



**HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN DEAL
WITH STRESS & TRAUMA**



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Helping Children Deal With Stress & Trauma

1. Safe Harbor

Understand the concept of "secure base."

- Stay close by. *I can see you are trying to figure out that new puzzle. This is a new room. I will hold you for awhile longer.*
- Do what you say you will. *I will be done in 1 minutes. Let's set the timer. I will be here when you wake up.*

Predictable schedule and routines.

- Post chart of daily routines: snack, naptime, meals, recess. *Remember after nap is snack time and then we will go outside.*
- Organized environment—toy shelves are labeled, everything has a place.

Keep environment safe.

- Reinforce safety

2. Self-Regulation & Calming Strategies

Use common approach to calm down.

Calm down. Stop. Breathe. Count.

- Build a common language to verbalize and manage thoughts, feelings and emotions. *I can see you have some 'big feelings' today. Let's go to the 'calm down box.' Would you like some 'calm down' toys?*
- Talk about feelings and what to do. *You are angry that your friend took your toy, what should we do next?*

Encourage comfort items.

- Calm down toys—stress ball, pinwheels, sunglasses, stuffed animals. *Do you want to bring your blanket to the dentist today?*

Create a physical calm down space within each classroom.

Encourage art, play, and music as outlets for expressing fears and other emotions.

- Self regulation games—*Hokey Pokey, Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes.*
- Books that show ways to handle emotions—*The Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* or *The Little Engine that Could.*

3. Consistent & Responsive Caregivers

Attunement

- 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 good-bye. I will stay a few more minutes.*
- Learn child's likes and dislikes. Match activities to skills and interest. *I know you love dinosaurs and we got a new book you might like.*
- Respond quickly and appropriately.
- Physically and emotionally available. *I will rub your back until you go to sleep.*
- Focused and engaged. *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. This is a safe place. I will be here with you.*

4. Positive Guidance & Support

Observe and read cues. *I see you turning your head away from the food. Are you all done? I hear your angry voice, tell me more.*

- Observe play: *Look for repetitive play or drawing about traumatic event.*

Observe child's behavior to figure out his emotional needs & help organize his feelings.

- Look for the unmet emotional needs. *I can see you are sad today. Want to put some words to your tears?*
- Time in, rather than time out. *Seems like you need a hug today. Would you like to come sit on my lap?*
- Fill up their cup. Delight in. *Wow! You did it all by yourself!*
- Acknowledge strengths and effort. *You worked really hard. Seems like you really enjoyed painting that picture.*
- 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.*

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

Source:

1. Powell, M., Cooper, G., Hoffman, R., & Murrie, R. (2005). The Circle of Security. In C. Zeanah (Ed.), *Handbook of Infant Mental Health* (3rd Ed., pp. 450-467). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
2. Division Letter for Head Start Children (2015). *Staying Strong Together: Building the Resilience of Children and Families in the EHSW Welfare System*. Available at <http://www.centerfortreatmentchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ST-into-Practice-WV-2014.pdf>.
3. Breithorn, M.E., & Kinniburgh, K. (2011). *Teaching Trauma-Informed Skills to Children and Adolescents: How to Foster Resilience Through Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Helping Children Deal With Stress & Trauma

1. Safe Harbor

**2. Self-Regulation
& Calming
Strategies**

**3. Consistent
& Responsive
Caregivers**

4. Positive Guidance & Support

1. Safe Harbor

A feeling
of physical and emotional safety



Attachment Theory

Bowlby's Key Concepts

- **Proximity:** The desire to be near the people we are attached to.
- **Safe Haven:** Returning to the attachment figure for comfort and safety in the face of a fear or threat.
- **Secure Base:** The attachment figure is a base of security from which the child can explore.
- **Separation Distress:** Anxiety that occurs in the absence of the attachment figure.



Secure Base

“In the presence of a sensitive and responsive caregiver, an infant or toddler will use the caregiver as a ‘safe haven’ or base of security from which to explore. The child returns to the “secure base” for comfort and safety. This confidence is forged during early childhood.”

- John Bowlby



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.).**

Remember? 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.



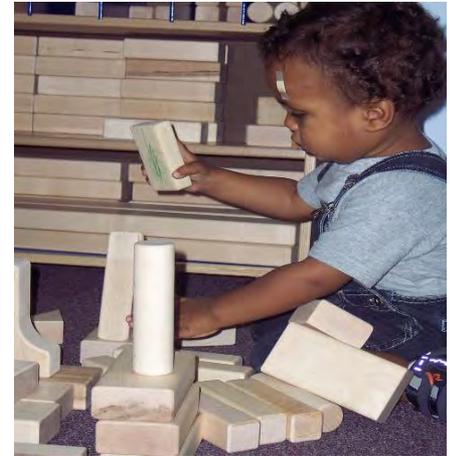
Keep the Environment Safe

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.



