



The emotional impact of trauma: Guidelines for Educators

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[Objectives]

- Provide an overview of emotional health in preschool aged children
- Present risk factors for emotional “derailment” in young children
- Present *behavioral indicators* of emotional distress and trauma in children
- Overview of ways teachers can help
- Ways teachers can talk to parents about their concerns

The progression of social-emotional development



The progression of emotional development

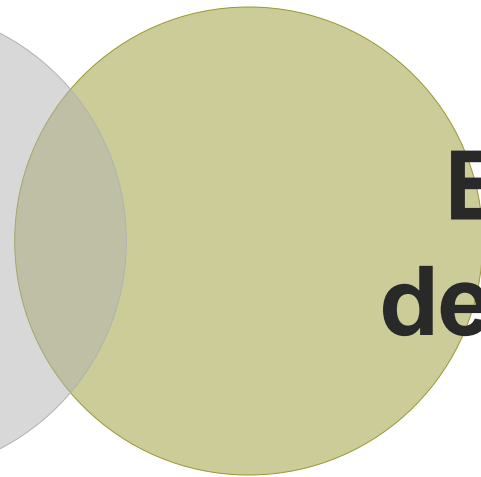
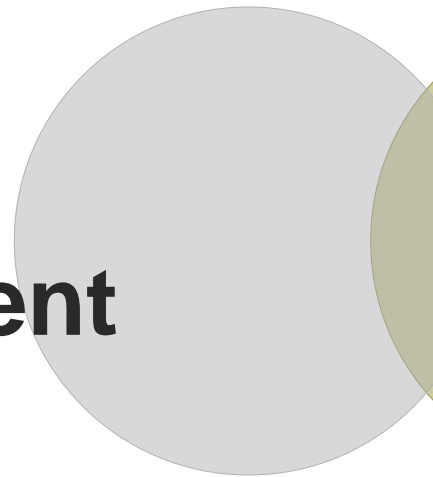
- Self regulation (Physical)
- Testing
- Trust/Expectations (people and environment)
- Independence/Sense of self
- Self control/ (emotional, then attention)
- Self esteem/mastery
- Conscience/empathy

The progression of social development

- Reciprocity/ communicating and being responded to (smiles, cries, sounds, language)
- Looking for trusted caregiver
- Seeking others for play/enjoyment and comfort
- Conflict resolution skills and other social skills
- Abiding by rules
- Making friends and being a friend



**Social
development**



**Emotional
development**

How social-emotional development is reflected in a child's development.



[Relating to Others]

- Emotional intelligence
- **Understanding Feelings**
- **Empathy**
- Engaging in cooperative play
- Getting along with others



Self Esteem



- Confidence
- **Mastery**
- **Self understanding**
- **Persisting in a task**

[Self Awareness]



- Knowing what we are feeling in the moment
- A growing ability to think about ourselves and our emotions (triggers)
- The growing knowledge of personal coping skills (soothers)

Social skills



- Reading cues of others
- Social vocabulary
- Thinking when upset
- Motivation to get along with others
- Conflict resolution

[Self Control]

- The ability to manage strong emotions
- The ability to manage one's own behavior
- The ability to control attention



Responsible decision making or “committed compliance”



- Thinking about consequences for self and others
- Taking responsibility for one's actions
- Behaving well because it is right not just to avoid punishment

Essential elements of a healthy emotional environment for young children



Factors that contribute to healthy emotional development- 4 R's-

P.Blackwell

- Relationships
- Routines
- Reliable caregiving
- Regulation



[Relationships- Attachment]

- A single “go to” person
- Caregivers who are emotionally present with the child
- Someone who patiently teaches child self control



[Relationships]

- Secure attachment to an adult caregiver
 - Emotional availability
 - Positive interaction including play
 - Consistent affection
- Peer relationships
 - Social skills development

[Routines]

- Predictable schedule
- Limits
- Regular opportunities for learning and enrichment
 - “Traumatized children crave the structure of a stable environment”
 - Rice & Groves(2005) Hope And Healing: A Caregiver's Guide to Helping Young Children Affected by Trauma (The Zero To Three Early Care Library)

[Reliable caregiving]

- Proper nutrition
- Shelter
- Medical care, dental
- Education

[Regulation]

