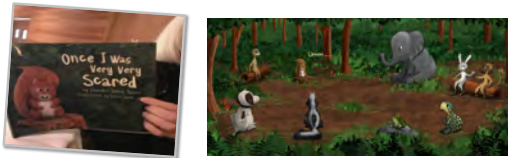
- ◆ how to cope with sadness
- ◆ how to use words instead of actions to deal with anger
- ◆ how to be a good friend
- ◆ how to express gratitude
- ◆ how to delay gratification.

These books help young children learn to deal with stress and interpersonal conflicts and develop executive functioning.



Once I Was Very Scared

This story was written to help children and grown-ups understand how stress can affect children and ways to help them.



PDF of book available for FREE!
View and download at:

<https://piploproductions.com/stories/once>

Order directly through Amazon \$14.95. Wholesale rate for 10+ paperback copies. \$8 a book plus handling from Chandra.Ghosh@ucsf.edu

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Meditation Increases Self Regulation & Decreases Behavior Problems

Behavior is the symptom of what's going on in the child's life. Calming techniques like meditation can calm anxiety and increase self regulation.



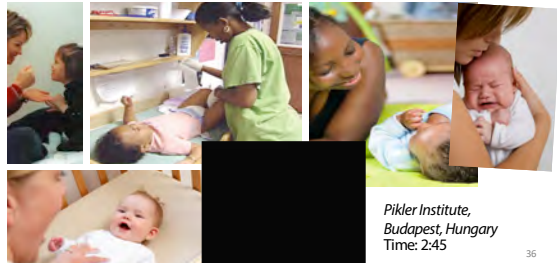
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3. Consistent & Responsive Caregivers



Nurturing & Responsive Caregivers Can Buffer Stress & Help Coping

Stress is made tolerable when buffered by supportive relationships that facilitate coping.



Pikler Institute,
Budapest, Hungary
Time: 2:45


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Attunement

“...their time together was perceptively nourished by their relationship.”

Attunement was:

- ◆ Focused & engaged
- ◆ Unhurried
- ◆ Followed child's lead
- ◆ Responsive
- ◆ Respectful
- ◆ Smiled
- ◆ Eye contact
- ◆ Physical touch & reassurance



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Learn Child's Interests and Match Activities to the Child's Skills

I know you love dinosaurs. We've got a new book you might like.




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Read Children's Cues

Responsive caregivers learn to accurately and empathically understand and respond to children's actions, communications, needs and feelings.


I can see you need a little more time to say goodbye. I will stay a few more minutes.



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Wonder "why?"

Why would he respond that way?
Look for the underlying emotional needs.



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4. Positive Guidance & Support

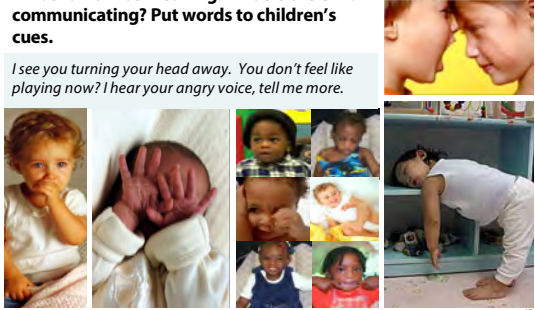


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Learn to read emotional cues

All behavior has meaning. What is the child communicating? Put words to children's cues.

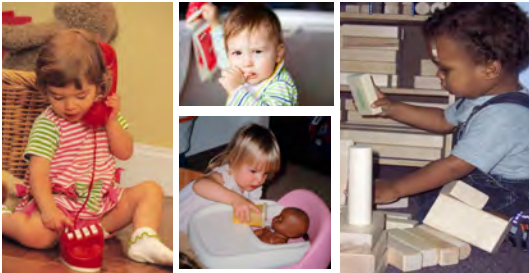
I see you turning your head away. You don't feel like playing now? I hear your angry voice, tell me more.



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Observe Child's Play

Look for themes or repetitive play or drawings about stress or traumatic events.



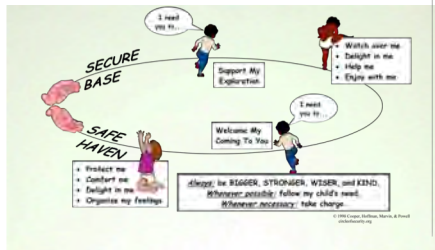
Observe the Child's Behavior

To figure out a child's emotional needs, observe the behavior. Then, ask yourself, "Does the child need to be reassured, to feel safe, to be delighted in, or to help organize his feelings?"



Video: Circle of Security

Clip: 2:34 minutes

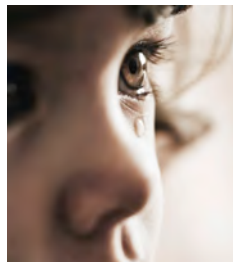


<http://circleofsecurity.net>

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Label Emotions With Words

I see you are sad today. Do you want to put words to your tears?



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Help Organize their Feelings.

You are angry that your friend took your toy, what should we do next?
You are crying and rubbing your eyes, I think you are feeling tired.



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Offer Time In Rather than Time Out

Child needs a sense of safety instead of isolation

Seems like you need a hug today. Would you like to come sit on my lap?



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Seeking Connection

Children are more likely to behave well when they feel safe & secure in their emotional connection



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Give kids what they need the most at the time they seem to deserve it the least.