1. Safe Harbor Summary

- Understand the concept of “secure base.”
- Stay close by
- Maintain predictable schedule and routines.
- Keep environment safe.



2. Self-Regulation & Calming Strategies



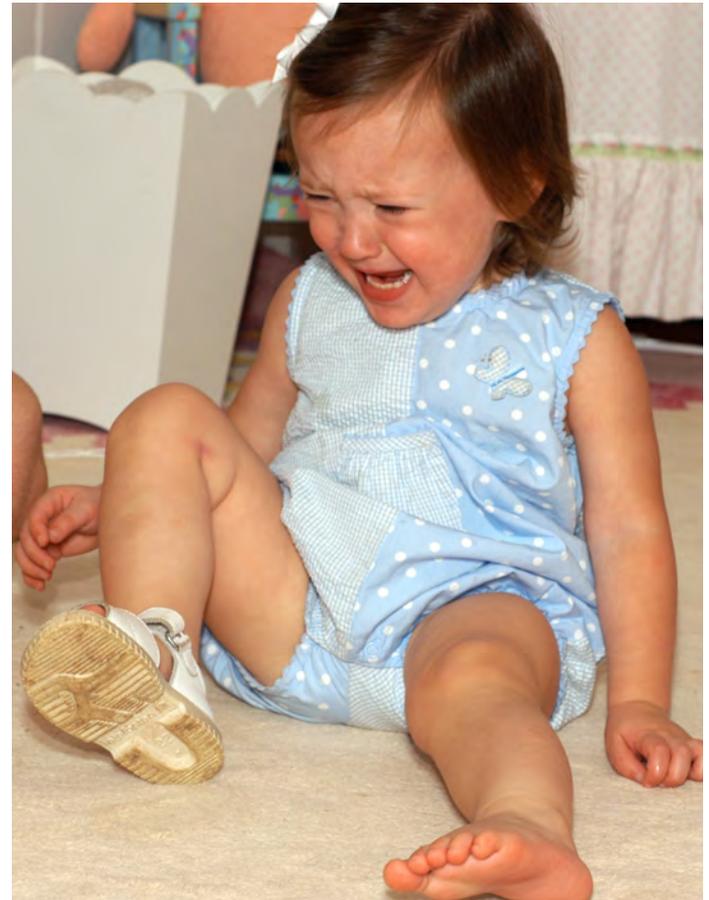
Use a Common Calming Strategy

“Calm down. Stop. Breathe. Count. You will be fine.”



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?



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?



Redirect to a Quiet Spot

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



Encourage Self Expression

- Encourage art, pretend play, and music as outlets for expressing fears and emotions.

Can you paint a picture of it?

Let's think of a song about what happened.



Singing...

Reduces stress, elevates “feel good” endorphins in the brain, improves mood



Play Games for Self-Regulation

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

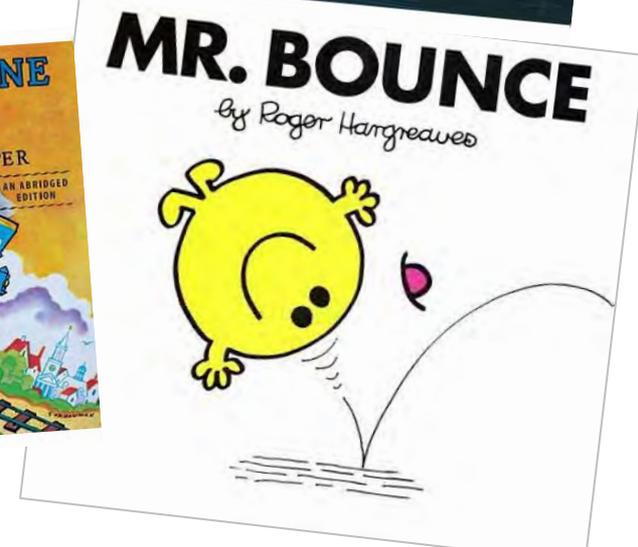
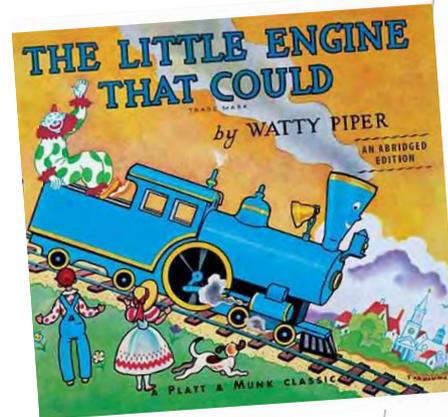
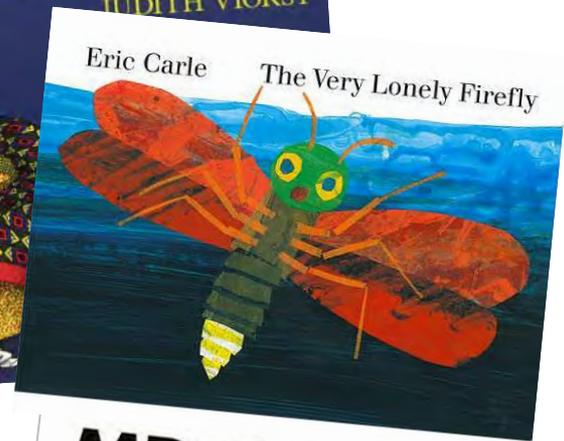
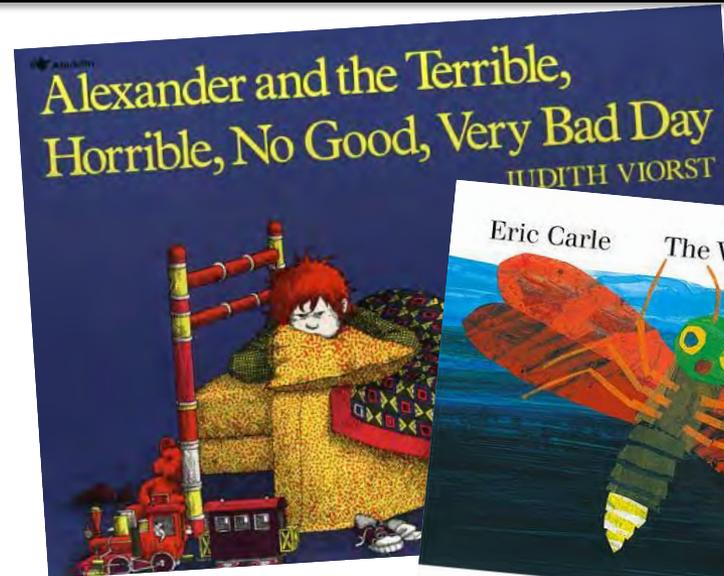


