

Consultation Corner

January 2019



Brain Development and Trauma: What We Can Do

This month we are going to continue looking at different ideas and strategies to utilize in your classroom with children who have experienced trauma.

- Connect and redirect by sharing love, hugs, and comfort and then distract children from the intensity of the moment/emotions until the child can regain perspective and more fully access their “upstairs” brain
- Be aware/prepared of other children’s reactions (as well as your own) to the child and the information that they could potentially share
- * There is a strong possibility that the child may want to talk with you (as a safe and trusting adult) about the trauma or event
- * Dismissing their efforts to talk can be detrimental, but know your

boundary and limit to what you feel comfortable with

- Teach kids to “name it to tame it”
- * When a child is experiencing strong emotions say things like, “I wonder if you’re feeling scared” and encourage them to name their feelings
- * This practice releases important chemicals in the brain which helps children calm themselves down, return to emotional balance so that they can access their “upstairs” brain in ways that support kindness, empathy, resiliency, and mental health
- Help children integrate their “downstairs” and “upstairs” brain
- * Developing connections and balance between these parts of the brain is essential for overall health and well-being
- * When kids are experiencing strong emotions (downstairs brain), you can help them reconnect to their “upstairs” brain by having them release energy by moving their

bodies. When emotions have calmed, you can play, “What would you do if...” or games that involve asking questions that tap into their “upstairs” brain

- Continue to ask yourself and maintain awareness around, “Am I engaging the “upstairs” brain, or am I triggering the “downstairs” brain
- Ensure YOU remain in your “upstairs” brain: losing your cool will only escalate the situation and the child
- Connect, Connect, Connect
- * Positive connections promote healthy brains ready to think and learn
- * Relationships build brain connections
- * Supportive relationships can reduce the impact and even prevent a threatening circumstance from being experienced as trauma



Visuals

Are you taking advantage of your sensory tables or have they become another storage space? Sensory is a center that should be accessible to children daily!

- Children are wired to receive and utilize sensory input from day one
- The senses are children's most familiar, most basic way to explore, process, and come to understand new information. This is why we must allow young children to learn through experience.
- Sensory experiences foster all areas of development
- Challenging behaviors are frequently a result of unmet sensory needs



Resources

Do you have developmental concerns about any children in your infant, toddler, or two year old classrooms? For more information on Early ACCESS check out:

www.iafamilysupportnetwork.org

Understanding Sensory

As mentioned, unmet sensory needs or sensory concerns are a common cause of challenging behaviors in the classroom. It is important to have an understanding of the different sensory systems, and that with each of the systems people process that information on a range that can change overtime or throughout the day. However, most kids tend to process the input they are receiving in similar ways. We tend to see challenges arise when the child is processing sensory input at one of the ends of the range. On the one end, a child is sensitive to a specific sensation or entire sensory system. These children avoid those types of sensory input. The other end of the range, children under process the input and seek that type of sensory input and stimulation. So, what are the different sensory systems and possible indicators of a need not being met or challenges with that particular system?

- **Tactile (touch):** This system provides sensory information through our skin and touch. Possible indicators of a need or challenge:
 - * Avoids getting messy
 - * Sensitive to certain fabrics
 - * Touches people excessively or avoids touch/becomes silly or annoyed when touched
 - * Chews or sucks on objects
- **Vestibular (balance and movement):** This system provides sensory information from the inner ear about gravity, space, movement, and the position of our head and body in relation to the Earth's surface. It also contributes to posture and a stable visual field. Possible indicators of a need or challenge:
 - * Seeks all kinds of movement
 - * Takes excessive risks while playing (no safety awareness)
 - * Rocks in chair
 - * Fidgets constantly
 - * Seems clumsy or moves awkwardly

- **Proprioceptive (deep pressure/body awareness):**

Provides information about where our body parts are and what they are doing in different environments efficiently and safely through information from our joints, muscles, and ligaments. Possible indicators of a need or challenge:

- * Poor body awareness
- * Drops or spills items frequently
- * Crashes or falls on purpose
- * Hangs on people or objects
- * Walks on toes

- **Visual:** This system gives us our sense of sight and what we see.

Possible indicators of a need or challenge:

- * Prefers to be in dark
- * Avoids bright light
- * Avoids eye contact
- * Poor eye hand coordination
- * Difficulty following moving objects or people

- **Olfactory (smell):** This system provides our sense of smell. Possible indicators of a need or challenge:

- * Complains about smells
- * Doesn't seem to notice strong odors
- * Smells objects and people
- * Seeks out certain smells

- **Auditory (hear):** This system allows us to hear what we hear.

Possible indicators of a need or challenge:

- * Responds negatively to unexpected or loud noises
- * Holds hands over ears
- * Seems oblivious within an active environment
- * Speaks very loud
- * Outbursts in loud places

- **Gustatory (taste):** This system provides us with our sense of taste.

Possible indicators of a need or challenge:

- * Complains about tastes
- * Picky eating or limited diet
- * Acts out at snack or meal times
- * Mouths, licks, or chews objects
- * Seeks out or avoids certain tastes