MHTTC — Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
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NCTSN — The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Frequently Asked Questions

Preventing and Responding to Family Violence During COVID-19 Series: Supporting Families of Young Children at Risk for Ongoing Domestic Violence, July 14, 2020

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The following are several frequently asked questions from the webinar. See the webinar recording and slide deck for more information.

Participant Question & Presenters' Response

Q1 *What are the elements of appropriate treatment and intervention for addressing family violence?*

A1 There are three key elements of appropriate treatment and intervention: 1) the use of evidence-based/informed treatment, 2) understanding traumatic stress responses, and 3) mitigating risk factors and building upon protective factors in the family.

Interventions for addressing family violence rest on a trauma-informed and culturally responsive framework that requires providers to acknowledge the intersection of historical events, biases, and disparities within systems. Providers should reflect on their own practice as they engage and respond to families who may have experienced long-standing histories of injustices within our systems.

Q2 *What are the recommended intervention strategies with parents and caregivers that support child safety?*

A2 One of the best ways to keep children safe is to intervene with parents. This should involve assessing for the stressors in the parents' lives and acknowledging that stress, as well as providing parents with concrete coping strategies. Providers can also help reduce parent or caregiver stress by connecting families with support in the community. It can also be helpful to help parents and caregivers understand how they children are experiencing the situation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed so much about our daily lives, such as school closures, loss of work, and social isolation, and these stressors may be compounded by the implications of ongoing systemic injustices. In order to provide families with concrete strategies to cope and connect with one another, providers need to consider these environmental factors as they assess parents' and caregivers' stress levels and connect the family with supports (e.g., financial instability, food instability, grief and loss, change of routines).

Q3 *What are some ways to help parents slow down and regulate?*

A3 When parents feel activated, providers can help them slow down and regulate by: 1) practicing controlled, diaphragmatic breathing; 2) taking space for themselves to calm down and step back from the immediate situation, 2) using mindfulness or grounding techniques that help them focus on the here and now, such as placing your hands in cold or warm water, coloring; and 3) exercising, including running or other cardio-vascular exercises, weight-lifting, push-ups or sit-ups, all of which are natural mood boosters and productive ways to expel agitation, stress or irritability.

Relaxing and regulation allows the "thinking" part of our brains (i.e., neocortex) to re-engage and allows people to feel more in control of not only their physical selves but also their emotional selves. Once parents are in a regulated state, providers can more effectively work with them around safety planning and interventions.

Q4 *What is the different between "Secondary Traumatic Stress," "Moral Distress," and "Burnout" and what can I do to take care of myself in my own practice?*

A4 Secondary traumatic stress is the emotional distress that results when an individual hears about the first-hand trauma experiences of another. Moral distress occurs when one believes they know the right thing to do, but institutional or other constraints make it difficult to pursue the desired course of action, and burnout is the result of a high workload with insufficient support and resources.

It is important for providers to identify the ways in which they take on a family's stress, especially during crises. It is important to be able to recognize it, acknowledge it, normalize it, and remember you are not alone in the hard work of providing services to vulnerable families. Techniques discussed during this webinar (i.e. breathing and grounding techniques) can be used by providers as well as families.

There are also several resources that you can access to help you take care of yourself right now, including:
- Secondary Traumatic Stress: A Fact Sheet for Child-Serving Professionals: https://www.nctsn.org/resources/secondary-traumatic-stress-fact-sheet-child-serving-professionals
- Taking Care of Yourself: https://www.nctsn.org/resources/taking-care-of-yourself
- Provider Resilience App: https://apps.apple.com/us/app/provider-resilience/id559806962