- Active facilitation of self control and coping
- Consistent, calm discipline





Risks to social/emotional development

Individual risk factors not as important as the number of risk factors- Arnold Sameroff

Risk factors for emotional derailment in young children

- Emotional unavailability of important caregiver
- Threats to safety
- Inconsistent or chaotic home environment, harsh discipline or no discipline
- Loss
- Trauma

[Trauma definition]

- “Trauma is an exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous events overwhelm a person’s capacity to cope.”
 - Rice & Groves (2005). *Hope & Healing: A caregiver’s guide to helping young children affected by trauma.*

Two kinds of Trauma

Acute- single event



**Chronic- many
traumatic
events over
time**



Types of trauma: Parental factors

- Unexpected separation-
Incarceration
- Child
Neglect/abuse
- **Domestic
Violence**



Young Children and domestic violence

- **50% of domestic violence cases involving police intervention include a child less than five years of age**
 - Fantuzzo, et al. (2000). In C. Zeanah (Ed.) Handbook of Infant Mental Health).



Types of trauma: Community

- Violence/crime
- War
- Natural disaster
- Inferior childcare
- Poverty

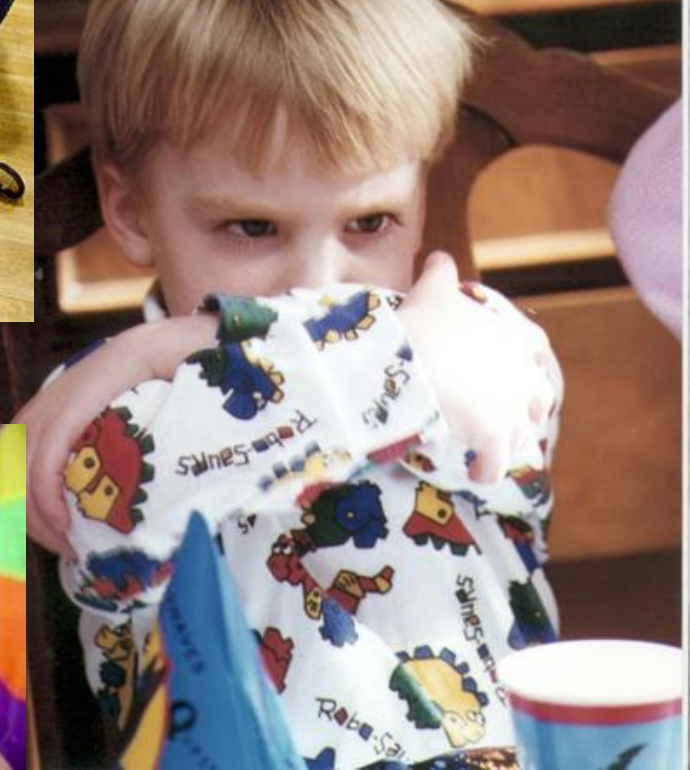
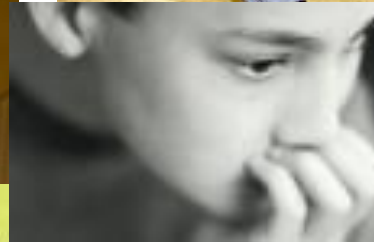


A child's vulnerability to trauma

- Temperament
- Psychopathology
- Age and Stage of development



Indicators of emotional distress in young children



Child's stress reaction at different ages-

■ Babies and toddlers

- Irritability
- Regression-(separation anxiety, need for pacifier)
- clinginess, fearfulness
- Frequent tantrums



Child's stress reaction at different ages-

■ Preschoolers to age seven years

- Sleep problems
- Bed wetting
- Regression
- Provocative behavior/testing



How do young children regard trauma?

