Welcome to Session 1

The Power of Resilience-based, Trauma-sensitive, Strength Focused Communication in Working with Youth

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The Power of Resilience-based, Trauma-sensitive, Strength Focused Communication in Working with Youth

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Ken Ginsburg, MD, MS Ed
The Center for Parent and Teen Communication
The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia
Covenant House Pennsylvania
An Inflection Point In Human History

Is the time we are living through an awakening?
Uncertain Times

• This unsettling time will leave a generational mark on young people.

• How can we adults shape the impact it leaves?
Childhood Trauma Affects:

- The Body
- The Brain
- Behavior
- Genetics
A needed course correction . . .

An Integrated Model that includes all we’ve learned from

- Positive Youth Development
- Resilience Building Strategies
- Trauma-sensitive Practices

A model that acknowledges pain, but sees the best in people.

A model that recognizes structural racism and the undermining forces of low expectations, but that prevents a new label from being applied to already marginalized communities. In sharp contrast, it must recognize the inherent strengths of individuals, communities, and cultures.
An Integrated Model that includes all we’ve learned from:

Positive Youth Development
Resilience Building Strategies
Trauma-Sensitive Practices
At the root of all models is the primacy and power of human relationships both to build strong, successful youth and to heal those who have endured hardships.
Restorative Practices
Seeking the “Sweet Spot”

We know young people need safe, secure, sustained relationships to thrive. We even know that such relationships can allow them to heal from hard pasts. We must guide them so they are accountable to being their best selves. When we do so, they must know that our high expectations are rooted in our caring. Ideally our efforts at accountability must enhance, rather than disrupt, our protective relationships.
Resilience

The ability to overcome adversity

The capacity to bounce back
Resilience

To survive difficult times

To thrive in the best of times
Resilience is a Mindset
Where’s the tiger now?

Uncertainty may be the greatest challenge to our sense of security
Where can the greatest progress be made for those with the hardest lives?
Content Areas

1. Positive Youth Development 101; Resilience Building Strategies 101

2. Understanding the Developing Adolescent Brain

3. Trauma Sensitive Care 101

4. Integrating development, resilience, and trauma-sensitive practice into APPLIED youth-building practice

5. Giving control back to people who have lost control over their lives

6. Consider Stress Management Strategies

7. Parenting; Changing the Cultural Narrative
Youth Development 101
How do we define success for ALL Young People?
Problem Free . . .

. . . is NOT Fully Prepared!

Karen Pittman
The Fundamental Questions of Adolescence

• Who Am I?

• Am I Normal?

• How Do I Fit In?
We Matter...
more than the buildings or the programs.

Kids come for the content, but the context is what heals youth.
Brain Development 101
Gray Matter – Nerve Cells (aka neurons)
White Matter – Connections between nerve cells that are insulated with myelin for speed and efficiency
Neural Pathways – Connections between parts of the brain
Development is . . .

- Gravelly Roads
- Super Highways
- Towns
Vocabulary and NeuroScience 101

- **Dopamine** – a feel good brain “chemical” that offers us rewards
- **Reward Centers** – Areas of the brain full of dopamine, that “encourage” a behavior
• Superhighways get built between the towns

• Reward Centers encourage the towns to get built in certain places

• Experiences – for better or worse – also lay down towns
Vocabulary and NeuroScience 101

• Prefrontal Cortex – The part of the brain most involved with cognition (thinking, reasoning, planning, decision making, evaluating and modulating emotions)

• Amygdala – A part of the brain critical to emotional responses
Vocabulary and NeuroScience 101

- **Pruning** – A process of shaping neural pathways to increase efficiency
- **Neuroplasticity** – The brain can change and reshape itself – for better or worse – to adapt to its environment. This is key to development.
- **Adolescence** is a time of astoundingly rapid brain growth where brains remain plastic
Emotional centers develop first

Reward systems are very powerful, and determine where brain pathways will develop

Pruning is occurring

Efficiency is developing
Development is a process not an event

Reasoning ability ALWAYS exists, but is solidifying
The WRONG Way to See It

Why do most 16-year-olds drive like they’re missing a part of their brain?

