

Creating Trauma Sensitive & Supportive Environments for Younger Children (Birth through 8)



Jen Kalis MSE NBCT

ECSE/4K

Program Support
Coordinator

La Crosse School District

jkalis@lascrossesd.org

WELCOME & Objectives



1. Recognize the impact that trauma has on a child's development
2. Explore "Toxic Stress" and its impact on brain development
3. Discuss how to create environments and relationships as a buffer to trauma

Meet Emerson



Emerson is in kindergarten. He is excited to come to school but sometimes his behavior is “out of control”. He screams, curses at his peers and teachers, and destroys classroom materials including other children’s paperwork- all seemingly without cause.

Early Childhood Trauma

- Roughly 26 percent of children in the US witness or experience a trauma before the age of 4 (Briggs-Gowan et al. 2010).
- In 2012 an estimated 686,000 children were victims of child abuse and neglect and more than half were between ages birth-8.
- Research demonstrates that all types of trauma can undermine children's abilities to learn, create healthy relationships, and follow classroom expectations.
- Children who experience trauma are 2 ½ times more likely to fail a grade in school than their non traumatized peers (NAEYC, May, 2015).



Early Childhood Trauma

A significant number of children experience trauma, and the effects can be profound. It is imperative, therefore, that early childhood settings be safe, trauma-sensitive spaces where teachers support children in creating positive self-identities.

~ Resource: [Young Children](#) / May 2015 / Creating Trauma-Sensitive Classrooms

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER, BUILDING RESILIENCE

Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development



Center on the Developing Child
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



Brief increases in heart rate,
mild elevations in stress hormone levels.



Serious, temporary stress responses,
buffered by supportive relationships.

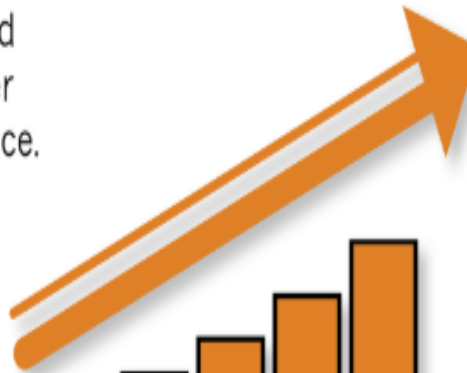


Prolonged activation of stress
response systems in the absence
of protective relationships.

VIDEO

“ACEs”

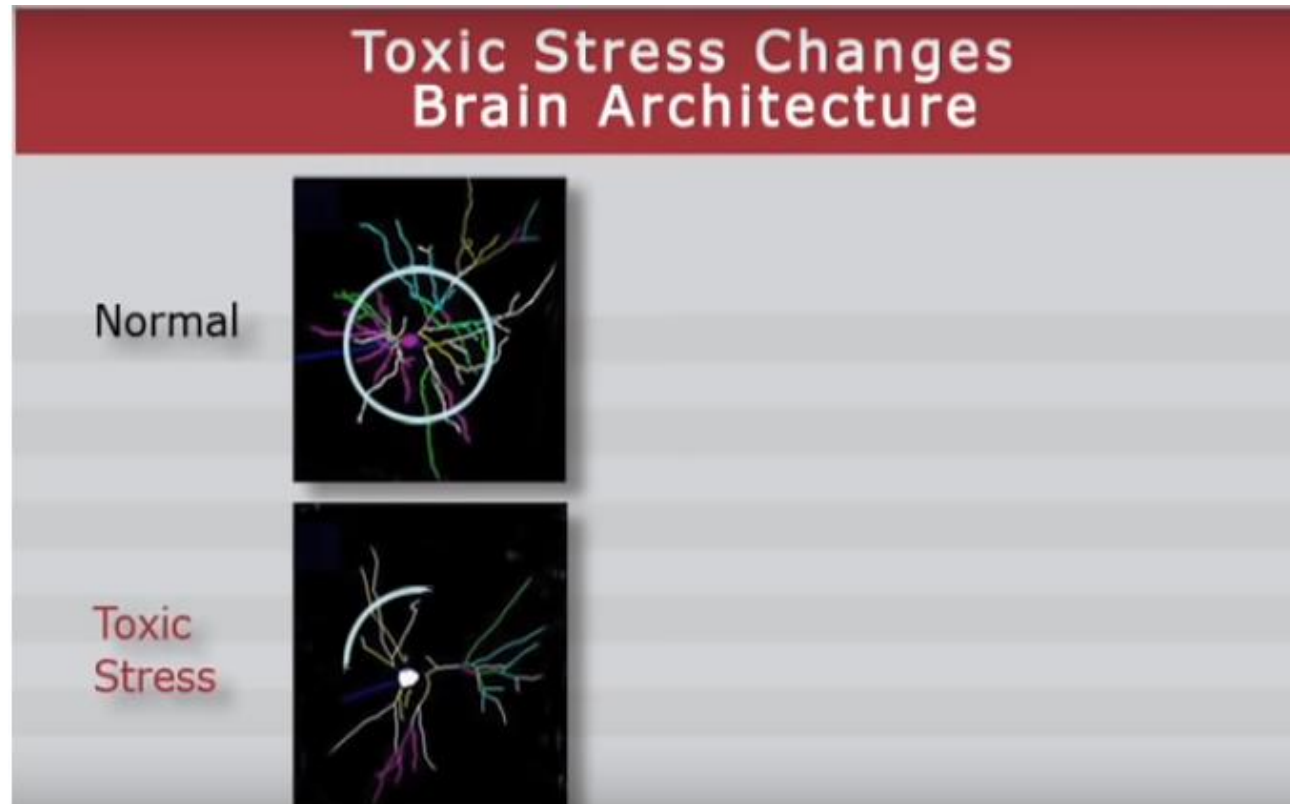
“ACEs” stands for “Adverse Childhood Experiences.” These experiences can include things like physical and emotional abuse, neglect, caregiver mental illness, and household violence.