Books Show How to Deal with Conflict, Cope & Teaching Executive Functioning

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 – parents, teachers, and other important adults – 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

View as video with Chandra reading the book:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXOgvchh_Lc





A little squirrel announces that he was once very, very scared and finds out that he is not alone. Lots of little animals went through scary experiences, but they react in different ways.

Turtle hides and gets a tummy ache, monkey clings, dog barks, and elephant doesn't like to talk about it. They need help, and they get help from grown-ups who help them feel safe and learn ways to cope with difficult feelings.

I know I look prickly. People sometimes worry that I might poke them, but I won't. I might get frustrated or a little mad because it's hard when things get crazy, but I won't hurt you.



You smell OK.



Thank you. I'll try hard to earn your trust, but I know it might take time.

Well, here if anyone bothers you, it's my job to help them learn not to bother you. It's my job to keep you safe. Here you don't need to growl or bark. You can just tell me what's happening, and I will listen to you. Then we will decide what to do.



Can we try that?



Yes, but I might forget.



That's ok. You are learning, and we will help you learn. We want this to be a safe place where you don't need to bark or growl.

Or bite.



That's true. Biting is not safe. Sometimes it is hard for us to talk about what is going on inside us or figure out how we can calm down.

When you feel scared, or when you have other hard feelings like

sad, angry, frustrated, embarrassed, or ashamed, what do you do?



Scared



Sad



Angry



Frustrated



Embarrassed



Ashamed

You have all been through a lot, and it makes sense that you feel this way, but it also seems like you need help, so you don't keep feeling this way.

Maybe we can learn new things to do that help us when we feel scared or mad or sad.



2. Self-Regulation & Calming Strategies Summary

- Use common approach to calm down.
- Build a common language to verbalize and manage thoughts, feelings and emotions.
- Encourage comfort items.
- Create a physical space to calm down within each classroom.
- Encourage art, play, books and music as outlets for expressing fears and other emotions.



**3. Consistent &
Responsive Caregivers**



Nurturing Relationships Can Buffer Stress & Help Coping

Tolerable stress is a physiological state that could potentially disrupt brain development but is buffered by supportive relationships that facilitate coping.



Read Children's Cues

- **A consistent, primary caregiver who observes will learn children's cues.**



Responsive Caregivers

Caregivers should respond with warmth and affection as children attempt to focus and engage.



Attunement



- Caregivers who 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.*



Learn Child's Interests and Skills

*You've worked all these puzzles.
Would you like to try a new one?*



Match Activities to the Child's Interests and Skills

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



Respond Quickly and Appropriately



Caregivers Who Are Physically & Emotionally Available



Caregivers Who Are Focused & Engaged



3. Consistent & Responsive Caregivers Summary

- Observe and learn child's cues.
- Stay attuned to accurately understand & respond to children's actions, communications, needs and feelings.
- Learn child's likes and dislikes.
- Match activities to skills and interest.
- Respond quickly and appropriately.
- Stay close by.
- Be physically and emotionally available.
- Remain focused and engaged.



