

BUILDING BRIDGES OF UNDERSTANDING MAINTAINING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH ENGAGEMENT

BEYOND AGGRESSION, FEAR, TERROR, AND
RESISTANCE

A PARENTS GUIDE



A PARENTS' GUIDE

What is the Engagement Model?

The engagement model is a philosophy of care. The model uses evidence-based research that focuses on “including the voices of children and families” by engaging with clients as partners to closely understand each child being served. (Bloom, S. L., et al, 2003). It promotes a non-violent environment in the mental health community which makes the best use of the chances for healing. (Bennington-Davis, M., Murphy, T., February 2007).

What is trauma?

Development during childhood is rapid and dramatic, which makes childhood not only a time of opportunity, but it is also a time of vulnerability. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) states: “Helping young people avoid or overcome emotional problems in the wake of violence or disaster is one of the most important challenges a parent, teacher, or mental health professional can face.” (NIMH, 2006, p. 1). NIMH explains mind trauma as an experience that is emotionally painful, distressful, or shocking and can result in lasting mental and physical effects.

It is important to remember that each child reacts differently to the experience of trauma and there are many things that can change their emotional reactions. In the past it was believed that early childhood trauma had little or no consequence on very young children. Now studies show that early childhood trauma has the greatest influence because it changes the structure, growth, and functioning of the child's brain. (Hodas, G. R., 2006, p. 8).

Parents and caregivers play an important role in today's challenging society. Families face difficult times and children and adolescents need their guardians care more than ever. Often parents feel isolated

in their task of helping their children through complicated experiences. Seeking help from professionals is a step many parents find hard to take. It is important for these parents to know that professionals have developed innovative ways to help children, adolescents, and families recover from traumatic events. (NCTSN, 2007).

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network gives the following information:

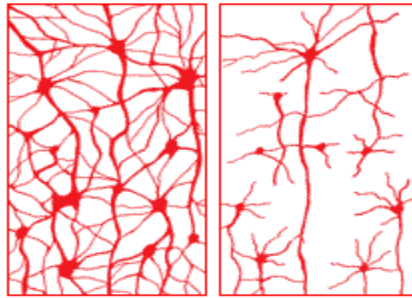
Types of Traumatic Stress:

- ❖ Physical abuse
- ❖ Sexual abuse
- ❖ Traumatic Grief
- ❖ Domestic Violence
- ❖ Community and school violence
- ❖ Complex trauma = multiple or prolonged traumatic event/s.
- ❖ Medical trauma = trauma related to an injury or accident, chronic or life-threatening illness (e.g. cancer or AIDS) and the experience of medical procedures (e.g. changing burn dressings or undergoing chemotherapy).
- ❖ Refugee or war zone trauma
- ❖ Natural Disasters (tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, and tsunamis).
- ❖ Terrorism (NCTSN, 2007).

What is trauma informed care?

Scientific evidence has proven that connections in the brain called synapses increase based on genetics and childhood experiences. (Perry, B., 2007).

Brain cell connections



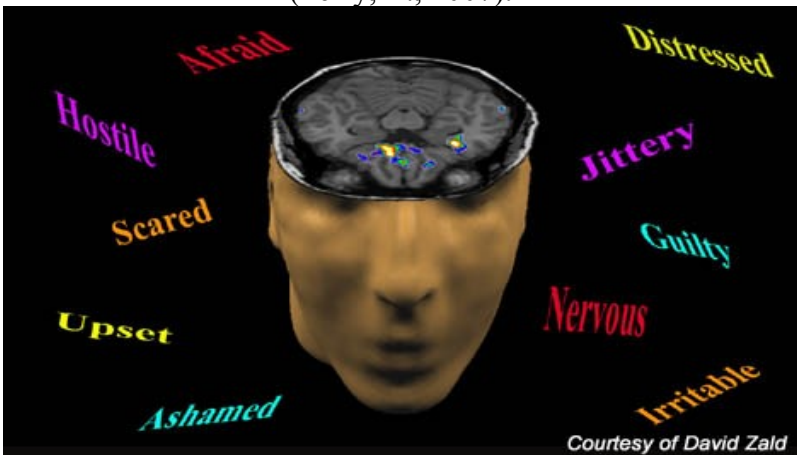
section of a stimulated brain

section of an unstimulated brain

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These synaptic connections are extremely important in a child's developing brain because synapses are responsible for building a foundation for how the brain organizes information, and how the brain itself is structured. A child's future performance, coping and behavioural skills depends on how these connections develop.