The more ACEs a child experiences, the more likely he or she is to suffer from things like heart disease and diabetes, poor academic achievement, and substance abuse later in life.



Impact of Trauma on the Brain



Center on the Developing Child
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

[VIDEO](#)

Trauma & Brain Development

Chronic stress can be toxic for developing brains. When strong, frequent, or prolonged adverse experiences such as extreme poverty or repeated abuse are experienced without adult support, stress becomes toxic, as excessive cortisol **disrupts developing brain circuits.**



Center on the Developing Child
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



Turn & Talk:

Discuss some “ah-ha” moments regarding brain development and ACEs in young children. How does this information impact your work?

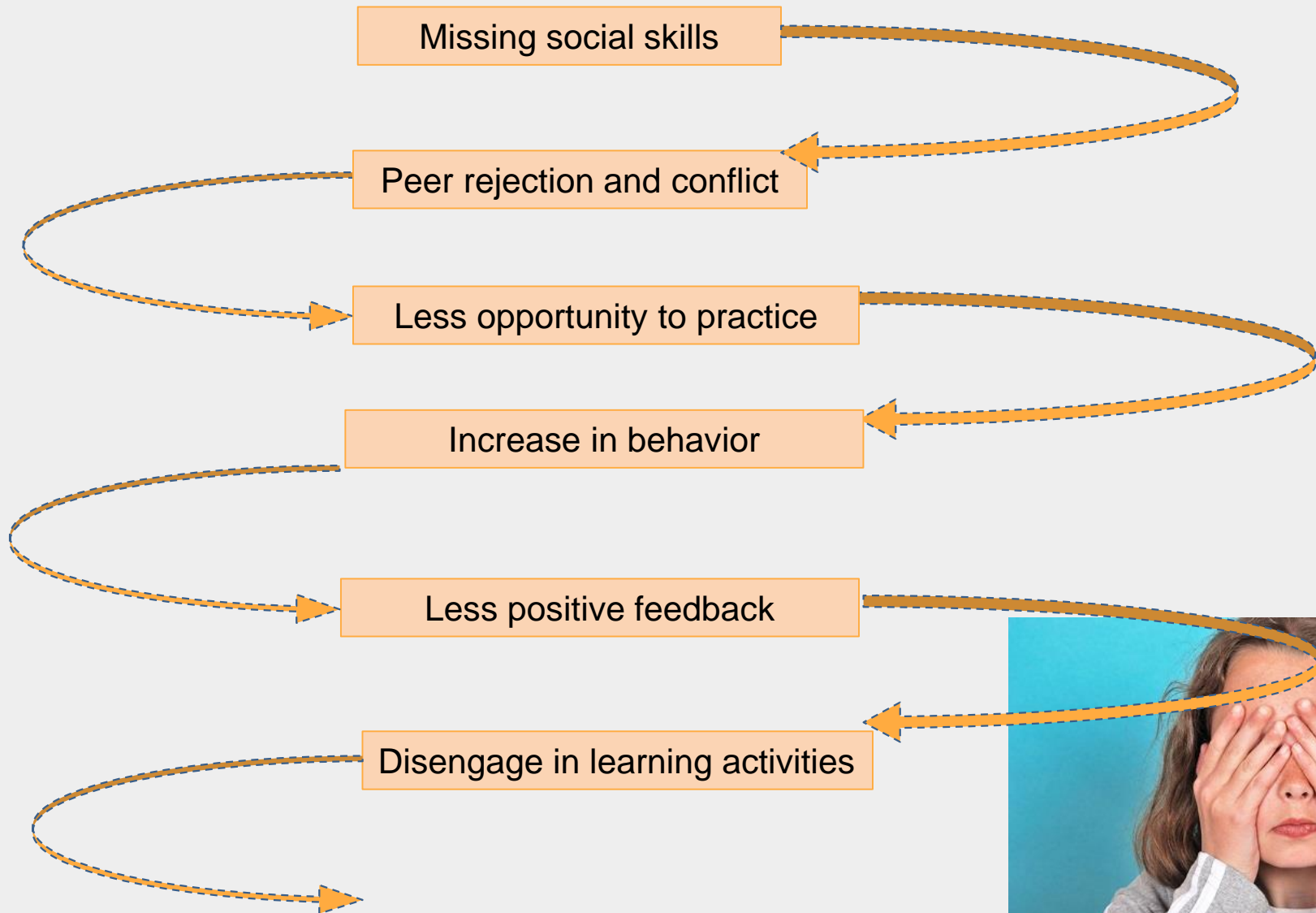
Mental Health in Early Childhood

Developing capacity of the child to:

- form close and secure adult and peer relationships;
 - experience, regulate, and express emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways; and
 - explore the environment and learn
- all in the context of family, community, and culture.



