Buffering Babies and Toddlers From Stress and Trauma Utilizing Protective Factors

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ZERO TO THREE works to ensure all babies and toddlers benefit from the family and community connections critical to their well-being and development. Since 1977, the organization has advanced the proven power of nurturing relationships by transforming the science of early childhood into helpful resources, practical tools and responsive policies for millions of parents, professionals and policymakers.

For more information, please visit www.zerotothree.org, Facebook.com/ZEROTOTHREE or follow @ZEROTOTHREE on Twitter.

Military Family Projects at ZERO TO THREE offers training and resources focused on strengthening the resilience of very young children and their military and veteran families all across the country.

- Our resources promote positive development and emotional health during potentially stressful experiences such as the injury or loss of a parent.
- Our work strives to build knowledge and capacity of professionals.
- Our work is multi-disciplinary, including professionals in health care, mental health, child care, and family support.

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We Will Be Discussing:

- Implications of trauma, grief, and loss for very young children
- The importance of a trauma-informed approach
- Utilizing Protective Factors Framework to promote resilience during stressful, challenging times
- Resources designed to support interdisciplinary professionals serving military-connected families

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What is Trauma-Informed Practice?

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network describes characteristics of trauma-informed practice:

- **Identify**: Ability to identify trauma exposure and related symptoms
- **Provide Information to Parents**: Make information available to parents on trauma exposure, it’s impact, it’s prevention and it’s intervention
- **Provide Support to Families**: Provide support to strengthen resilience and protective factors of children and families impacted by trauma
- **Refer**: Refer families to evidence-based treatment services when needed
- **Self-Care**: Understand the self-care that is needed when working with families impacted by trauma
A New Life Begins…

What Do Babies and Toddlers Need?

What must every child have to grow, learn and flourish?

Infants & Toddlers’ Developmental Work

- Forming secure attachments
- Exploring their environments
- Working toward physical, emotional, and cognitive milestones
- Developing an emotional road map
- Learning to soothe and regulate themselves
Healthy Social-Emotional Development

The young child's capacity to:

- Feel safe and secure enough to explore themselves, others and the world
- Engage in increasingly interpersonal activities
- Form loving and reciprocal relationships
- Communicate in gesture, word, play and thought

Fundamentals of Attachment Theory

- Globally defined as a lasting connectedness between human beings
- When used as an early childhood relationship construct, it defines the child's view of the relationship

“There is no such thing as a baby.”

(Winnicott, 1964, p. 88)

Relationships: The Dance of Attunement

“Attunement represents the caregiver and child being “in tune” or “in sync” with one another.

“We look for indicators of attunement in the ability to read one another’s cues/behaviors, verbal and non-verbal communications and shared emotions/affect.”
The dance…

Behaviors toward the caregiver/parent
- Smiling
- Making Eye Contact
- Pointing
- Crying
- Moving close to or moving away from the caregiver, but "checking in" with them

Behaviors toward the caregiver/parent
- Smiling
- Making Eye Contact
- Pointing
- Crying
- Moving close to or moving away from the caregiver, but "checking in" with them

In turn, the parent...
- Smiles back at the child
- Cuddles with the child
- Comforts the child
- Reassures the child
- Touches/Holds the child
- Talks with the child

A Secure Base

How does this look to the child?
- A securely attached infant learns that when confronted with a frightening or threatening situation, seeking proximity to the attachment figure will provide comfort, security, and soothing.

Chuksie, 2006
Use It or Lose It

If neurons are not used at appropriate times during brain development, their ability to make connections dies. Neuroscientists call this pruning. 

Sprenger, 1999

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Memory

Implicit Memory
• I don’t know I know this, yet I act, feel, or imagine in response

Explicit Memory
• I know I know this, and I can recall the information

Siegel, 1999

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Autonomic Nervous System

Sympathetic Nervous System

Parasympathetic Nervous System

Trauma for Infants and Toddlers

What might this look like for a very young child?