4. Positive Guidance & Support



Acknowledge Effort

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



Learn to read emotional cues

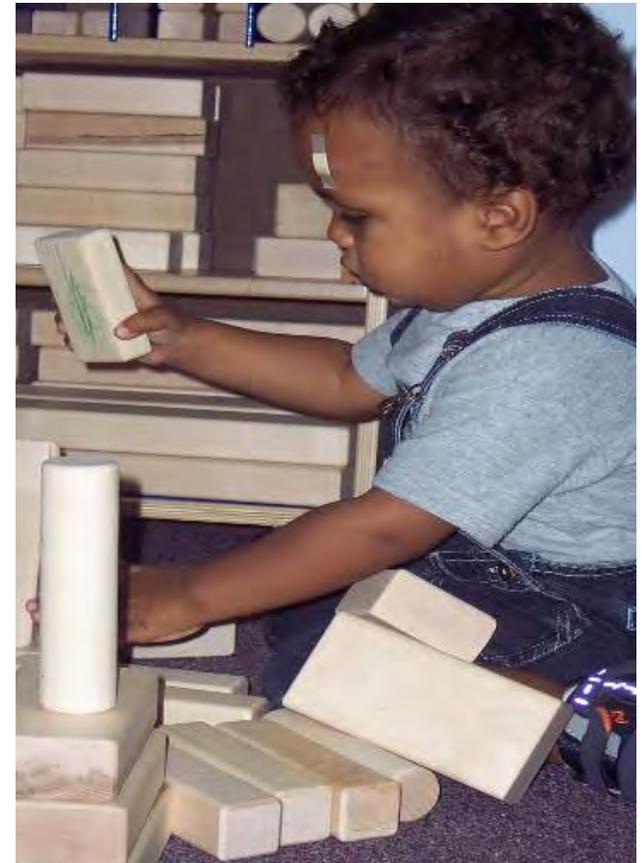
- All behavior has meaning. What is the child communicating? Put words to children's cues.