Crazy Cycle Begins: Young Children with Challenging Behavior

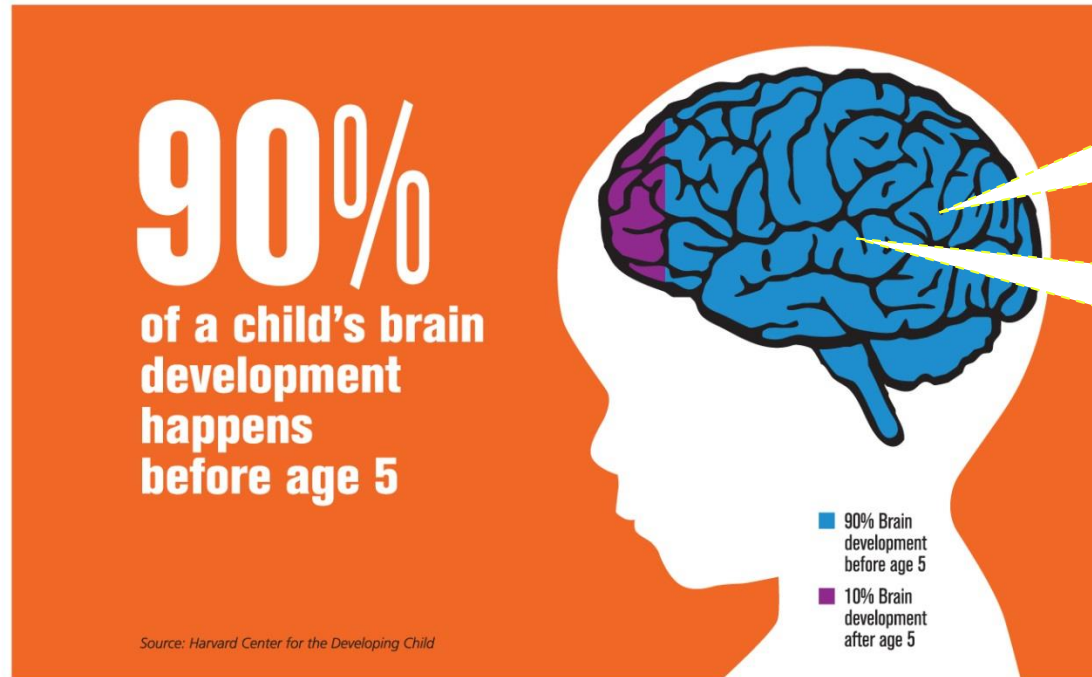


What Can We Do?

- Understand early brain development
- Work to develop sensitive, nurturing and responsive relationships
- Design environments & curriculum that support children to be successful & allow for play
- Intentionally teach social and emotional skills



Early relationships matter



This is what I should expect from others.

This is what others should expect from me.



letsgrowkids.org

buildingbrightfutures.org



VIDEO
[Experiences Build Brain Architecture](#)

Kids Need Key Social Emotional Skills

1. Confidence and competence
2. Capacity to develop good relationships with peers and adults
3. Concentration and persistence on challenging tasks
4. Ability to effectively communicate emotions
5. Regulate strong emotions
6. Ability to listen to instructions and be attentive
7. Ability to solve social problems





Early on, children decide whether they view themselves as learners, and by age 8 most children are on the academic path they will follow throughout their schooling (Stacks & Oshio 2009). ***What does it look like when a child does not have the social-emotional skills necessary to be successful in life/school?***