- All young children including babies will respond to parent's tension
- Toddlers cannot always separate real from fantasy. They must "recreate" to understand.
- Toddlers may blame themselves for bad things that happen (2 years olds)
- All young children are concerned primarily with their own safety

[Children and coping]

- Remember children have had less time than adults to develop coping strategies.
- Children rely on their caregivers (parents and others) to help them cope.
- Caregivers create a “holding environment” - Winnicott

Ways emotional derailment is experienced

■ Internalization

- Feeling sad
- Hopelessness
- Low self esteem

■ Externalization

- Disruptive behavior
- Aggressiveness
- Oppositional-Defiant



Signs and symptoms of trauma

- Behavioral indicators
 - Challenging behaviors
 - Indiscriminant affection
 - Too well behaved
- Physical indicators
 - Somatic symptoms
 - Sad expression
 - Lethargic

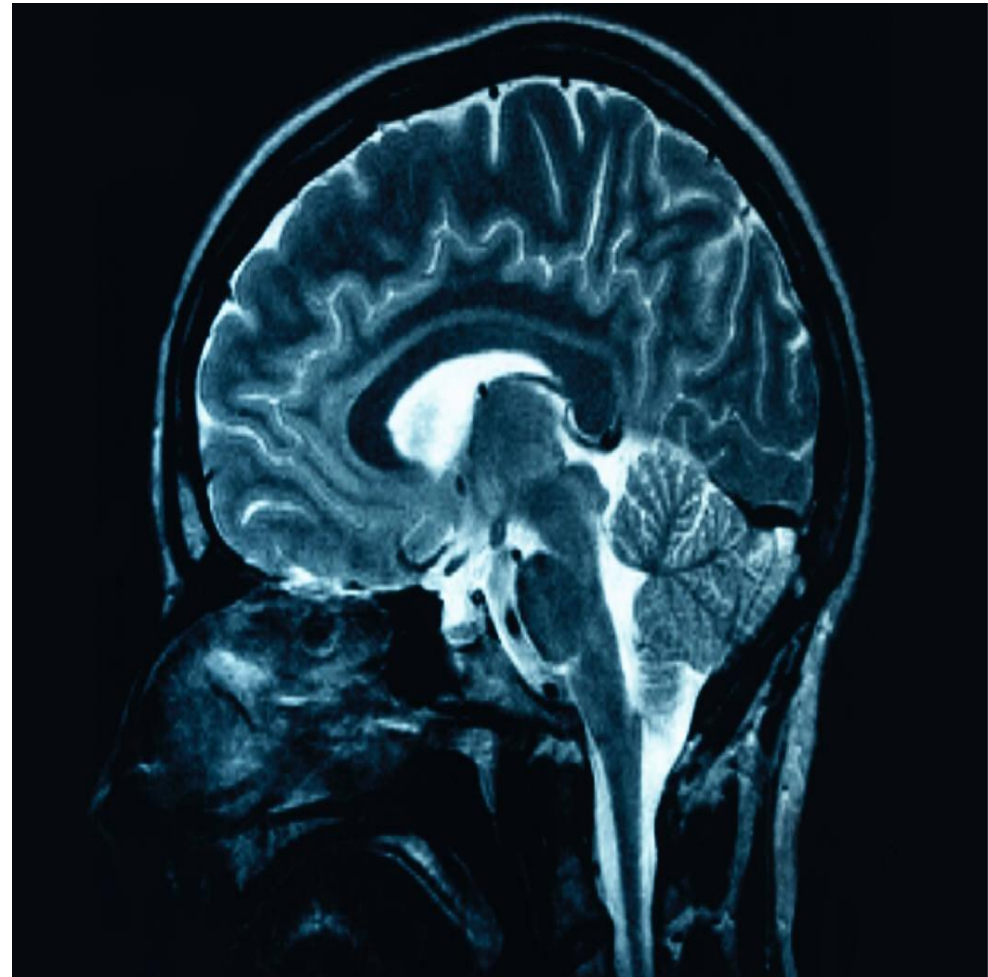


[Trauma and child behavior]

- “Traumatized children often show behavior that is out of control, fearful and disruptive, or excessively aggressive. They are not trying to cause trouble or misbehave. Rather children who experience trauma may become flooded with feelings of fear and anxiety. They cannot regulate these behaviors without help.”
 - *From: Rice & Groves (2005)*

[Trauma and the brain]

- Trauma affects the brain's ability to organize, process and store information.



[Stress and the brain]

- Stress elevates cortisol levels that may harm parts of the brain such as the hippocampus- a brain structure responsible for memory and emotion.

- Cortisol is a hormone in the glucocorticoids class.
- It kills brain cells such as hippocampal cells.
- Reduction in the size of the hippocampus has been found in children with high cortisol levels.
- Reduction in size of hippocampus makes it harder for a child to deal with trauma which in turn raises the cortisol level higher and increases risk of further damage.
 - Victor Carrion, 2007. Stanford Univ.