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



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?”*

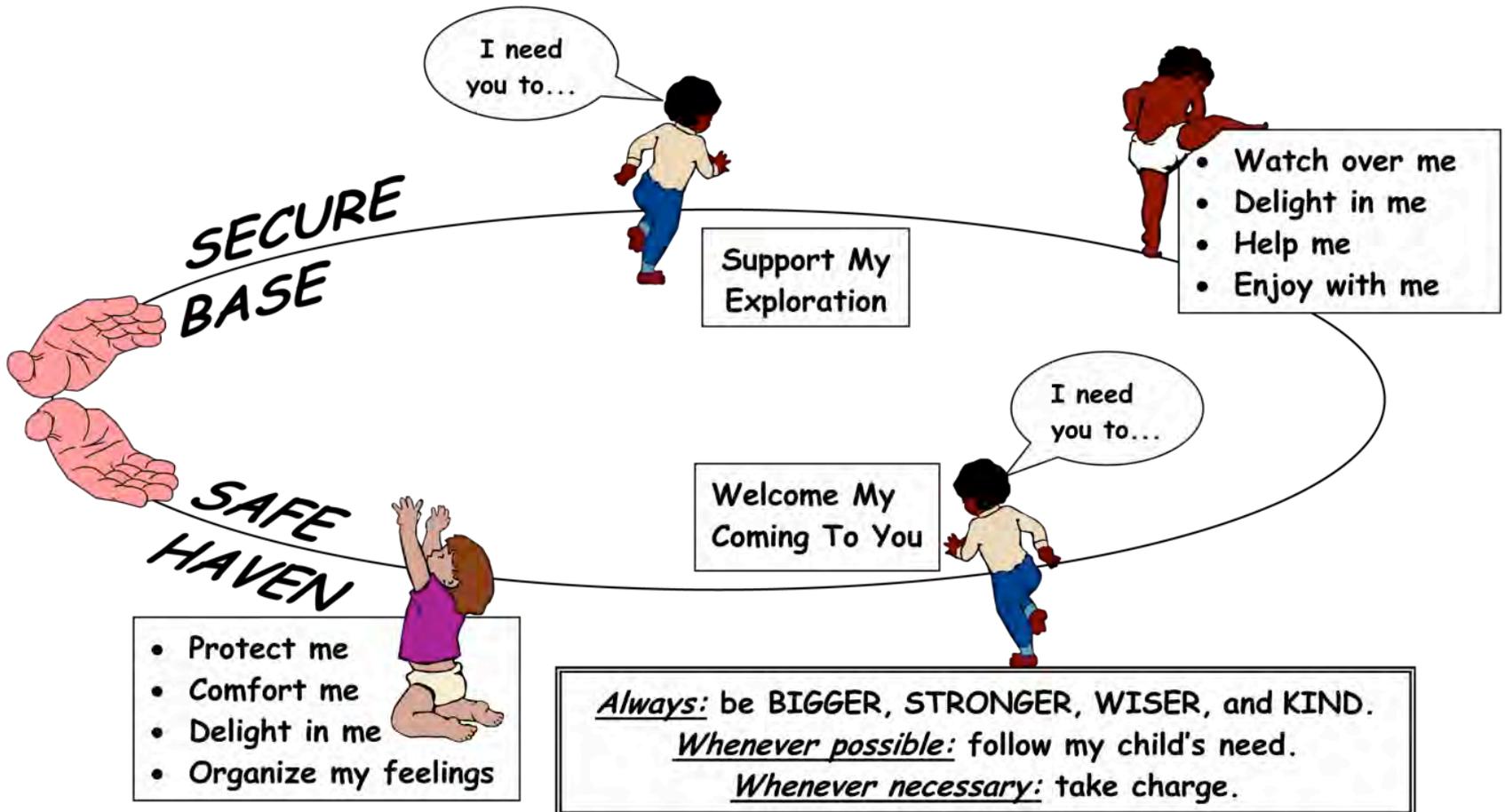


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Video: Circle of Security

Parent Attending to the Child's Needs

[Click here for YouTube video](#)



Label Emotions With Words

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



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.*



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?



Filling Up the Cup



Delight In



Being With

- ***'Being with'*** is to be present and emotionally available which helps children move through difficult emotions.
- ***'Being without'*** often prolongs the distress.



Adult: ***I am here and you are worth it.***

Child: ***You are here and I must be worth it.***

Seeking Connection

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



Video: Social Referencing: How Children Learn About Fear & Safety



YouTube Link to The Visual Cliff Experiment, Dr. Joseph Campos:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6cqNhHrMJA>



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.

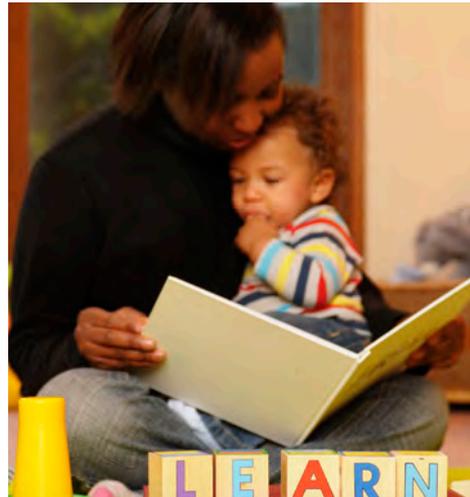
I wonder how she feels when you say that?

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



Nurturing & Responsive Relationships

High quality caregiving is a powerful buffer against the damage that adversity inflicts on a child's stress-response system.



4. Positive Guidance & Support Summary

- Learn to read children's cues. Put words to cues.
- Observe child's play. Look for repetitive play or drawing about traumatic event.
- Observe behavior to figure out child's emotional needs. Label emotions with words. Look for the unmet emotional needs.
- Acknowledge efforts.
- Use time in, rather than time out.
- Fill up their cup.
- Delight in.
- Being with.
- Use a trauma lens.