WI DPI SEL Competencies & WMELS

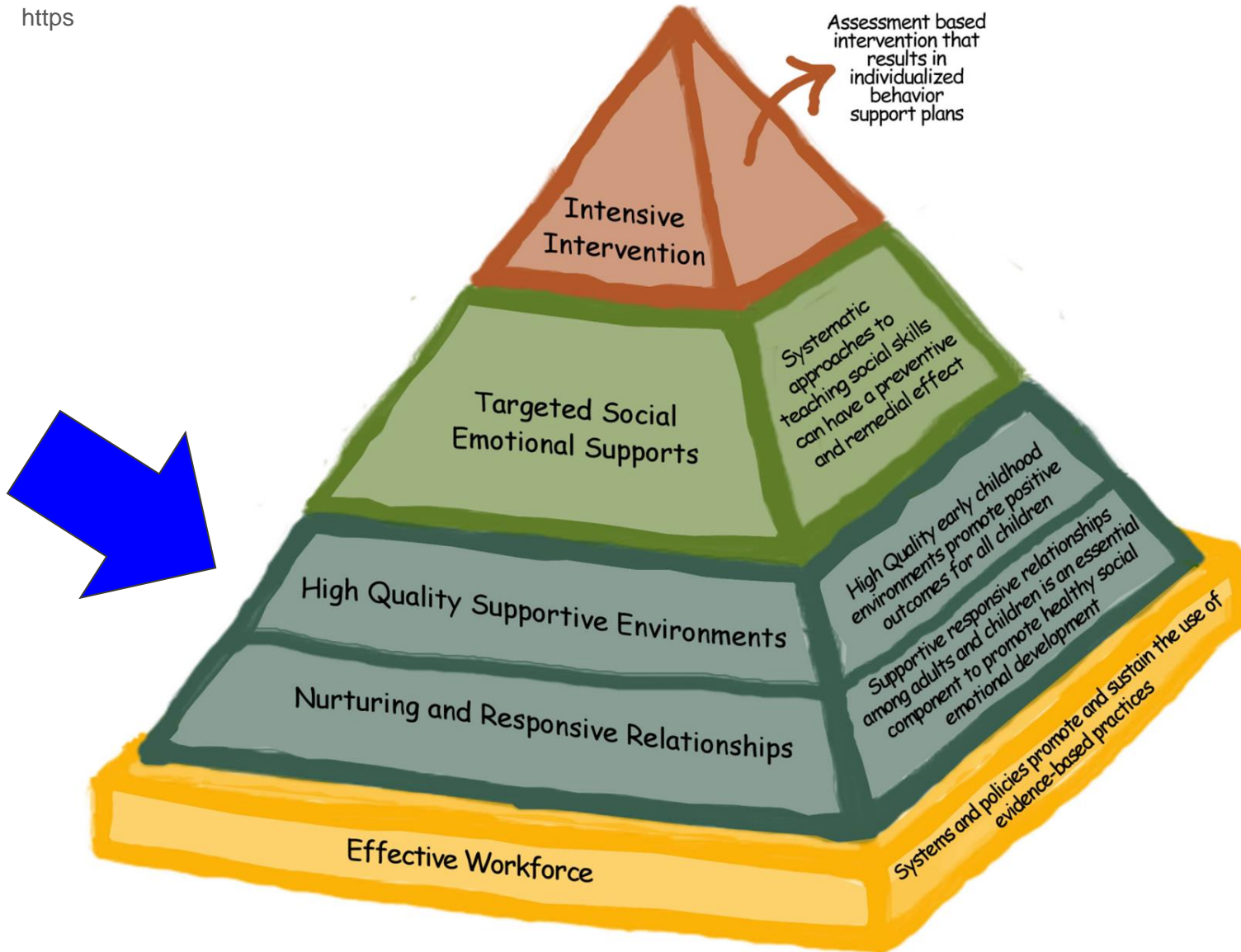


Strategy: Pyramid Model



https

Assessment based intervention that results in individualized behavior support plans



Pyramid Model Strategies in Action



- Creating Nurturing and Responsive Relationships
- Positive Classroom Environments
Predictable Routines and Schedules
- Using Transitions to Teach and Practice Expectations

Creating Trauma-Sensitive Classrooms



www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2015/trauma-sensitive-classrooms

1. **Create and maintain consistent routines**
2. Tell children when something out of the ordinary is going to occur
3. Offer children developmentally appropriate choices
4. Anticipate difficult periods and transitions during the school day & offer support
5. **Teach techniques to support children's self-regulation**
6. **Understand that children make sense of their experiences by reenacting them in play or through interactions with peers/adults**
7. **Be nurturing and affectionate... but sensitive to triggers**
8. Use positive guidance to help ALL children

Environments Matter- Turn & Talk

- Think about your **least** favorite place to shop
- What about this place makes you feel uncomfortable or unwelcome? Why?



Supportive Environments Include

- Clear expectations (directions & rules)
- Engaging learning centers
- Supporting transitions
- Predictable Schedules and Routines



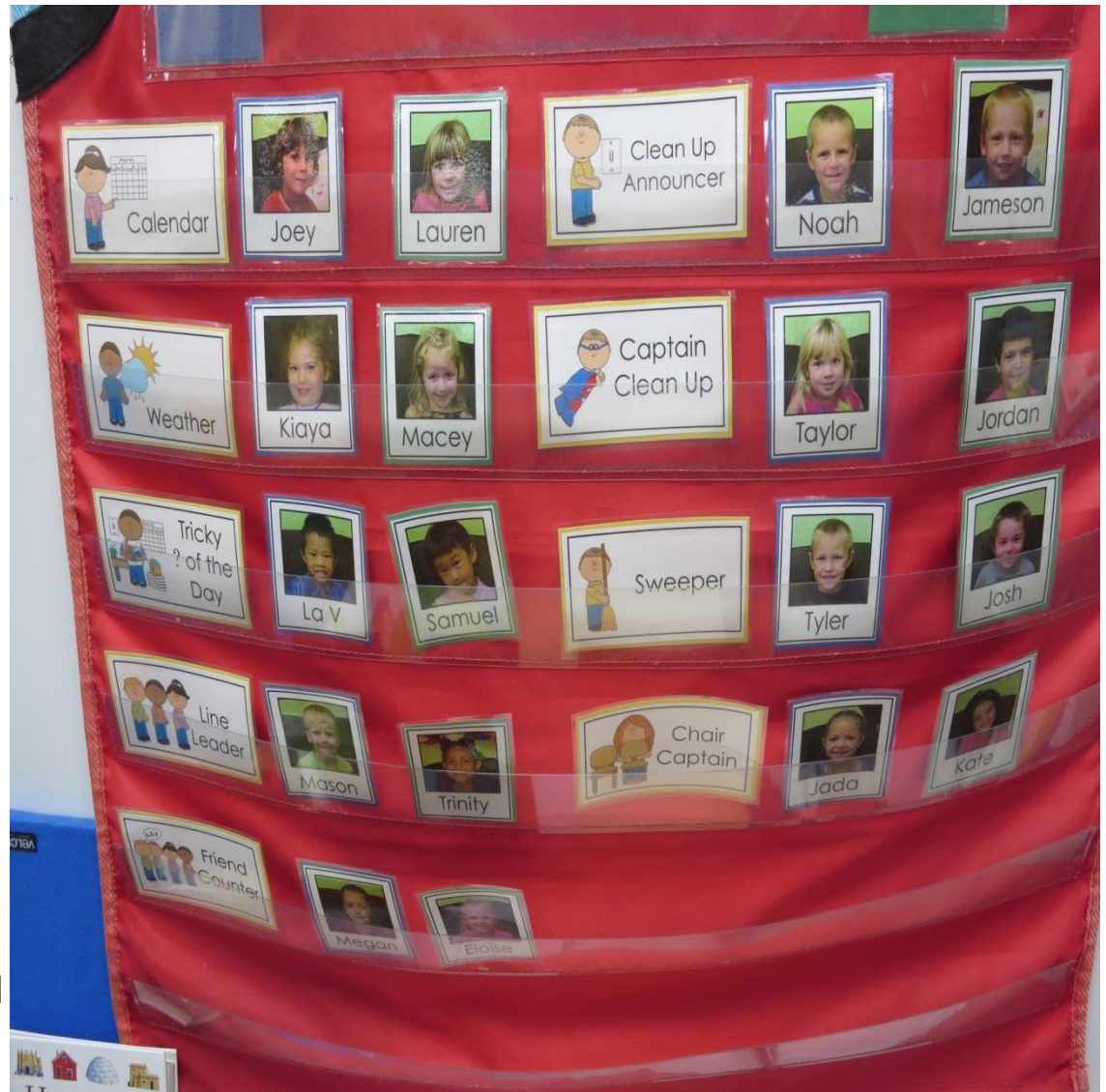
Maintain Consistent Routines (with Visuals)

