Everyone, including children, experiences stress in their lives. In an infant or toddler’s life, internal stress can come from being hungry, wet, cold, or too full. External stress may stem from a family move, loud noises, etc. Stress that is short-lived and taken care of rather quickly can promote growth in young children, promoting their self-regulation as they move through early childhood. A thirsty 3-year-old who has to wait for his teacher to get him a drink discovers that a short wait results in a positive outcome.

Stress that is chronic and not resolved fairly quickly, can result in devastating impacts on a child’s developing brain. Chronic stress comes from extreme conditions such as neglect, family or community violence, abuse, and deprivation. Leaving children alone with chronic stress or overwhelming, unregulated emotions is debilitating for them and their systems. It puts children at risk for challenging behaviors.

A strong relationship with you, an early childhood care-teacher, can act as a buffer and can minimize the effects of stress over time because your interactions with them are daily and occur over time. Your relationship with a chronically stressed child, and any child for that matter, can be life-altering! What follows, in this edition of the ECMH Newsletter, are some ideas for how you can create a healing environment within your center, group, or family facility. To paraphrase Uri Bronfrenbrenner, “Never underestimate the healing power of an early childhood educator who is crazy-in-love with (and attuned to) her children!”

*I've come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized."
— Haim G. Ginott

Today's diverse classrooms require teachers to become much more adept at communicating differently depending on the child. Some children take a friendly and reasonable way of communicating as a license to misbehave. Others take any hint at sternness as an indication that an adult is mean. Today's teachers need, then, to figure out what their ways of communicating mean to each and every child—and adjust their ways to meet the needs and meanings of each child. When it comes to communicating and relationship-building, one size definitely does not fit all.”

**Object Constancy—(def.)** When a child is able to evoke a comforting image of her attachment figures without them having to be near. This is a crucial developmental milestone.

**Comfort Through Emotional Storms**

We know that we need to hold and comfort an infant who is crying; be physically near for a toddler who is tantruming in order for him to re-establish emotional balance.

For the children in our care, they depend on the adults in their lives to help them survive when they become overwhelmed by their own emotions. Only as well-supported children move into primary school do they assume responsibility for emotional regulation that had previously been for the adults in their lives to manage and co-manage.

Children whose attachment partners are not willing to help them manage their strong emotions or were not tolerant of their emotions may not grow into this self-regulation. This lack of mastery puts them at risk for their next educational environment.

Attuned and responsive teachers become partners in this critical social/emotional milestone during the hours they spend together every day. This teacher-child relationship can be life-altering for children whose home relationships are not supportive enough.

“**If we expect those children who feel unprotected and easily threatened to get along with their peers and focus on their learning, we are expecting superhuman powers from young children.**”

Lesley Koplow
Teddy Bears in the Classroom

Teddy Bears in the classroom can help:

- A child to tolerate short separations from their teacher
- To minimize the classroom stressors that can derail many children with challenging behaviors
- A stressed child to rest
- To symbolize the security of the teacher-child relationship
- Children to understand their own emotions and express them in constructive ways
- Children to understand feelings in their peers
- To decrease stress and anxiety in the classroom

Transitional (Comfort) Objects as Intervention

Some of us view transitional objects as a necessary part of infancy and toddlerhood. In addition, we believe that transitional objects should be left behind by age 3, 4, and definitely by kindergarten! Correctly so, it is the child’s ability to internalize their relationship with their loved one that eventually allows them to give this up except during deeply stressful times. In fact, it is the creation of this ‘comfort object’ that is indicative of object constancy and healthy social and emotional development.

Sometimes children come to you without having developed object constancy. It is those children who have no internal source of emotional comfort when they are distressed who then find it difficult to look externally for a source of comfort, you. If it’s your desire to offer the children coming to your site the opportunity to heal or simply the best holding environment for all children, you might want to consider object constancy!

When children lack a secure relationship, the ability to create object constancy needs to develop inside of your care.


The Early Childhood Mental Health ‘Warmline’

When a child in our care exhibits challenging behavior we are often at a loss as to how to help her.

An ECMH Consultant will be available to discuss specific concerns and answer your questions.

The line is open the last Wednesday of the month, from 1:00-2:00pm.

May 29, 2013
June 26, 2013

Call 1-800-528-7222, ext 2349
If you have any questions about early childhood mental health issues or would like more information about the consultation process, contact Ivy Reynolds at the number and extension below or email her at ireynolds@cscinc.org.

1-800-528-7222, ext. 2328
610-437-6000, ext. 2328

To make a referral, fax the following completed forms to Diane Milia at 610-432-5700.

To refer a child, complete and fax the Request for Service Form along with the Parent permission, which is necessary before the ECMH consultant will become involved, to Diane Milia at 610-432-5700. (The Parent/Facility Agreement form is an agreement between the ECMH consultant, the parents, and the child care facility.)

"Teachers are afraid that if they allow the true range of children's feelings to have a voice in their classroom, especially at-risk children or those with developmental disabilities, the outcome will become pervasive and overpowering. It is only by teaching these children how to appropriately accept and express their feelings that your classroom becomes a real 'holding' environment."