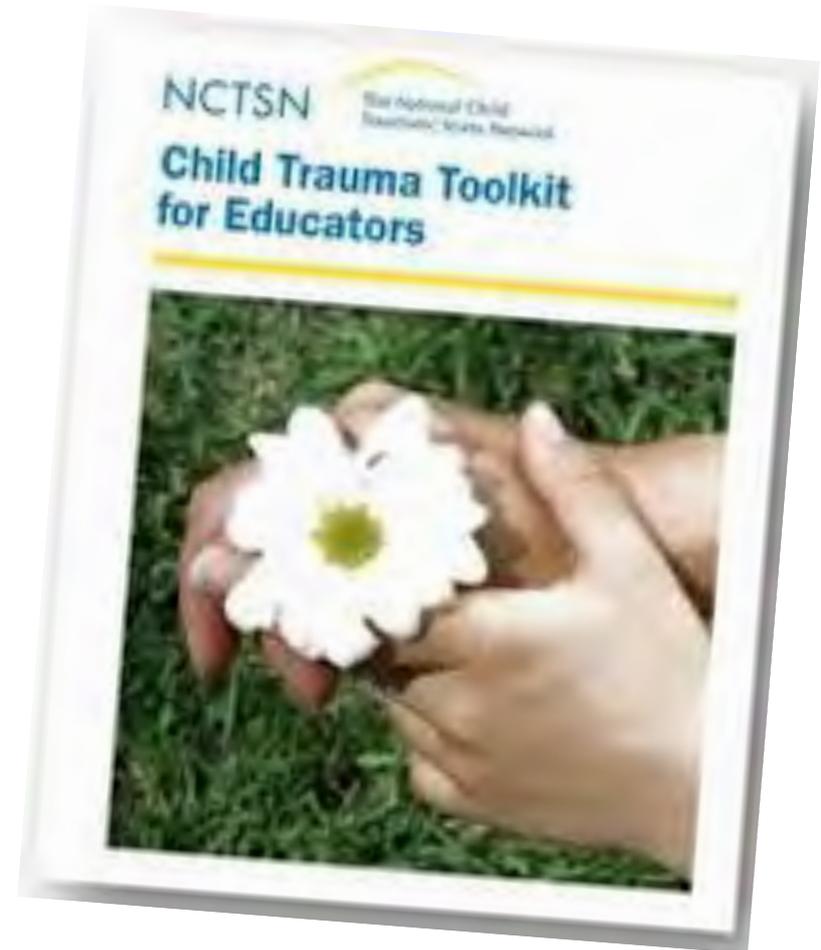
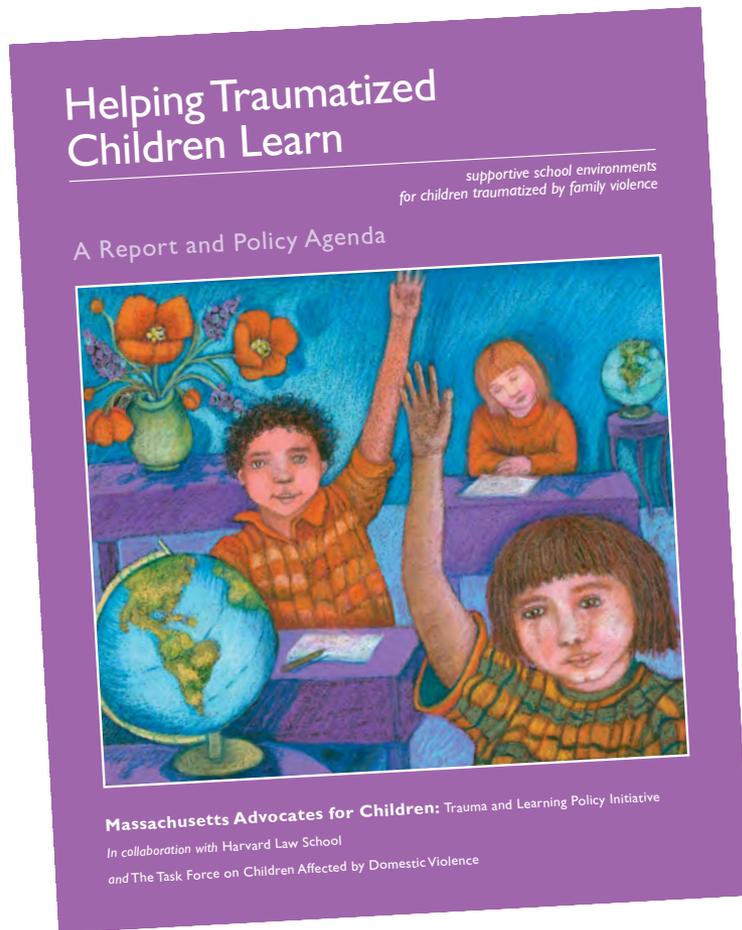


