



Quality ChildCare

For Registered Home-Based Providers

LEARNING TO GROW ★ WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Vol. II, No. 1

10 Hallmarks of Quality Child Care

- ★ Build trusting relationships
- ★ Provide consistent care
- ★ Support children's health
- ★ Provide a safe environment
- ★ Provide positive guidance
- ★ Provide a language-rich environment
- ★ Foster curiosity and development through play
- ★ Individualize care and learning activities
- ★ Partner with parents
- ★ Pursue personal and professional growth

This Month's Hallmark of Quality Child Care

Building Trusting Relationships

Relationships as a Buffer against Toxic Stress

Child care providers sometimes report that certain children in their care exhibit more challenging behaviors than others. Providers may wonder why one child is unable to follow instructions, fit in with the program, or get along with others when all the other children seem to know and do what is expected of them. The challenging child may be angry and defiant, withdrawn and non-compliant, or the first to misbehave when your back is turned. There can be many reasons that contribute to his behavior and that's why it is important for you to:

- Develop a relationship with the child and family at the beginning of their entry into your program,
- Observe and document the child's behavior throughout their time with you, and
- Keep in regular contact with the family.

If the challenging behavior is something that developed all of sudden, it is important to find out if something has changed. If this behavior is something that has been exhibited since the beginning, find out if it is consistent with what is shown at home.

For some children, their behavior is an indication that they may be suffering from stress or perhaps even toxic stress brought on by traumatic experiences.

According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, "Learning how to cope with adversity is an important part of healthy child development. When we are threatened, our bodies prepare us

(continued on next page)



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Relationships *(continued)*

to respond by increasing our heart rate, blood pressure, and stress hormones, such as cortisol which can be very damaging to the brain. When a young child's stress response systems are activated within an environment of supportive relationships with adults, these physiological effects are buffered and brought back down to baseline. The result is the development of healthy stress response systems." For example, young children experience a stress response when they are hungry, overtired, or frightened. Attentive parents and providers consistently respond to the child's needs by feeding, comforting, or reassuring children that they are safe. Over time, children who have been supported in this way start to manage their own stress because they have an expectation that their needs will be met.

In this newsletter, we'll describe what is known about how toxic stress brought on by multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) affects children's developing brains and bodies. We'll conclude with the powerful positive impact your relationships with children have that buffers the potential damage.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) Study

Three categories of stress responses have been identified:

- Positive (healthy) stress response as described above;
- Tolerable stress response—that which is severe enough to disrupt brain development if unchecked, but can be buffered by supportive relationships that facilitate adaptive coping. Sources of tolerable stress can include the death or serious illness of a loved one, a frightening injury, parental divorce, or a natural disaster. Tolerable stress generally occurs within a time-limited period, which gives the brain an opportunity to recover from potentially damaging effects;

- Toxic stress response occurs when multiple traumatic events occur over time, with no buffering protection of supportive relationships, preventing the return to normal levels of cortisol when a new stress occurs.

In a study of the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences conducted by Kaiser Permanente with more than 17,000 adults, it was found that 63% of the participants had experienced at least one category of trauma which can be described as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACES). Some examples included:

- Emotional/physical abuse or neglect
- sexual abuse
- witness to domestic violence
- grew up with a mentally ill person or someone in the household abusing alcohol and/or using drugs
- lost a parent due to separation, divorce, or incarceration.

It was also learned that the more categories of trauma these participants experienced in childhood, the more likely they suffered from:

- alcoholism and illicit drug use
- depression and suicide attempts
- poor health-related quality of life including:
 - obesity and diabetes
 - smoking and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
 - heart or liver disease
 - cancer
 - risk for intimate partner violence
 - sexually transmitted diseases
 - unintended pregnancies.

Through these and other studies, including brain imaging, it has been determined that children's exposure to trauma not only affects their mental health and behavior during early childhood but also contributes to a shortened life by destroying DNA, decreasing the number of neuronal connections in the brain, and creating inflammation which is the root cause of most adult disease patterns.

The Power of Relationships

In the State of Hawai'i, the majority of children (53.6%) have experienced no ACEs. Approximately 26.3% of children experienced one ACE and 20.1% of children experienced two or more ACEs. Children who have experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences are at the greatest risk for the negative outcomes that were described on the previous page. However, not every child who has faced four or more traumatic events will be permanently harmed. Many people who lived in very adverse circumstances as children have grown up to become competent, confident, and successful adults. Risk factors can be buffered by the presence of protective factors such as the intervention of one caring adult—a person who helped the child gain control over their emotions, see themselves as lovable and loved, and develop a sense that they had something to contribute to society.

Child care providers play an important role in assuring the resilience of young children who may have been exposed to multiple stressful life events leading to a toxic stress response. This is often illustrated in challenging behaviors. You can be that one person who makes a difference in the lives of vulnerable children by maintaining a loving relationship that supports and encourages them.



If you are caring for a challenging child, you may not know what precipitating events are at the root of his problems. However, ask yourself if you can put aside your feelings about the challenges this child is creating and be that one supportive, loving adult who will hang in there with him. Find the community resources that can benefit him the most and support you and the family in guiding him. Your assurance of patience and love with each child could be the one positive intervention that makes the difference for all the coming years of his life.



Citations:

Burke Harris, Nadine. (September 2014). *How Childhood Trauma Affects Health Across a Lifetime*. [Video File] retrieved from http://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_ho Presentationw_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime?language=en.

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Hawaii Department of Health, Family Health Services Division (October 2014). *Health Status of Children in Hawaii: 2011/12 National Survey of Children's Health*. <http://health.hawaii.gov/about/files/2013/06/health-status-of-children-in-hawaii-report.pdf> [Retrieved on-line 9/10/15].

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Reflection Sheet and Award Book

- To receive the award book for this month, fill out your caregiver's reflection sheet and return it to the Learning to Grow program in the postage paid envelope by the deadline posted.
- Indicate on Question #8 if you would like to receive free technical assistance or support related to a child care issue.
- Update your address or contact information if any changes have taken place.

REMINDER: Registered QCC Participants can use their participation in the program to fulfill the relicensing requirement of "increased knowledge." Ask your DHS Licensing Social Worker about the requirements today.

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