Raising Resilience: Infusing Resilience Into Our Work with Young Children

Sarah Dunham LIMHP, LADC

Overview:
- Overview of ACES
- What is Resiliency
- Why should we build Resiliency
- PACES
- How to build Resiliency within our work with young children

ACEs Survey
Adverse Childhood Experiences Survey
- 10 types of childhood trauma measured in the ACE study
  - 5 are personal: physical abuse, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect
  - 5 are related to other family members: a parent who’s an alcoholic, a mother who’s a victim of domestic violence, family member in jail, family member diagnosed with mental illness, disappearance of a parent through divorce, death or abandonment

- ACEs Survey Attachment
ACEs

- Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Found that people who had experiences, difficult or adverse in childhood, had a greater risk of both physical and mental health problems during adulthood.
- The risk increases significantly for people with higher numbers of adverse experiences in their childhood.
- Adverse experiences include not only trauma and abuse, but also non-traumatic stressors like parental divorce and household dysfunction.
- Research has found that toxic stress on children's brains, damages the structure and function of a child's developing brain.

Why Is This Important?

- When children are overloaded with stress hormones, they are in a fight, flight, or freeze mood.
- Impacts learning, have difficulty trusting adults or developing healthy relationships with peers.
- They turn to easily available biochemical solutions such as substances and risky behaviors.
- Toxic stress can be passed down generations through hormones.
- If a child grows up with an overload of toxic stress, their stress-response genes are likely to be activated so they are easily triggered by stressful situations.

Resilience

- Fortunately, our brains are the most malleable organ in the body!
- Research shows that the appropriate integration of resilience factors can help people improve their lives.
- Resiliency:
  - The ability to cope with stress caused by such challenging situations.
  - The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties.
  - Impacts a child's ability to relate to others and their ability to survive and be successful even though their lives include many challenges.
Basics of Building Resilience

- Building solid relationships with parents, caregivers, and professionals can help children cope with stress in their lives while building a sense of mastery.
- Two important ways early childhood professionals can help parents and young children foster resilience include identifying strengths and building on resources.
- Give practical ways to infuse resilience into caring and working for children.

Understanding Resiliency

- **Individual**
  - Engage in age-appropriate activities such as attend school, participate in community activities, and relate to others.
- **Family**
  - Parents remain deeply committed to parenting.
- **School and Caregiving System**
  - Vital in building strengths by providing care.
- **Larger Community**
  - Safe neighbors, strong social ties, shared purpose can build resilience.
  - Early care and education programs such as Early Head Start.

Building Resilience Opportunities

Resilience can be recognized and fostered at four levels:

- **Individual**
  - Supporting the capacity to learn, relate to others, use imagination, see themselves as a part of a community.
  - Developing child’s awareness and regulation of their own feelings as well as skills and strategies for letting others know how they feel.
  - Encouraging children’s relationships with their peers, caregivers, and parents.
Building Resilience Opportunities

- **Families**
  - Understanding cultural variations and build strength and resilience from that
  - Encouraging parents to be more effective by having regular routines for children to follow
  - Maintaining appropriate limits
  - Engaging in positive parent-child interactions such as reading together or talking about what happened during the day at school

- **Caregiving**
  - Encouraging consistent positive attachments with children and making parents feel welcomed and comfortable
  - Understanding adversity and resilience within those families they work with can provide a better resource and be more effective

- **Community**
  - Understanding what exists and what is missing in the community to be a better parent outreach
  - Sharing knowledge and experience with families to find the right service or information from a variety of settings such as health clinics, schools, places of worship, and community centers
  - Child neglect can be avoided by government assistance to help families afford food and quality daycare
Why Is This Important?

- Research shows that good childhood memories support improved physical and emotional health.
- Positive memories lower depression and illness risks.
- Positive memories of parents are associated with better health in adulthood.
- Studies show that an important way to prevent ACEs and toxic stress is to build "Protective Factors" in children.
- Protective factors are like a shield to protect kids from ACEs and build resilience.
- It only takes One Positive Attachment!

What Are Protective Factors?

- Loving supportive parents.
- Parents who read and talk to their kids.
- Healthy relationships with parents, family members, and friends.
- Learning good communication skills.

PACEs
Positive and Adverse Childhood Experiences Survey

- Designed as an alternative to the ACE Survey.
- Includes questions about protective factors to help decrease the potential for re-traumatization, maintain balance between activating and calming questions, and help provide a richer understanding of early childhood experiences.
- Developed to highlight the importance of understanding positive as well as adverse events in shaping a variety of outcomes.
- Reduces the likelihood of re-traumatization and not of dysregulation while answering the questions.
- PACEs attachment.
Infusing Resilience Into Our Work

Help Parents Build Resilience:

- Messages such as: “You and your child have strengths.”
- Asking parents what they like best about their child or what makes them happiest about their child.
- Ask a parent: “What do you need?”
- Many parents require support in understanding their needs before they can ask for resources.
- Encourage parents to think about how their current experiences compare to how they would like things to be.
- Building trust in your relationships with families is important to encourage reflection.
- Encourage parents to consider how they are taking care of themselves.

- Have as many healthy, positive experiences as possible for your child.
- Always be there for your child when they need support and encouragement.
- Spend time with your child; let them know they are loved and have a purpose in life.
- Let them know who they can count on if bad things happen.
- Shield your child from toxic stress by working to prevent negative experiences.
- Children learn from their parents’ behavior. If you handle times of stress by being positive and confident, your child will notice and learn from it.

Infusing Resilience Into Our Work

On a daily basis, parents can build their child’s resilience by:

- Teaching self-care:
  - Making time for healthy eating, exercise, and rest supports parents’ efforts to feel strong and teaches a child good habits to last throughout their lifetime.
  - Emphasizing the positive:
    - Helping parents remember and celebrate important events within their family or within their culture.
    - Singing songs with their children, drawing pictures with them, looking at photographs together, acknowledging important holidays.
Infusing Resilience Into Our Work

- Building a strong parent-child bond
  - Developing a consistent loving bond by showing affection and responding to a child's needs can help them feel secure and support parenting effectiveness

- Reading Together
  - Numerous benefits such as language and literacy learning, creating routines, and fostering a love of learning and discovery through books
  - Books are also great tools that can open and support conversations about positive feelings and difficult events

- Encouraging social skills
  - Teaching children how to make friends and parents reaching out to their own friends can teach children what it means to be friendly and get along with others
  - Make time and encourage children to play with peers and participate in positive group activities such as sports or clubs

- Maintaining a daily routine
  - Knowing what to expect can be comforting
  - Keeping a routine and following daily simple rituals such as reading a story each night before bed can be reassuring

- Nurturing positive self-esteem
  - Important to build on strengths
  - Parents can help child trust themselves and try new activities by complimenting successes and helping them learn from hardships

- Practicing self-reflection
  - Taking time to reflect on life can help gain perspective and problem-solve
  - Could keep a journal or talking with others about positive and difficult events
  - Creative projects such as taking photos, creating artwork, making music and then sharing those art forms
Questions?

References