When You Need More Help

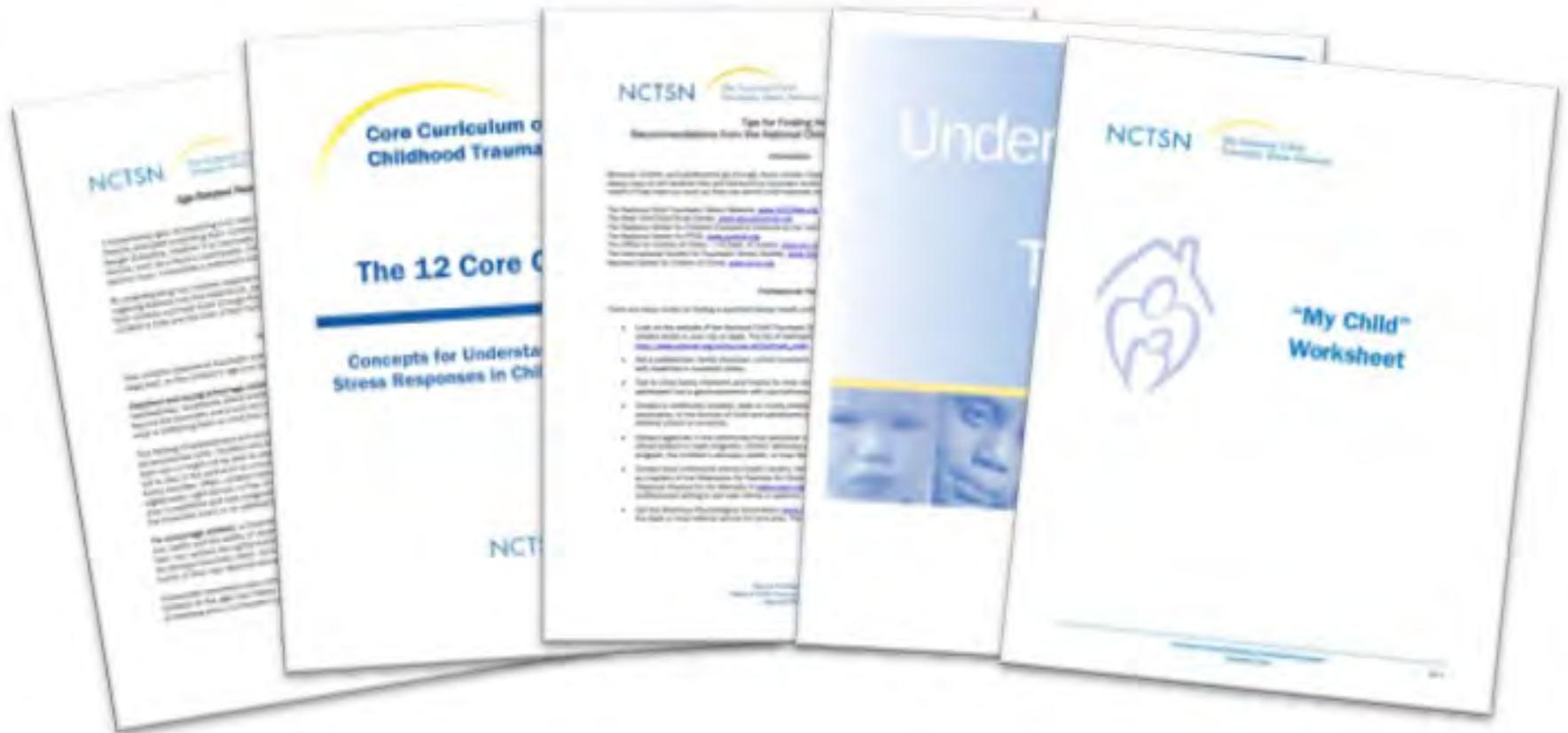


◆ Know when and who to call for **additional support**.

Resources for Teachers



National Child Traumatic Stress Network Trauma Informed Tool Kit



National Child Traumatic Stress Network at www.nctsn.org/

<https://www.weareteachers.com/10-things-about-childhood-trauma-every-teacher-needs-to-know/>

Dr. Susan Craig, wrote practical book, Trauma-Sensitive Schools: Learning Communities Transforming Children's Lives, K–5

Trauma-Sensitive Schools for the Adolescent Years: Promoting Resiliency and Healing, Grades 6–12 Kindle Edition by [Susan E. Craig \(Author\)](#),

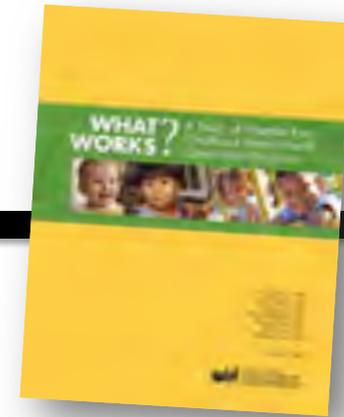
[Lost at School: Why Our Kids with Behavioral Challenges are Falling Through the Cracks and How We Can Help Them Revised, Updated Edition, Kindle Edition by Ross W. Greene \(Author\)](#)

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation to Child Care

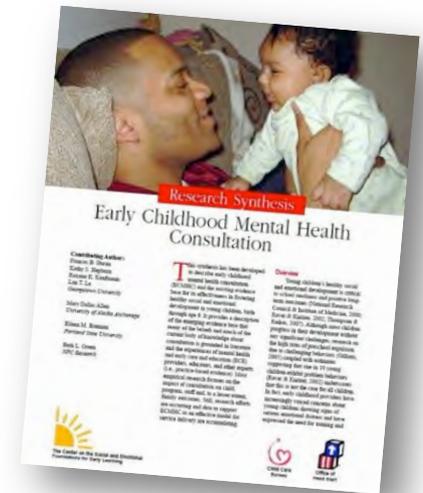
Reduces children's problem behaviors when least costly and most amenable to intervention, which reduces costs, reduces expulsions, improves school readiness, & reduces likelihood of later behavior problems.



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



Summary

Helping Children Deal With Stress & Trauma



- Use a trauma lens to understand emotional needs and behavior.
- Create a safe haven to ensure physical and emotional safety.
- Use calming strategies – words, toys, games, calm place.
- Consistent and responsive caregivers
- Positive guidance and support – “time in” rather than “time out.”