BECAUSE THEY ARE.
The Right Way to See It:
A Critically Important Opportunity to Shape the Future
Enrichment and Protection

• Adolescents are super-learners

• Adolescents are developing their social selves

• Experimentation is a necessity, it is our job to create enriching, exciting, **safe** opportunities for growth.

• It is also our job to protect from harm
Why super-learners must push the edges. And, our role.
Communication for the Developing Brain
(Which incidentally is inside of a person)
Resilience
The Bottom Line

• Young People will be more resilient if the important adults in their lives believe in them unconditionally and hold them to high expectations

• Young People live up or down to the expectations we set for them
Resilience is NOT Invulnerability

is

NOT

Invulnerability
Above all . . . human connection
When Resilience Reaches Its Limits

- Physical symptoms
- Fatigue
- Disinterest
- Dropping grades
- Sad mood
- **Irritability/anger**
- Substance use
Trauma Sensitive Practices
Trauma Does Not Break Us . . .

• Predictive is Not an Absolute Determinant
  • What is relative risk?
• Results do not go in both directions
• Its all about being deserving of focused attention and extra protective forces
• A Different Kind of Credential
The Household Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Emotional Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Neglected
- Exposure to Substance Abuse in Household
- Exposure to Mental Illness in Household
- Exposure to Domestic Violence in Household
- Parent(s) Sent to Prison
- Were Parents Divorced or Did You Experience Parental Abandonment?
Adverse Childhood Experiences of Low-Income Urban Youth

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WHAT’S KNOWN ON THIS SUBJECT: Adverse childhood experiences have been shown to have long-term impacts on health and well-being. However, little work has been done to incorporate the voices of youth in understanding the range of adverse experiences that low-income urban children face.

WHAT THIS STUDY ADDS: Study participants cited a broad range of adverse experiences beyond those listed in the initial adverse childhood experience studies. Domains of adverse experiences included family relationships, community stressors, personal victimization, economic hardship, peer relationships, discrimination, school, health, and child welfare/justice systems.

KEY WORDS
child abuse, children of impaired parents, domestic violence, nominal group technique, poverty, sexual abuse, spouse abuse, substance abuse, urban

ABBREVIATIONS
ACE—adverse childhood experience 
PPL—federal poverty level

Dr. Wade conceptualized and designed the study, coordinated
Childhood Trauma Affects:

- The Body
- The Brain
- Behavior
- Genetics
UNLESS
The Effect of ACEs on the Brain and Behavior
How Do We React to Behavior?
Trauma Does Not Break Kids . . .
. . . Nor Does it Cause Brain Damage

- A Different Kind of Credential
- Having a “Protector’s Brain”
Offer Radical Calmness Amidst a Chaotic Reality

- Co-regulation
  - Amygdala to amygdala communication
  - Key to de-escalation
  - Critical to anticipation
  - Key to allowing “Mother Teresa” to surface

- Self-regulation is a skill to be developed
How Do Hard Lives Make People Experience Transitions Differently?

Every new opportunity is a chance to be rejected entirely.

- Where's the tiger?
- Am I safe?
- What if I am judged? Will I be rejected?
- Should I pretend I don’t care?
- Should I fail fast to maintain my control?
- Should I choose to fail, so at least I’ll control my destiny?
Key Principles of Trauma Sensitive Practices

1. Knowing what is about you and what is not about you

2. Changing your lens from “What’s wrong with you!” to “What happened to you?”

3. Seeing people as they deserve to be seen, not based on labels they’ve received or behaviors they’ve displayed

4. Giving control back to people from whom control has been taken away
To enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens.