Filling Up the Cup



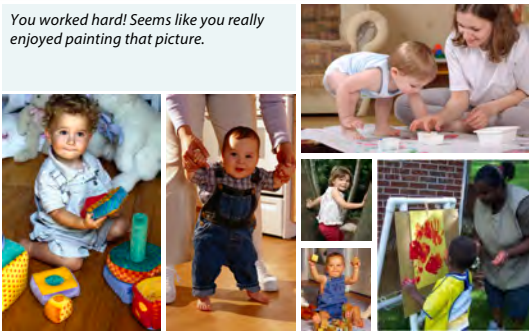
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Delight In



Acknowledge Effort

You worked hard! Seems like you really enjoyed painting that picture.



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Children with Trauma Histories Need to Shine



Acknowledge Effort
You worked really hard on that!

Filling up their cup
Delight in
Build on strengths

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Use a Trauma Lens

"I wonder what happened that she would respond like that?"

- **Support child's unique needs.**

I can see that it's hard for you to sit still today. Would you like to stand beside me?

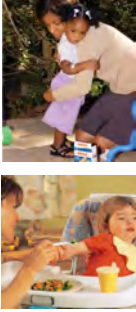
- **Provide safe and loving limits.**

No biting. It hurts. It's not safe to run. Hold my hand.

- **Model trust, emotional regulation and empathy.**

I'm really frustrated; I'm going to take a minute to calm down. I wonder how she feels when you say that?

- **Knowing when and who to call for help.**



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Trauma Informed Child Care

The goal of the Trauma Informed Care for Child Care Professionals course is to help reduce stress and promote success for young children. This will be achieved through understanding the signs of stress and trauma in young children, realizing the impact of early adversity on the lifetime, learning how stress and trauma impact development, comparing how a healthy child's brain develops to the brain of a child who experiences trauma and toxic stress, learning strategies to decrease stress in the classroom, and knowing when and who to call for additional support.



The 5-hour course is presented in four modules:

- Module 1: Childhood Stress, Trauma, and Early Adversity
- Module 2: The Impact of Early Adversity
- Module 3: Classroom Strategies to Help Children Deal with Stress and Trauma
- Module 4: How Child Care Professionals Can Help Children Thrive

When You Need More Help




- ◆ Know when and who to call for additional support.

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How to Ask About Trauma

"Have you, your child, or family experienced anything stressful or scary that you feel is important for us to know?"



Reference: Illinois Bright Futures Trauma Informed Early Intervention Project. A collaboration of the Erikson Institute and Early Intervention Child and Family Connections offices #8, and #12 EastSeals Chicago and #12 LaRabida Children's Hospital. The question was adapted and piloted in CFC #8. For more information, contact Linda Gillette at lgillette@erikson.edu

Resources for Help

- Help Me Grow-211
- Early Steps
- Florida Association for Infant Mental Health
- SEDNET

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Instruments for Assessing Traumatic Stress in Young Children

- ◆ Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL): Achenbach, and Rescorla (2001). Ages 1½-5
- ◆ Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Semi-Structured Interview and Observation Record: Scheeringa and Zeanah (1994). Ages 0-4
- ◆ Posttraumatic Symptom Inventory for Children (PT-SIC): Eisen (1997). Ages 4-8
- ◆ Preschool Age Psychiatric Assessment (PAPA): Egger and Angold (1999). Ages 2-5
- ◆ PTSD Symptoms in Preschool Aged Children (PTSD-PAC): Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, Semel, and Shapiro (2002). Ages 3-5
- ◆ Traumatic Events Screening Inventory-Parent Report Revised (TESI-PRR): Ghosh et al. (2002). Ages 0-6
- ◆ Trauma Symptom Checklist for Young Children (TSCYC): Briere et al. (2001). Ages 3-12
- ◆ Violence Exposure Scale for Children-Preschool Version (VEX-PV): Shahinfar, Fox, and Leavitt (2000). Ages 4-10
- ◆ Violence Exposure Scale for Children-Revised Parent Report (VEX-RPR): Shahinfar, Fox, and Leavitt (2000). For parents of preschool-aged children aged 4-10

Source: NCTSN

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Resources for Teachers

www.nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/Child_Trauma_Toolkit_Final.pdf 61

Helping Children Deal With Stress & Trauma

Download from www.floridatrauma.org

Downloadable Parent Handouts on Stress

Free & downloadable at: www.cpeip.fsu.edu/mma

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation to Child Care

Reduces children’s problem behaviors when least costly and most amenable to intervention, which reduces costs, reduces expulsions, improves school readiness, & reduces likelihood of later behavior problems.

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Findings

- ◆ Reduced behavior problems in target children
- ◆ Reduced expulsions
- ◆ Improved classroom environments and teacher-child interactions
- ◆ Increased teacher beliefs and practices regarding developmentally appropriate and child centered practices
- ◆ Decreased teacher job stress and depression & increased teacher sense of job control and satisfaction
- ◆ Improved sensitivity and classroom management
- ◆ Improved classroom climate
- ◆ More positive interactions
- ◆ More skilled to handle difficult behavior
- ◆ Lower stress for teachers


Source: Raver, et al. 2008 and Gilliam, 2007 65

What Have You Learned About Helping Children’s Stress?

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Helping Children Deal with Stress & Trauma Summary

- 1. Safe Harbor**
Create a safe haven with predictable routines to ensure physical and emotional safety.
- 2. Self-Regulation & Calming Strategies**
• Use calming strategies – words, toys, games, books, music, art, calm place, comfort items
- 3. Consistent & Responsive Caregivers**
• Learn to accurately and empathically understand and respond to children's emotional needs underlying actions, communications, needs and feelings.
- 4. Positive Guidance & Support Summary**
• Label emotions with words. Look for the unmet emotional needs. Use time in, rather than time out. Fill up their cup. Delight in.
• Use a trauma lens to understand emotional needs and challenging behavior.




How will you know if your strategies work?



 **The End**

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