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“Thank You” and Disclosures

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• Thanks to the Florida Association for Infant Mental Health for providing advocacy for services relevant to infants and young children.

• Special thanks to my graduate students and to my own boys.
Topics for Today

• Review the needs of young children who are child welfare-involved.
• Draw attention to what is going on with the parents of these young children.
• Present the Circle of Security-Parenting program and share some of the findings from an FICW grant funded study examining Circle in Orange County.
Infants are the Largest Age Group in Florida’s Child Welfare; 54% Age 5 or younger

Important Characteristics of Early Childhood

(Lawson & Quinn, 2013)

- Young children are developing communication, empathy, relationships, self-awareness, self-regulation, and a basic sense of self.

- Inconsistency in caregiver provisions undermines healthy child development.
  - Co-regulation of emotions is critical, with attachment being particularly important.

- Young children are especially vulnerable to the impact of trauma (especially from a family member).
Importance of Parents to Young Children

- “There is no such thing as a baby” (Winnicott, 1953).
  - Parents are crucial to the development of their young children.
- Parents usually are the gatekeepers as to whether or not professionals get to work with them and their families.
  - In child welfare, we need to empower them to REALLY participate.
- Therefore, partnering with parents in the context of the family system is important to the success of any service that may be provided to young children.
Finding a Better Way Forward…

• We need to consider the needs of the youngest kiddos in the system.

• How do we assess young traumatized children’s needs?
  – Answer: There is a way!... And research on Attachment provides that path.

• How do we build systems that recognize the needs of family units and respond adequately to those needs?
  – Is there a way?

• We thought so! Bringing evidence-based parenting programming to our CBC…
The Nuts and Bolts
That We Need to Understand
for Our Kiddos in Care...
Incredible infant capacities!

Based on Andrew Meltzoff’s work on infant imitation.
Definition of Attachment

- Enduring emotional tie between infant and caregivers that develops through repeated interaction over time.

- Inborn system—“feedback loop”.
- Operative throughout life.
- The external goal in infancy is to balance exploration and proximity to caregiver ("the secure base").
- The internal goal is to achieve sense of “felt security”.
Still Face Example
Attachment Classification Groups

• Securely Attached.

• Insecurely Attached.
  – Anxious/Avoidant.
  – Anxious/Resistant.
  – Disorganized/Disoriented.
Attachment-Salient Behaviors

- **Showing affection** (i.e., warm and affectionate interchanges).
- **Comfort seeking** (i.e., from discriminated attachment figure).
- **Cooperation** (i.e., a willingness to comply with caregiver requests with minimal conflict).
- **Reliance for help** (i.e., balance between autonomous functioning and developmentally appropriate help-seeking).
- **Exploratory behavior**.
- **Response to reunion after separation** (i.e., comfort seeking proportionate to distress precipitated by separation).
- **Controlling behavior** (i.e., no pattern of attempting to control the behavior of the caregiver).
Circle of Security

- Protect me
- Comfort me
- Delight in me
- Organize my feelings

Support My Exploration
- Watch over me
- Help me
- Enjoy with me
- Delight in me

Welcome My Coming To You

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For Young Children, Experience Builds Expectations

• Children learn through repeated trips around the Circle every day, but when the “Hands” are:
  – Not emotionally available
  – Mean
  – Unpredictable
  → Frightening

• …Then, they see ‘monsters’ everywhere (and they act with those expectations in mind…)
Relational Neurobiology?

1. Selection of neuronal pathways
2. Emotions—development and regulation
3. Shaping of Internal Working Models/Representations
Attachment and Trauma

• Research on attachment helps us understand what promotes secure attachment.
• The same research has helped uncover the ways in which negative life events impact young children and serve to disrupt or disorganize the attachment system.
• When young children experience psychological symptoms and/or trauma, we can zero in on key principles of treatment that can repair disrupted or disorganized attachment and address these symptoms.
But What About the Parents?

Why Aren’t We Assuming That They Have Suffered in the Same Ways as the Kiddos We See?
Three-Headed Monster?

Mental Illness  Family Violence

Substance Abuse  ACE

Clinician
Parenting in the Midst of Substance Misuse

- Across a multi-year study, almost 70 million children were identified as having one parent who abused or was dependent on alcohol or an illicit substance.  
  - The youngest of children are over-represented in this sample (SAMHSA, 2009).
- Substance misuse by parents is present in 25 to 80 percent of cases in the child welfare system (e.g., Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2003).
- Parents who misuse substances are the least likely to be reunified successfully with their children and are the most likely to have children with long stays in foster care once children enter the child welfare system (Gregoire & Schultz, 2001).
Reasons to be Concerned About Parents’ Psychological Symptoms

- Parents’ psychological symptoms are related to the ways in which they interact with others. Thus, their parenting and their interactions with their children may be affected.

- In turn, parenting exchanges are related to the outcomes experienced by children.
Association Between Maternal Depression and Child Abuse

- Risk Factors associated with severe physical assault of a child.
  - Maternal depression greatly increased the likelihood of severe physical assault in children who were less than 3 years old.
  - Increased risk of physical assault seen with more severe maternal depression.
  - Mothers without a partner or who experienced intimate partner violence more likely to be verified for abuse.