[Disorganized brain.....]

- The environment has a key role in organizing the brain of a young child. If the environment is chaotic and stressful, the brain is wired in a disorganized fashion.

[Disorganized behavior.....]

- Hyper-arousal (acts quickly and impulsively)
- Withdrawn behavior
- Aggressive behaviors (strike out without a clear reason)

How to sensitively *Respond* (and not react) to emotionally driven behavior



Promoting relationships

- *“The relationships that children build and the care they receive in high quality early childhood education programs can give them the strength they need to cope with traumatic experiences.”*

Rice & Groves (2005).

Promoting relationships

- Special caregiver model- A designated adult spends time with the child each day. This person may help calm the child when upset.



- Help the child learn to make friends (model, direct teaching, buddy system)

Promoting relationships

- Help child learn to trust
- Individualize interactions with children-
 - adult/child interactions should be unique to the needs of the child.
 - Use child's strengths and abilities to help them begin to master their own fears.

Create a safe environment

- Help children understand and manage their feelings (develop an emotional vocabulary)
- Observe the child to identify their triggers and soothers- then help the child recognize this.
- Childcare providers remain calm and show child in every way he is safe and accepted.

Create a safe environment

- Create an open environment for talking, sharing, listening
 - Circle time, music, games and non verbal expression times are important for children to begin to understand their emotions.
 - Children may need extra help to solve conflicts with other children- they should be coached to do the resolutions as much as possible.

Build a community of care for children

- Traumatized children feel isolated and alone. Help them feel part of a community-
- Community building activities include: relationship building, defining community, celebrating the group, and helping the child understand that they are *part of the whole*.
 - Rice and Betsy Groves (2005).

What does the child need?

- “It is crucial for children exposed to trauma to learn over and over again that adults can be patient, tolerant and caring even when the child’s behavior is out of control”
- Rice and Groves (2005)



When a child tells: Responding to disclosure of a traumatic event



[When a child tells:]

- “It’s okay to tell”
- Comfort and reassurance
- Help child identify feelings
- Help child understand the facts of the event
- Ensure the child’s privacy
- Determine whether immediate attention is needed

How to talk to parents about concerns regarding their children



[Structure of “the talk”]

- Describe how you see the whole child not just the problematic behavior
- Express caring and concern about child
- Describe problem
- Present observation of the function of the behavior
- Think WITH parent about what the behavior means/ or what it says about the child’s social and emotional functioning

Talking to Families about sensitive issues

- Have a plan (discuss with supervisor about what to say)
- It is a conversation not a confrontation
- Rehearse and role play
- Begin with the positive
- State the goal of the meeting
- Stick to facts and avoid judgment
 - (Rice & Groves (2005))

Talking to Families about sensitive issues

- Use active listening
- Create a plan together
- Summarize
- End with hope
 - (Rice & Groves (2005))



Cautions

- Parent's social emotional functioning
- Respect their defenses
- Be an ally but also be an advocate for the child



Helping parents help their children



*Helping children cope with a traumatic event- **Parent's role***

- **Maintain a routine** and a predictable structure to the child's life; this will make them feel safe
- **Set limits** on behavior but understand that misbehavior may occur
- **Be emotionally present**, try to understand their child's perception of the event
- **Take time to talk-** be simple, honest, avoid probing too much
- Provide the child an opportunity to **express and understand their feelings** regardless of age of child

Long term impact of unmet emotional needs



[Continued]

- The result of extreme stress in children is post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- PTSD can look a good deal like Attention deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Internalized or externalized distress (there can be overlap)

■ Internalized distress

- Depression
- Lack of confidence
- Anxiety
- Attention problems
- Lack of empathy

■ Externalized Distress

- Aggression
- Oppositional/defiant
- “Hyper” or disorganized behavior
- Inability to form relationships with others

Conclusions



[CONCLUSIONS:]

- Many of the problems observed in traumatized and neglected children is a result of insecure attachments
- For this reason the best hope for these children is helping them be part of a nurturing relationship

[Summary of Action Steps]

- Observe
- Identify
- Support with sensitive understanding
- Discussion with Family
- Referral