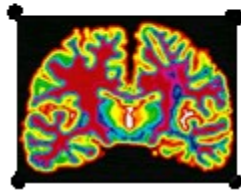
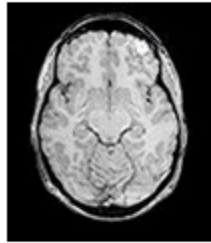
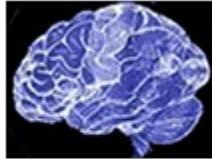
(Perry, B., 2007).



Courtesy of David Zald

"You are your synapses. They are who you are." --- Joseph LeDoux, 2002 (in *Synaptic Self*)

Below is an image of a child's brain

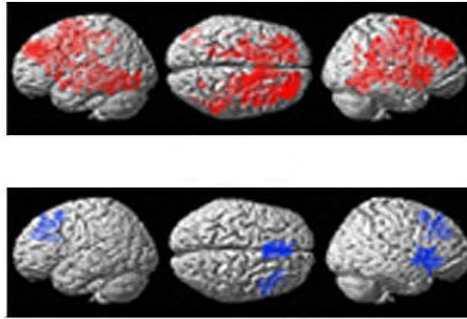


www.med.harvard.edu/AANLIB/cases/caseNA/pb9.htm

Traumatic experiences do change the development of a child's brain. The picture above shows a normal developing child's brain. (Bloom, S. L., et al, 2003).

When a child has been traumatized they are will have problems concentrating, they will be more anxious, and they will pay more attention to body language than to what is being said. Difficult behaviors are in fact stress responses and it is up to the parents and adults in these children's lives to figure out what could possibly be causing these stress responses. (Bloom, S. L., et al, 2003).

The red sections show normal activity in the human brain:



<http://news-service.stanford.edu/news/medical/2004/march17/brain.html>

The blue sections show decreased activity in the human brain.

Three Typical Stress Responses:

1. Hyper Sensitive or Hyper Responsive. Is the fight or flight response, or self-preservation that humans use whether they think about it or not. Our primitive coping responses go into motion. For example being anxious all of the time, or having trouble sleeping, feeling agitated or irritable, or startle easily.

2. Hyper Vigilant: Another fight or flight response happens when a child thinks danger is lurking everywhere. To the person experiencing hyper vigilance it can feel overwhelming and ever-present. The person feels they must watch-out for harmful situations or they will be hurt. This response takes an incredible amount of energy to keep up.

3. Shut Down and Tuned Out (often seen in the “good” or “easy” child). Still another form of fight or flight response happens when a child becomes withdrawn because she/he cannot fight or flee. These children feel overpowered and the response is to “freeze” or shut down and tune out. All of these responses are highly adaptive, very primitive and universally observed in human beings under threat. <http://healthlink.mcw.edu/article/1031002705.html>.
Article written by Dan Ullrich (Three Typical Stress Responses)

Some Strategies Parents Have Used:

- 1.** Comforting, encouragement, and support are very important to every child.
- 2.** Listening, without judgment, to what their child is saying by allowing the child to talk about what happened.
- 3.** Children need a parent's calm attention
- 4.** When some parents are angry with their child they will take a time out to calm themselves down by going to another room, or going for a walk.
- 5.** When the child or adolescent is calm some parents ask their child or adolescent to tell them three things they like to do to calm down, this helps parents be more prepared when their child gets angry or upset.
- 6.** Other parents try to understand what triggers unusual or aggressive behaviors in their child.
- 7.** Children and adolescents cannot think like adults because their brains are still developing.
- 8.** Children and adolescents need a dependable, predictable, and repetitive lifestyle.
- 9.** Listening and talking with your child as much as you can. This shows your child you are interested in what happens to them.
- 10.** Parents who have set realistic goals and have suitable age expectations for their child have found this successful.
- 11.** Being patient with your child's progress and with yourself. Some times it can be very difficult if you, as a parent, do not see changes happening.