• Youth who need us the most are often those who push us away
• Youth who need us the most are often those who push our buttons
• Youth who need us the most may raise uncomfortable feelings in us
• Youth who need us the most often don’t give us the feedback we crave
Nobody dared go near the tower. A fearsome dragon sat on its top.

Until one day, a knight rode up. "Do you need help to get down?"

"Please."
Tying it Together:
Developing Strengths, Addressing Risk, and Acknowledging Trauma
Behavioral Change 101
(Forward and Backward Movement)

What Does it Mean to Have Somebody’s Back?
Confidence gets progress started . . .

. . . and shame and demoralization prevent action
Finding Competence . . .
. . . Building Confidence
“Love is seeing someone as they deserve to be seen, *as they really are*, not through the lens of the behaviors they have sometimes needed to display nor the labels they may have received.”
• Heart
• Belly
• Head
• Hands
Secure and Sustained
Giving Youth Control Over Their Decisions
Learning Not to Undermine Competence

- Talking in a way young people understand
- Recognizing the cognitive development of adolescence
- No more lectures!!!!!!
- No hot Communication
\[ x = \frac{3}{\sqrt[3]{2 + \frac{10}{3\sqrt{3}}} + \frac{3}{\sqrt[3]{2 - \frac{10}{3\sqrt{3}}}}} \]
The World Happens to Me

or

I control my Destiny
A Future as an Architect, Building Your Community

Death and Destruction

Sense of control returns

Life Running with Gangs
Nobody dared go near the tower. A fearsome dragon sat on its top.

Until one day, a knight rode up. "Do you need help to get down?"

"Please."

O. Westin. Micro SF/F Stories
Behavioral Change
Behavioral Change 101

(Forward and Backward Movement)

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The Choreographed Conversation
You fight, but she uses her knife first

You fight, but she uses her knife first

You fight, and kill her

You fight, but she uses her knife first

You fight, but she uses her knife first

You fight, but she uses her knife first

You fight, but she uses her knife first

You fight, but she uses her knife first

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Life Running with Gangs
What we know about promoting self discipline from the parenting research
Balancing Love, Warmth, and Monitoring
Parenting Style

Love, **warmth** and responsiveness

Monitoring, **rules** and boundaries
Effective Monitoring
Knowing when to “jump in” and when to allow mistakes and recovery
Stress Management and Resilience

• Is about learning to cope, in a positive way with life’s inevitable stressors
• We do our greatest good by equipping youth with a wide range of coping strategies
• People who can choose positive coping strategies gain control
You Feel Awful!!!

Stress

Discomfort

Positive Coping Strategies

Relief

Negative Coping Strategies
The Worst thing is not to be stressed . . . it is to be NUMB
Caring for the Caregiver
Protecting the Grandmas and Grandpas
Boundaries

Not the easy stuff. How do you love and still remain whole?

• Knowing our buttons
• Being trauma-sensitive
• Knowing who is the expert
• Avoiding the rescue fantasy
• Giving control back
• How much do we share?
• How much do we give to each youth?
• I or We?
Flipping the Script

Shifting adolescence from a time to be survived to a time to be celebrated
Myths and Misunderstandings that Disempower Parents and Professionals

• Infants aren’t paying attention

• Adolescents:
  • Think they are invincible
  • Are wired for risk
  • Don’t care what parents think
  • Can’t be reasoned with
  • Don’t like adults
  • Are self-centered
One last breath . . .

“The little man’s almost done!”
How will we judge our success?
(not in ways easy to measure!!)

• Through easy measurements: grades, jobs, graduations, suspension rates.
• By proving adolescents are capable of healing from trauma
• By helping our young people experience that people are worthy of trust
• By helping our young people know they are worthy of being loved
• By making it more likely youth will be able to “pass along” our love to their children, and thereby break the cycle of trauma and oppression.
How will we judge our success?

• By making it so our young people can feel again

• By creating the kind of environment where staff never forgets how to feel

• By creating schools and communities that are really safer