- Predictable Schedules and Routines
- Tell children when something out of the ordinary is going to occur
- Plan for transitions



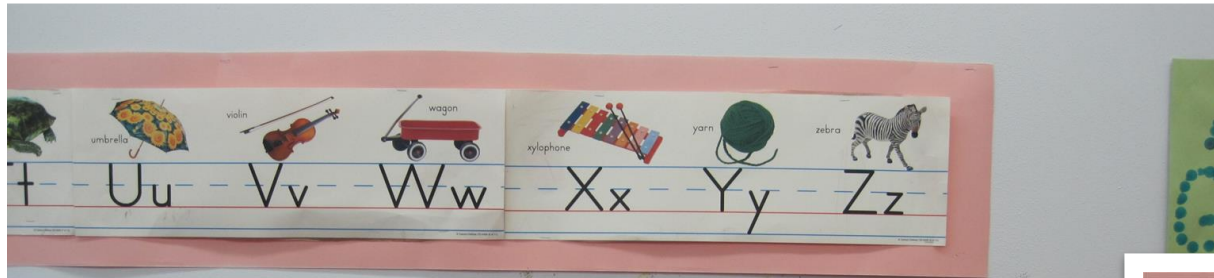
Strategy: I belong here; I know what to do

Calendar
Weather
Tricky Question
Line Leader
Friend Counter
Clean Up Announcer
Captain Clean Up
Sweeper
Chair Captain
Take Care of It Team





Strategy: Honoring children's choice





Strategy: Friend and Family Boards

A Cozy Area Invites Conversation



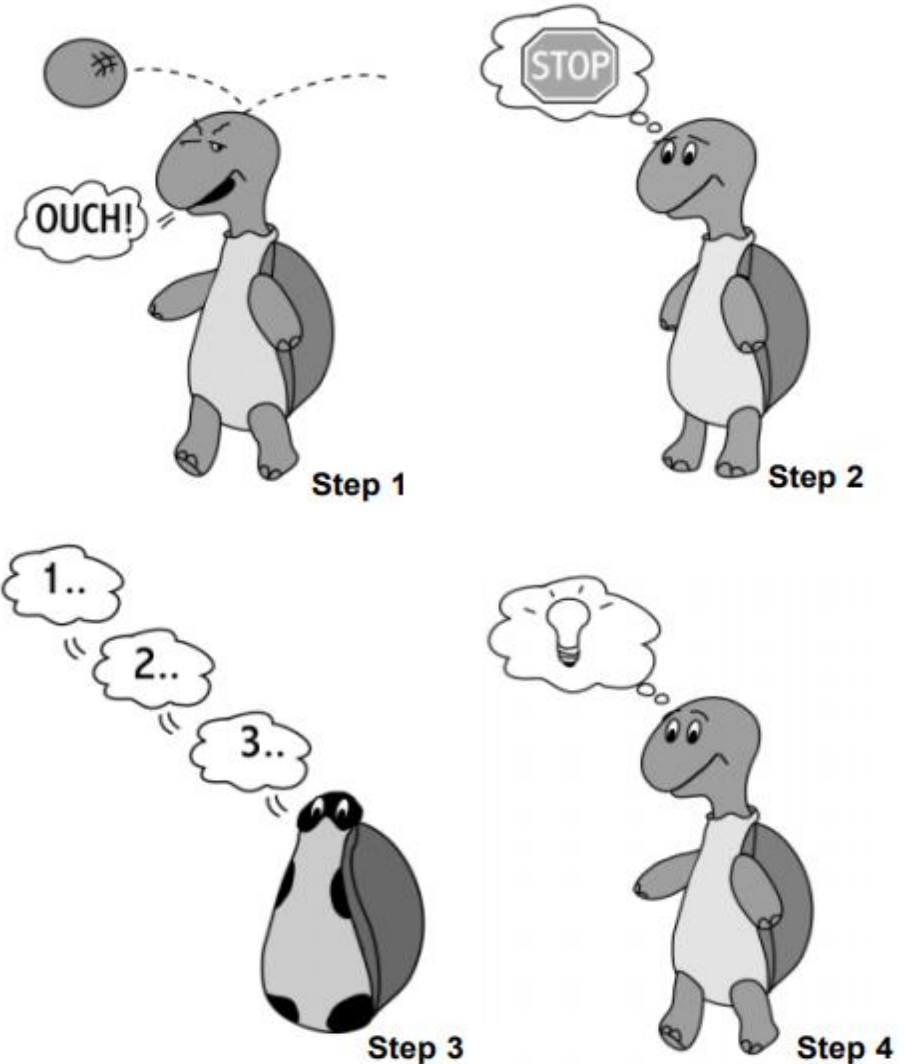
Strategy: Teach Self Regulation with the Turtle Technique!