12. Most parents found that seeking professional help early helpful. Children are more impressionable early in life and as they get older making changes become more difficult.

13. Take care of yourself. It will not help if you become exhausted or overwhelmed. If you do not take care of yourself, who will take care of your child?

14. One of the most important things a parent can do to understand their child is that trauma creates fear in children, and that anger has an underlying element of fear. Instead of just focusing on the anger, it is important to address the underlying fear in children. Attempt to calm and soothe the fear, and in turn that could help make the anger go away. (Perry, B., 2007).



Calm

A Place for Parents:

Parents may want to take some time and start a healing process of their own in self understanding. Parenting can be challenging and demanding with today's social pressures. Questions about how to protect your child from traumatic experiences are tough to answer. Professionals in the community with experience can help parents understand and answer many demanding questions about raising child/children, as well as help parents and caregivers to de-stress and remain calm. It is important for parents to get the support they may need in difficult situations, and nurses are an excellent source and resource for parents and caregivers.



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<http://thebluefeather.tripod.com/>

Resources:

Your Local Public Library is a valuable resource for books and health journals. As well, libraries have computers with internet access that the public can use. Some suggested authors are: Bruce Perry and Sandra Bloom.

Google: Canadian Mental Health Association on the internet.
www.google.com/

Parenting Pathfinders: <http://www.coping.org/parenting/present.htm>

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network:
http://www.ncsnet.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=ctr_aud_prnt