What Have You Learned About Helping Children's Stress?



Which will help reduce stress?



Staff well trained in trauma informed care?



Caregivers that punish children's challenging behavior.



Which increases a child's sense of security and order?



Disorganized sparsely equipped room.



Labeled shelves with multiple sets of same toy at child's level with lots of choices.



Which will reduce stress?



Small groups with caregivers on the floor with children.



Large groups of children confined to car seats.



Which will increase a child's emotional security?



Caregivers ignore child's cues.



Caregivers anticipate need for reassurance and help children adjust to new situations with physical proximity and security objects.



Which helps caregiver to be attuned to child's needs & feelings?

A

Caregivers have joyful connections during daily routines.



B

"How long until I can get away from these crying kids?"



Which helps a caregiver understand the child's emotional needs?



Caregivers who think responding to children's cries is "spoiling" & let children cry it out.



Caregivers who accurately read children's cues and respond to their needs.



Which creates a calm down & helps organize feelings?



Children left alone to watch TV.



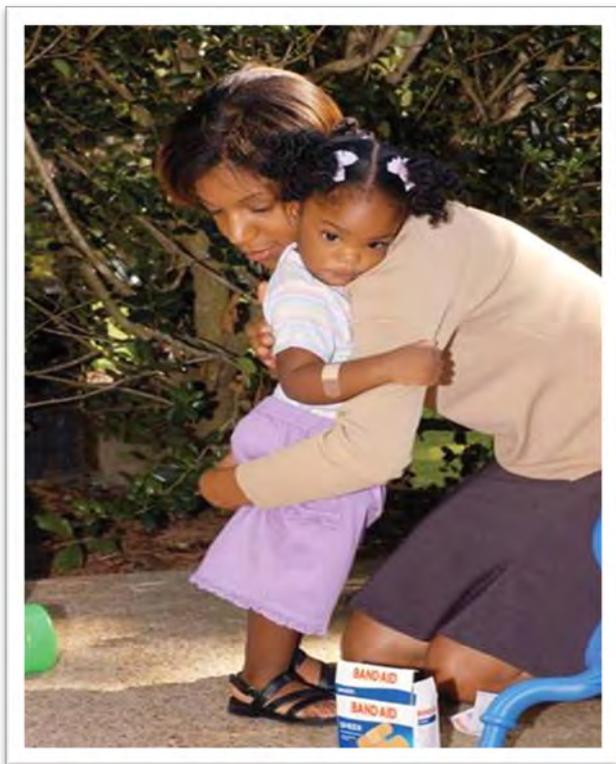
Cozy area to share books that show ways to handle emotions.



Which helps address children's emotional needs?



Time in.



Time out.



Which helps children best learn to handle their emotions?



Children left to struggle with emotions on their own.



Caregivers help children express their emotional needs and to learn to control their behavior.



How will you know if your strategies work?



[Link to YouTube Happy! Official Music Video by Pharrell Williams](#)



The End

FSU Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy



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Promoting Attachment Security in Pediatric Practice: Using the Circle of Security



Some caregivers struggle to be emotionally available to their young children and office visits with such parents can be distressing.

Download handout from
www.cpeip.fsu.edu/mma

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INTRODUCTION

Parent-child attachment is a key developmental process and pediatricians are uniquely positioned to assess and track the development of attachment in early childhood. Observing parent-infant interactions during the pediatric visit, listening to how the caregiver talks about their relationship with their child, and asking key questions when concerns arise, allows the pediatrician to gauge attachment security and identify families that need intervention.

THE PEDIATRICIAN'S ROLE

In line with the American Academy of Pediatrics' focus on what has been termed "the new morbidity," pediatricians have been asked to focus on the psychosocial aspects of care. The new morbidity refers to social, emotional, or developmental difficulties. The pediatric practice has increasingly focused on prevention and early intervention for such difficulties. Attachment to a primary caregiver is central to psychosocial development. Tracking attachment security is therefore central to pediatric practice.

WHAT IS ATTACHMENT?

Humans, like many other species, are hard-wired to attach in infancy. In times of stress, infants and toddlers reliably signal their caregivers for comfort and protection. Many caregivers have no difficulty recognizing their child's need for comfort and protection and will respond to help the child manage their emotions. When all goes well, by 7-9 months of age, the child will show clear preference for those caregivers who have consistently provided them the comfort and protection they need. A secure attachment might be considered to be the natural order of things: a warm, engaged caregiver with a child who is curious and well-regulated make up a dyad that is a joy to be around.

Pediatricians know, however, that some caregivers struggle to be emotionally available to their young children. Office visits with such parents can be distressing. The nervous parent with a highly anxious and difficult toddler or the disengaged parent with an aggressive 3-year old can leave the pediatrician feeling like something is wrong. What now?