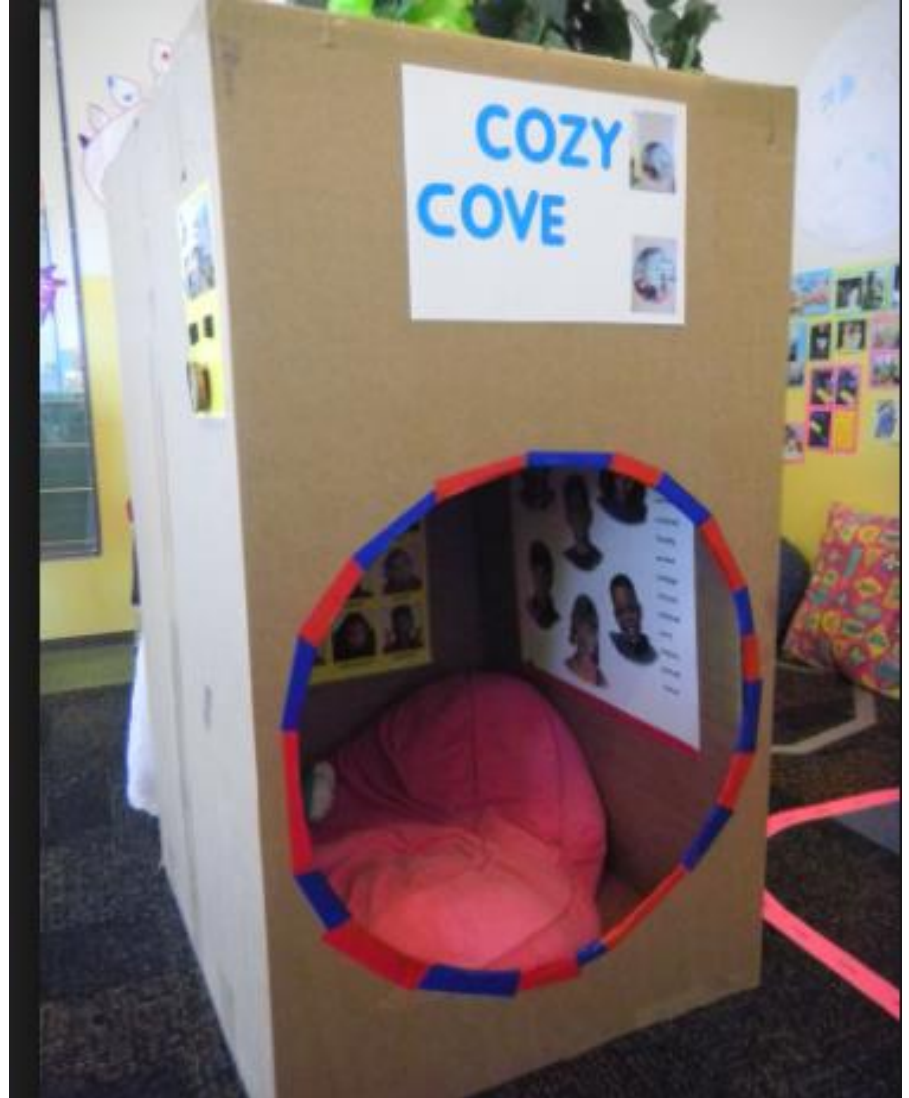
Tucker Turtle Takes Time to Tuck and Think

A scripted story to assist with teaching the "Turtle Technique"

The Turtle Technique



Build Environmental 'Cozy Coves' & Quiet Spots



Build Environmental 'Cozy Coves' & Quiet Spots



Clearly (and visually) Teach and State Expectations



Inside Play Expectations



Bee Safe



- Feet and wheels on the floor
- Build blocks as tall as you
- Toys stay in your hand

Bee Kind



- Hands to yourself
- Use tools to solve problems

Bee Helpful



- Everyone cleans up
- Play together

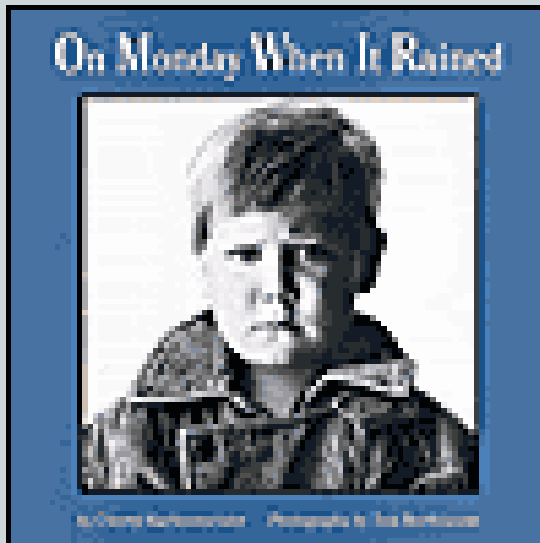
Talk About, Practice, & Re-teach Feelings

- How does your face look when you feel proud?
- What makes you feel proud?
- “Walk to the door like you feel proud.”