A Continuum from Stress to Trauma

Normative, Developmentally Appropriate Stress

Emotionally Costly Stress

Traumatic Stress

Early Adversity and Trauma: Derailing Healthy Growth (1/26/07)
Presented by Alicia F. Lieberman, Ph.D., Irving B. Harris Professor of Infant Mental Health and Vice Chair for Academic Affairs, University of California San Francisco Dept. of Psychiatry, Director, Child Trauma Research Project at San Francisco General Hospital

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The Impact of Non-Normative Stress

Chronic Toxic Stress

- Alters the size and neuronal architecture of the brain
- Impacts learning, memory, and executive functioning
- Associated with more anxiety and less impulse control
- Mood may be impacted

Chronic Toxic Stress

- The body can be trained to respond to everything as stress; a hyperresponsive or chronically activated stress response
- Adverse stress in childhood is associated with health issues later in life, including heart disease, obesity, COPD, substance abuse, and depression.
Buffering Babies and Toddlers From Stress

What we ask of parents

- Predictability
- Emotional attunement
- Sensitivity
- Contingent responsiveness
- Co-regulation
- Mutuality

PTSD symptomatology

- Sleep problems
- Hypervigilance
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability or outbursts
- Hallucinations/flashbacks
- Exaggerated startle response
- Feelings of detachment/estrangement
- Restricted range of affect

Secure Attachment

Secure Base

What we ask of parents

- Consistency
- Emotional attunement
- Sensitivity
- Contingent responsiveness
- Co-regulation
- Mutuality

Brain Development

Toxic Stress becomes Tolerable

Normative Stress

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Serving as a Secure Base

- Predictability
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- Sensitivity
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- Mutuality

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TBI symptomatology
- Disorganization
- Impulsivity
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Vision problems
- Depression

(PTSD symptomatology from American Psychiatric Association, 2000)

Complex Veteran Family Issues that Can Significantly Affect Early Relationships

- Caregiver impairment
- Injury
- Depression
- Substance Abuse
- Family violence/addiction/child maltreatment history
- Child with special needs
- Significant financial stressors

- Service member parent’s PTSD symptoms predicted child depression, internalizing behaviors, and externalizing behaviors
- Service member parent’s depression served as robust predictor of child’s internalizing behaviors
- Nat’l Guard soldiers’ PTSD had direct and indirect effects on self-reported parenting behaviors, including impaired parenting

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Increase Risk for Children

• Growing body of research indicates increased risk for emotional, behavioral, and academic difficulties in school-aged children and adolescents
• Higher rates of substance use, risky behaviors, and internalizing symptoms in adolescent youth from military families
• Some evidence of an increased risk for social and emotional adjustment problems in younger children affected by parental deployments separations

Parental behavioral health symptoms were found to be significant risk factors for child adjustment problems. Greater parental sensitivity was found to be associated with better child adjustment

Challenges for Military Families

• Isolation
• Separations/Loss
• Frequent Moves
• Disruption of Relationships
• Facing potentially dangerous experiences
• Risks for family conflict
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Still Face Experiment

Tronick et al., (1975)

Young Children and Reintegration

- N=516; spouses of AD MPs who had returned from deployment within last 6 months; child ages 0 to 3
- Key Findings
  - Final predictors
    - Perception that public supports war; CP stress; CP's adjustment to having MP home; community support; military satisfaction; imminent deployment; perception that deployed service members are making a difference; family support; MP distress; and marital satisfaction.
  - Strongest predictors
    - CP stress and couple's readjustment
    - Across indicators and most robust betas
    - Couple readjustment particularly strong predictor of MP-child reconnection and CP-child attachment
    - MP distress predictor of MP-child reconnection (Williams, 2014)

The Connection Between Baby and Parent

- Family functioning has been shown to predict returned soldiers' PTSD symptoms
- Child behavior problems can predict parent stress, which in turn can predict child behavior problems
- Caregiver strain can lead to, or worsen, parent mental health issues

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A Reminder

• We must always be mindful that, in addition to what the event brings to the family, it is what the family brings to the event.

Every family is unique and will write its own story

Imagine the Experience of a Child

Lullaby

By Chuck Mangione

Please somebody hold my hand
I'm scared and feel real shaky
please somebody understand
I just now lost my daddy

Daddy said goodbye today
I love him so already
I love mummy very much
But mummies can't be daddies
Please somebody hold my hand
I'm scared and feel real shaky
please somebody understand
I just now lost my daddy

Saying good-bye to Daddy

For Your Consideration

Consider a family in your program
• What are their challenges?
• How does the family's cultural context promote resilience?

How do you think complicated transitions might affect infants and toddlers and their core needs?
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Parental Trauma, Grief or Loss
The parent/caregiver might, to some degree, be “emotionally” absent
• Emotionally preoccupied by the trauma, grief or loss.
• Less available time/capacity for positive play and interaction.