- Many studies have found an association between more symptoms in parents and more symptoms in children following trauma to the children (reviewed in Scheeringa & Zeanah, 2001).
The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE’s) Study

• The largest study of its kind ever done to examine the health and social effects of adverse childhood experiences over the lifespan (~18,000 participants).
• Conducted by a group at Kaiser Permanente led by Vincent Felitti, M.D.
Examples of ACEs

**Abuse by Category**
- Psychological (by parent)
- Physical (by parent)
- Sexual (by anyone)

**Household Dysfunction by Category**
- Substance Abuse
- Mental Illness
- Mother Treated Violently
- Imprisoned Household Member
# The ACEs Breakdown

## Abuse by Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Prevalence of positive response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological (by parent)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical (by parent)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual (anyone)</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Household Dysfunction by Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Prevalence of positive response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Treated Violently</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imprisoned Household Member</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cumulative ACEs Increase the Risk of Negative Outcomes

Attempted suicide
Injected drug use
Alcohol problem
Illicit drug use
Depressed
Chronic bronchitis
50+ sex partners
STDs
Poor Self-rated health
Current Smoker
Cancer
Severe obesity
Behavior and Emotion Regulation Across Development

Mutual regulation: Regulated with the help of the caregiver

Self-regulation of behavior and emotions

Trauma May Impair Both Mutual and Self-Regulation
Our Child Welfare Sample

- 65 parents (72.3% female, 27.7% male) with at least one child in the 0- to 5-y.o. range.
  - Mean age = 27.52-years.
  - Ethnically diverse (38.5% Caucasian, 33.8% African American, 21.5% Hispanic American, 3.1% Native American, 3.1% Multi-racial, 1.5% did not report).
  - Mostly single (61.5%).
  - Educational barriers (4.6% completed less than high school, 27.7% completed some high school, 33.8% earned a high school diploma or GED, 4.6% completed some vocational training, 26.2% completed some college, 1.5% earned a college degree, and 1.5% had more than a college degree).
  - Low socioeconomic status (46.2% had an income less than $10000, 27.7% had an income between $10000 and $20000, 9.2% had an income between $20000 and $30000, 7.7% had an income between $30000 and $40000, 3.1% had an income between $50000 and $60000, 1.5% had an income between $90000 and $100000, and 4.6% did not report income information).
  - Had 2.65 children on average.
Our Child Welfare Sample

• Related to our discussion…
  – 23.1% had received case management services previously, whereas 76.9% were receiving service for the first time.
  – 9.2% had received similar services during their own childhoods.
  – Parents endorsed a concerning number of ACEs (2.53 in CoS group vs. 3.92 in comparison group; range = 0-10).
  – Parents likely under-endorsed their own problems.
  – Their ratings suggested that parents were more responsible for parent-child interactions and that they were experiencing moderate levels of parenting stress, even though they felt that their children had more control.
So What Should We Target In Our Parenting Programs?
Internal Working Models

• Relationship template (‘structure of the mind’).
• Formed by experience (influenced by temperament; e.g., genetic underpinning?).
• Accessible in adults by interview.
• Predicts later patterns of behavior in relationships (stable though malleable).
The “Internal Working Model”

Story of the Relationship
Circle of Security-Parenting
Circle of Security-Parenting

- Not your typical parenting program!!
  - Uses the Circle map as a parenting guide.
  - Uses video footage to demonstrate the concepts in the program.
  - Offers novel names for concepts to make them memorable and understandable.
  - Addresses how the parent is parenting as well as how they were parented.
1. Welcome to the Circle of Security.
2. Exploring Our Children’s Needs All the Way Around the Circle.
4. Being With Infants on the Circle.
5. The Path to Security.
6. Exploring Our Struggles
7. Rupture and Repair in Relationships.
8. Celebration.
Circle of Security

- Protect me
- Comfort me
- Delight in me
- Organize my feelings

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Always: Be BIGGER, STRONGER, WISER, and KIND.

Whenever possible: follow your child’s need.

Whenever necessary: take charge.
So...

What Might Parents Look Like to Start?

(Clinical Video Removed for Posting)
Comparing Those Who Completed Vs. Those Who Did Not

• **Those Who Were Lost to Follow Up in the Comparison Group**
  – Were more likely to attribute failures in the parent-young child relationship to the parent rather than the children ($p < .06$).

• **Those Who Discontinued Participation in the CoS Group**
  – Scored more highly on externalizing problems ($p < .01$), total problems ($p < .07$), impulse control difficulties ($p < .08$), distress reactions to children’s negative emotions ($p < .09$), and parenting stress ($p < .10$).
Changes Over Time in Our Sample

- **Comparison Group**
  - Decreased their lack of emotional awareness \((p < .03)\).
  - Decreased their punitive reactions \((p < .08)\), emotion-focused parenting \((p < .06)\), and wish-granting parenting \((p < .06)\).

- **CoS Group**
  - Increased impulse control difficulties \((p < .03)\), lack of emotional clarity \((p < .02)\), and emotion regulation limitations \((p < .07)\).
  - Increased expressive encouragement parenting \((p < .006)\).
  - Decreased minimization of how serious young children’s negative emotions were \((p < .04)\) and punitive reactions \((p < .06)\).
Reasons That These Findings Are Important

• New models meant to predict child abuse potential include the kinds of variables that showed changes with Circle of Security in this study.
And, After the Circle of Security Program...

(Clinical Video Removed for Posting)
And, What About After Parents Complete Their Circle Program?

• Further parenting consultation and/or treatment.
  – Intensive 20-week Circle of Security Program.
  – Child-Parent Psychotherapy.

• Individual services for the parent.
  – Domestic violence counseling.
  – Cognitive Processing Therapy for parent trauma.
  – Substance intervention.

• Case managers being the “hands on the Circle” for parents.
Questions?
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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”
–Margaret Mead