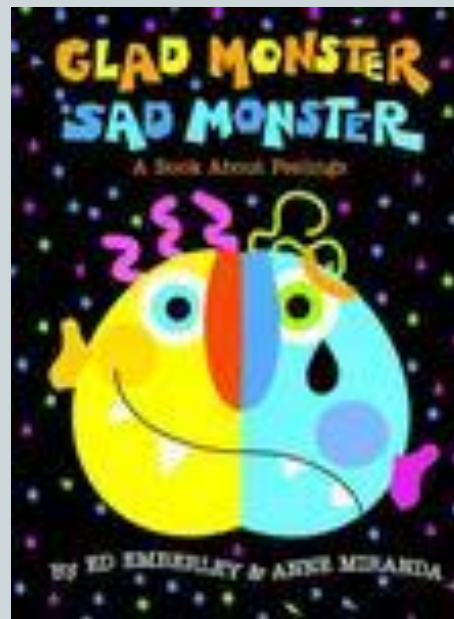


Book Nooks: Emotional Literacy

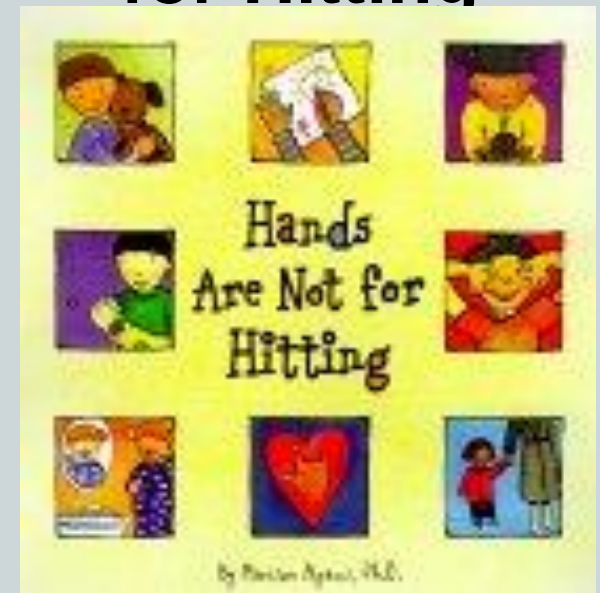
On Monday When it Rained



Glad Monster Sad Monster



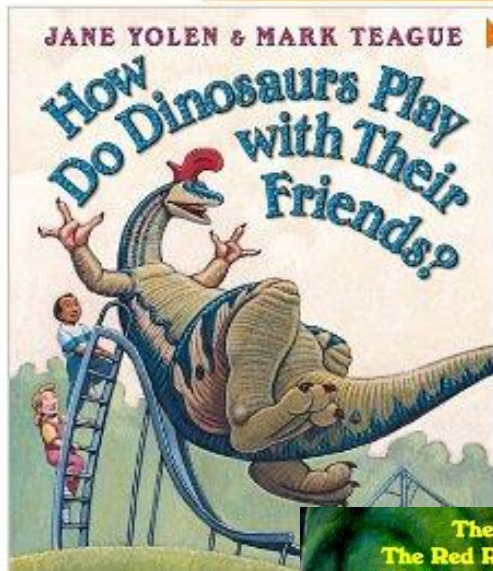
Hands Are Not for Hitting



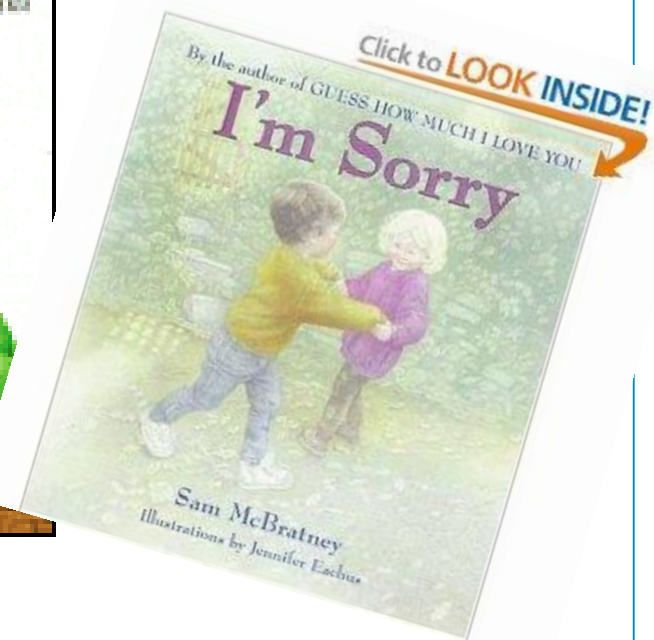
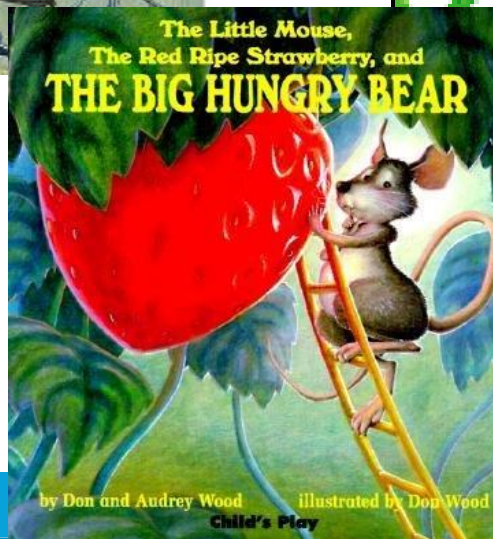
5.4 – On Monday Book Nook
5.5 – Book Nook Summary

DIY: SEL Kits!