Changes in structure and routine
• Can represent further breakdown in security.
Caregiver/child relationship becomes more stressful
• Reduced “En face-à-face” opportunities

Ways Young Children May Respond to Loss
• Protest
• Sadness and emotional withdrawal
  • Withdrawal, lethargy, detachment
  • Concept of “short sadness span”
• Intensification of normative developmental anxieties
• Anger
• Regressions in developmental functioning

Impact Can Last a Lifetime
• Adverse Childhood Experiences Studies demonstrate links between
  • Early traumatic experiences and social, emotional, and cognitive impairments (Felitti et al., 1998)
  • Adoption of health risk behaviors (Brown et al., 2010)
  • Disease, disability and social problems that manifest into adulthood (Anda et al., 2006)
  • Marked reduction in life expectancy (Brown et al., 2009)
• There are significant links between exposure to childhood trauma/traumatic losses and the development of negative psychosocial outcomes in childhood and adolescence

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When Additional Support Is Needed

- Identify signs when a child is saying, “I’m having a hard time.”
- Assist parents in recognizing signs that they need additional support
- Share and use resources without overwhelming families—or yourself
- Refer families to the next level of care when necessary

Listening to the Behavior

“What cues might we see indicating a child is experiencing stress or trauma?”

Photo by J Yeary
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Fostering Resilience

- How do infants/toddlers engage in self-soothing, comforting, and self-regulating behaviors/strategies? (regulation)
- How can a parent or caregiver help an infant regulate their response to stress? (attunement)
- How do infants, parents, and caregivers influence each other through emotions? (co-regulation)

Regulation and Co-Regulation

Support Routine Sense of Control

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Recommendations to Help Children

- Provide a sense of security, patience, and attention to what the child is communicating through their words and behaviors.
- Encourage the expression of feelings.
- Watch out for reminders (triggers).
- Support child in maintaining connection to the deployed, injured or deceased parent.

(The National Child Traumatic Stress Network website [n.d.])

Promoting Protective Factors

The good news is there is also strong evidence that “the course of development can be altered in early childhood by effective interventions that change the balance between risk and protection, thereby shifting the odds in favor of more adaptive outcomes.”

(National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000, p. 32)

Center for Study of Social Policy (CSSP) Strengthening Families™ Protective Factors Framework (PFF)

An evidence-informed approach to help families build protective factors:

- Focuses on preventing child maltreatment before it occurs.
- Rather than focus on decreasing risk factors, it works to increase protective factors that promote healthy family and child outcomes.
- Goal isn’t just to decrease potential harm to a child, rather to maximize potential for that child
Foundational Ideas of PFF

• Two generational approach designed to increase family strengths
  • Parent and child well-being are inextricably linked
• Consideration of Culture
  • Parenting beliefs, definitions, values, expectations, and behaviors are directly influenced by culture
• Strength-based perspective
  • All families benefit from protective factors
• Biology of Stress
  • Adverse childhood experiences have long-term effects on physical and mental health

Browne, 2014

Foundational Ideas of PFF

• Resilience Theory
  • “A resilience-oriented approach draws out family strengths and potential to meet the family’s challenges” (Walsh, 2006, in Browne, 2014, p. 14)
• Focus on Well-Being
  • Consistent with Administration for Children and Families, this includes the domains of a) cognitive functioning b) physical health and development c) emotional/behavioral health and d) social functioning.
• Nature of Risk and Protective Factors
  • Families don’t exist in isolation, we must address the systems in which they exist including individual, family, community, and society

Browne, 2014

The Good News:
Protective Factors Reduce Impact of Trauma

The presence & strength of protective factors enhance children’s ability to resist, or to quickly recover from harmful effects of trauma, loss & other adversities.