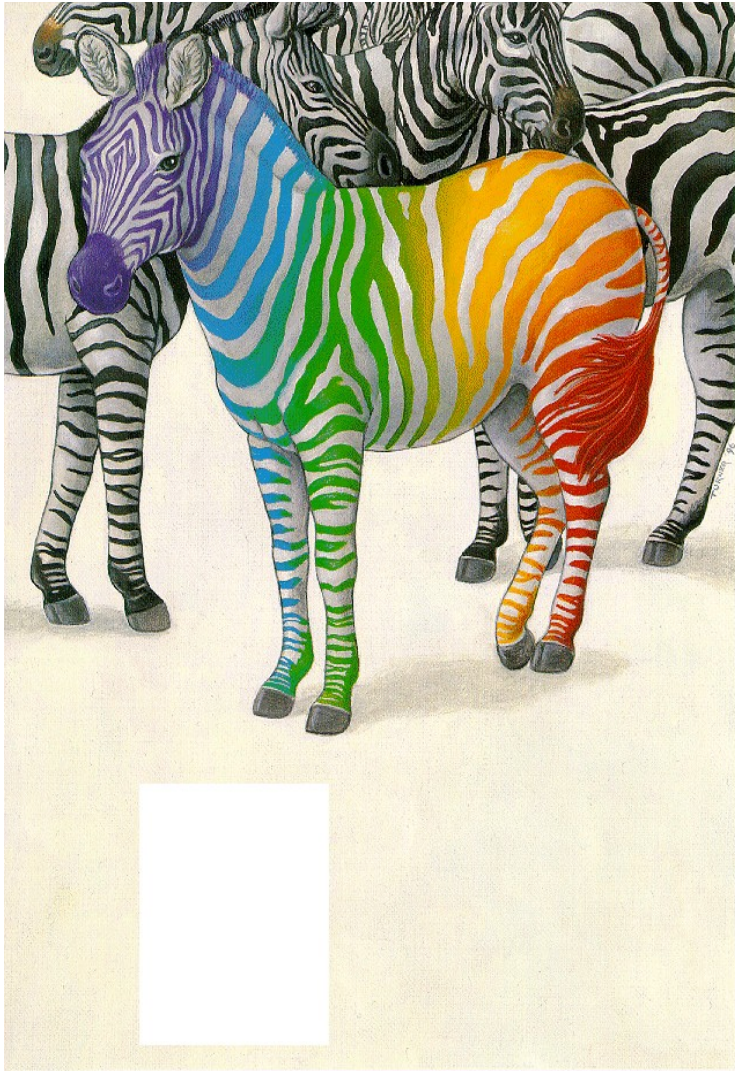


http://www.fieldeditor.nl/website/_images/references_main_03.jpg

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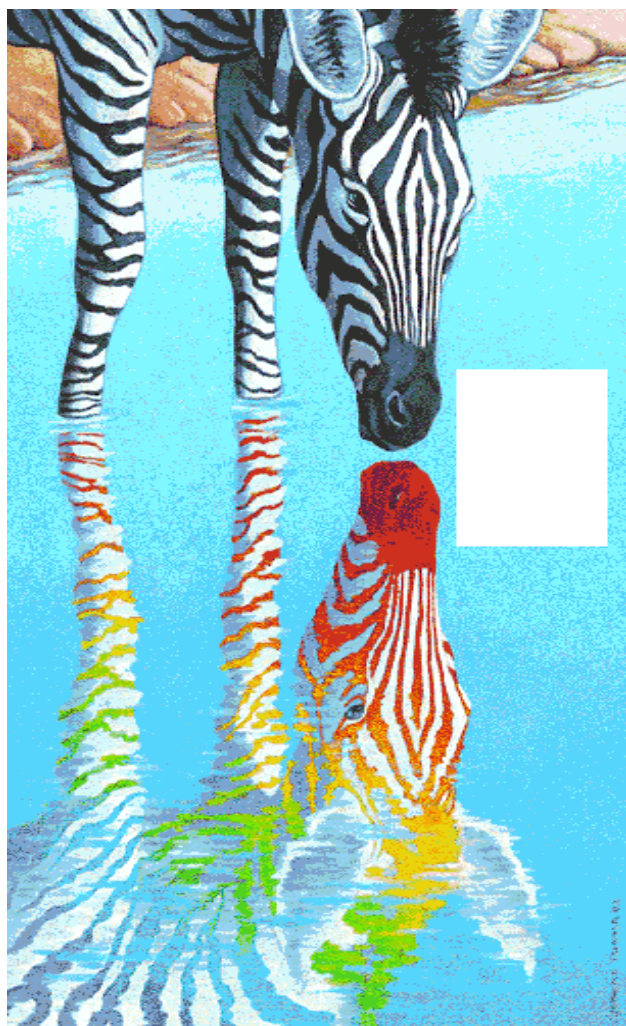
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2. Bloom, S.L., Bennington-Davis, M., Farragher, B., McCorkle, D., Nice-Martini, K., Wellbank, K (2003). *Multiple Opportunities for Creating Sanctuary. Psychiatric Quarterly, Vol. 74, 2.*
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http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/bruceperry/working_children.htm on March 07, 2007
5. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Types of Traumatic Stress. Retrieved from: http://www.netsnet.org/nets/nav.do?pid=ctr_aud_pmt on March 07, 2007.
6. Ullrich, D., (2006). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is Based on Individual Response to Danger. Retrieved from:
<http://healthlink.mcw.edu/article/1031002705.html> on March 22, 2007.

Contact your Clinical Nurse Coordinator or Educator if you have any questions, comments, or need assistance with resources in your community.



“All Fords are exactly alike, but no two [people] are just alike.
Every new life is a new thing under the sun; there has never
been anything just like it before, never will be again.”

Henry Ford (1863 - 1947)



<http://www.nichey.org/>