Click to **LOOK INSIDE!**



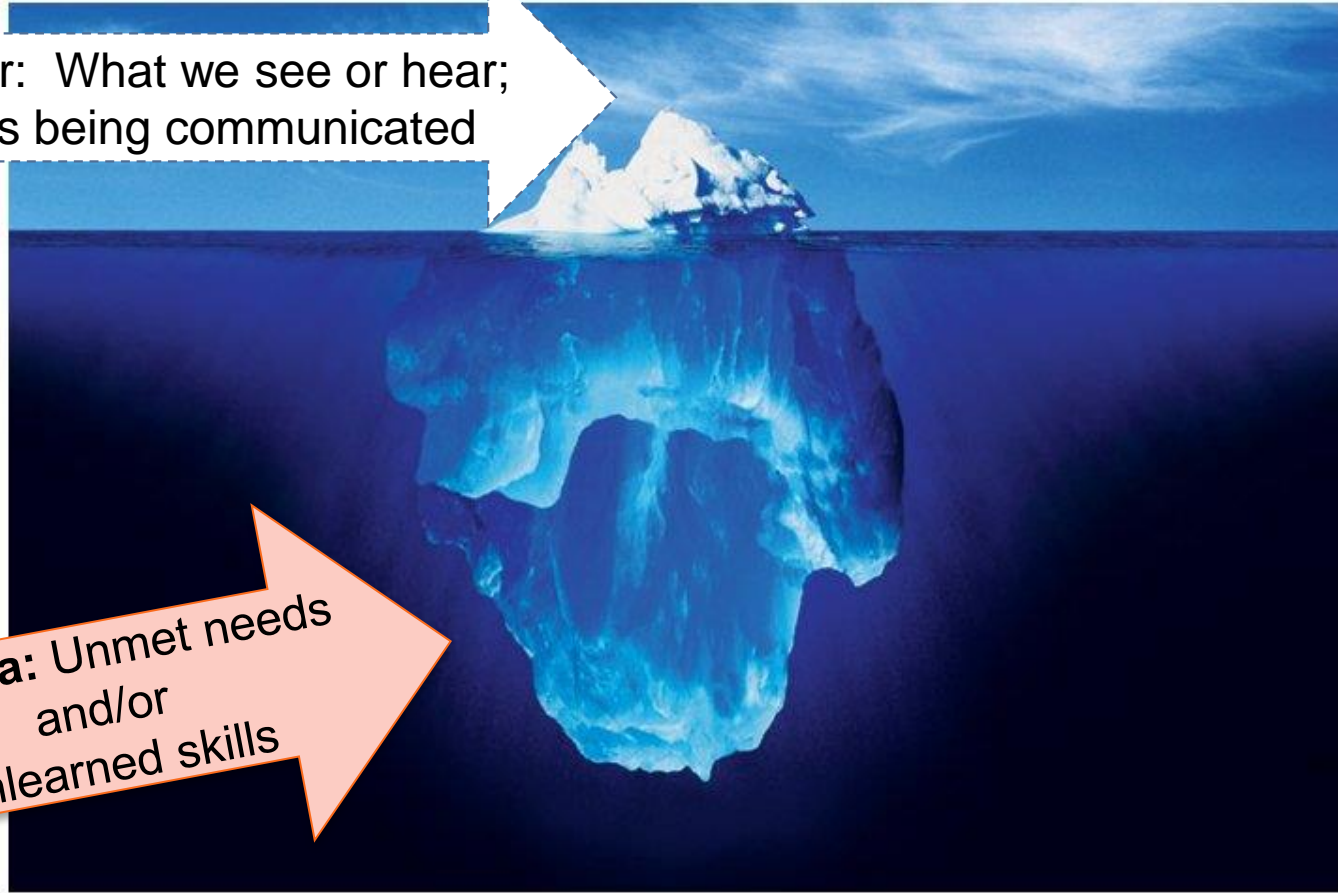
BOOK NOOK



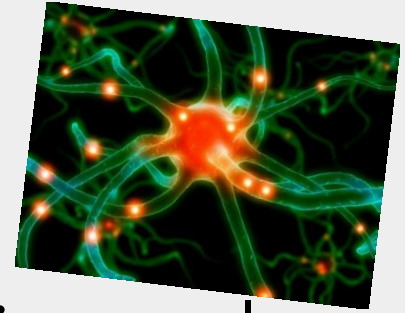
Reminder- Looking below the Surface

Behavior: What we see or hear;
What is being communicated

Trauma: Unmet needs
and/or
Unlearned skills



LOTS of Play!



- **Play** - vital to brain development during early childhood
- Strengthens neural connections
- Wires brain's executive control center for regulating emotions, making plans and solving problems

“Play seems to be so important to our development and survival that the impulse to play has become a biological drive.”

• Stuart Brown, MD, Play Research Scientist

DPI says, PLAY is the WAY!

Early Childhood: Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Play is the Way!



Children Learn by Playing

DPI promotes play as the key to early learning.

Related: Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards.

<https://dpi.wi.gov/early-childhood/devel-approp>



Children make sense of their experiences by re-enacting them through play. Give them the TIME, MATERIALS, & SPACE to play!

Examples: Play & Partner Learning in Action



More than anything, children who have survived trauma need loving and nurturing adults who can support them in their most troubling moments.

Children's brains have the ability to change and reorganize in response to new experiences; therefore, having healthy and consistent interactions with early childhood educators can greatly influence their brain development and their ability to engage successfully in the early childhood setting

~(Cole et al. 2013)



“Every child needs one person who
is crazy about him.”

–Urie Bronfenbrenner



- What happens when a child doesn't have that one person?
- If that one person isn't you, then who?

REFLECTIONS

1. Do the statistics of children who experience trauma surprise you? Why or why not?
2. Describe how your current practices reflect the healthy, consistent interactions young trauma survivors need to support their healthy brain development. What additional practices might be beneficial for you to implement?
3. What else do you need to support the needs of ALL children in your care/environment?



Practical Resources

[Pyramid Model Resources](#): Pyramid Model Consortium

[Practical Strategies for Implementing Pyramid Model](#)

[Harvard's Center on the Developing Child](#): Toxic Stress

[NAEYC- Creating Trauma Sensitive Schools](#)