Photo by Department of Defense
National Center on Child Traumatic Stress (2015)
How Protective Factors Influence Outcomes

1. Mitigate the negative effects of risk factors
2. Interrupt the cumulative effects of risk factors
3. Help to avoid the negative effects of risk factors

Strengthening Families™
Protective Factors Framework

- Parental Resilience
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Social Emotional Competence of Children
- Social Connections
- Concrete Support in Times of Need

Protective Factors Framework

- Parent's capacity for resilience or how a parent deals with stress
- Ability to problem solve
- Ability to build and sustain trusting relationships with your child
- Ability to seek help when needed
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Protective Factors Framework

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- With accurate information about child development, parents can form realistic and appropriate expectations for their child's behavior
- Knowledge allows parents to see child in a positive light
- Ability to obtain information about parenting and healthy development from sources such as family members, parenting classes, internet
- Parents who received harsh discipline, or had negative childhood experiences may need extra help to change pattern they learned

Protective Factors Framework

Social Emotional Competence of Children
- Child's ability to interact positively with others
- Child's developing ability to self-regulate and communicate their feelings
- Early identification and assistance facilitates parents in addressing needs of children with developmental delays or challenging behaviors, mitigating negative results and keeping development on track

Protective Factors Framework

Social Connections
- We all need other people! Friends, family members, neighbors, and community members provide emotional support and help problem solve
- Isolated families may need help in reaching out to build positive relationships
Protective Factors Framework

Concrete Support in Times of Need

- Need to ensure families have access to basic needs including food, shelter, safety, health care, and clothing.
- Families need to know they can access services in crisis such as domestic violence, mental illness, and substance abuse.

The Benefits of a Strengths Approach

- A deficit perspective defines problems in terms of what needs to be "fixed", strengths based perspective builds on the strengths of the family.
- Warriors don't have to see themselves as being weak to seek services.
- A respectful approach, viewing families as possessing and able to use their strengths.
- Acknowledges parents as experts on their family and wanting to do what is right by their child.
- Encourages partnering with parents.

Instead of assessing only what's wrong, find out what is right! Every family has its own story, every family member brings its own strengths.
Using PFF-M to Assess Family Strengths

Parental Resilience

"There is so much going on for you right now, so many changes! I wonder what you are doing to care of yourself as you work so hard to care for your child?"

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

"How do you get information about your child's development? Who do you ask if you have questions?"

Social Emotional Competence of Children

"What do you think she is trying to tell you when she does that? I wonder what you think she would say if she could talk?"
Using PFF-M to Assess Family Strengths

Social Connections

"Who do you turn to for emotional support? If you didn’t feel well, and your spouse was away, is there someone you could call that would come help you with your baby?"

Concrete Support in Times of Need

"It’s so hard to stretch your dollars with little ones. If you are ever in need of basic support, or need to access services, I will help as much as I can to connect you to those services. I know a lot about the many resources at our installation and in our community!"

Applying Strengths-Based Practice

• Essential to forge trusting relationship with family
• Focus on parent’s unique strengths
• Identify parents knowledge, competencies, and unrealized resources
• Identify resources within family or community that could help
• Understand inequities and conditions that may be barriers in larger system
• Parents MUST be active participants in the change process!

Browne, 2014, p. 48
Case Planning

- How can you build on the family strengths to promote family wellness?
- How can you support shared decision making so the family can problem solve with you, becoming more skilled at promoting their own family’s wellness?
  - What are some goals you would consider proposing to the Jones Family?
  - Where would the goals fall within PFF-M?

How YOU Are Matters!

“If providers prioritize self-care, they are giving two gifts—one to themselves and one to the children in their care.”

Reflections on Self-Care

- What are the ways professionals serving military children and families like you can help promote self-care—as individuals, as professionals and as programs?
- What are ways you can support and buffer yourself as you deal with the sometimes intense experiences and emotions of the families you support?
Resources to Support YOU in Supporting Families with Young Children

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Find information, training, and resources on topics such as:

- Trauma Types and Secondary Traumatic Stress
- Trauma Informed Care
- Military and Veteran Families and Children
- Adolescence and Substance Abuse
- Culture and Trauma
- Natural Disasters and Terrorism
- Special Populations and Trauma
- Treatments That Work

For more information, visit

http://www.nctsn.org/

NCTSN Professional Resources
"Very young children stir up powerful feelings in adults (the species is programmed that way)."

(Fenichel, 1992, p 11)

"How we are is as important as what we do."

A moment to reflect....

• Think of a time when you were helped just by the presence of another.
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Thank you for all you do for babies, toddlers, and their families!

References

References (cont'd)


References (cont’d)


 references (cont’d)


References (cont’d)


ZERO TO THREE. (2015). Honoring Our Babies and Toddlers: Supporting young children affected by their Veteran family’s transition to civilian life, injury, or parental death. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.