

Safe Babies Court Teams: Addressing the Trauma of Families with Children in Foster Care



Quality Improvement Center
for Research-Based
Infant-Toddler Court Teams

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Who are we?



- Judges, lawyers, CASAs
- Mental health clinicians
- Early interventionists
- DHS staff
- Parents
- Grandparents
- Foster parents
- Indian child welfare specialis
- Teachers, professors
- Who else is here?



Child Maltreatment: What is it? Why does it happen?



Parents:
Why do they mistreat their young children?



Infant Mental Health

The developing capacity of the child to:

- Experience, regulate and express emotion
- Form close and secure relationships
- Explore the environment and learn

Within family, community, and cultural expectations for young children



Forging Strong Connections In the Earliest Months and Years...

Central to Future Health, Well-Being,
School and Life Success



Impact of Trauma on Infants, Toddlers, and Families

Maltreatment and exposure to violence affect:

- Brain development
- The immune system
- Emotional regulation
- Attachment and other relationships
- Ability to learn



Some characteristics of Court Team Babies

Signs of re-experiencing trauma

- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Unprovoked aggression
- Prolonged tantrums
- Staring into space

Numbing

- Social withdrawal
- Regression/Loss of milestones

Increased arousal

- Attention problems
- Hyper vigilance
- Sleeping problems



In some cases: prolonged grief

- Crying, calling, searching
- Lethargy
- Disruption of biological rhythms
- Developmental regression
- Detachment
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Anti-social behavior

A Shaky Foundation



Some Characteristics of Parents whose Children are in Foster Care

- Difficulty planning, organizing, prioritizing, initiating and following through
- Difficulty learning from past experiences
- Impaired judgment
- Poor receptive language skills
- Difficulty switching gears
- Defective memory
- Maturity consistent with an age much younger than their chronological age
- Inability to predict outcomes
- Short triggers



Outcomes for Parents Without Intervention



- Continued difficulty managing money
- Impulsive behaviors and poor judgement that continue the cycle in child welfare
- Loses ability to process information when stressed which results in a lack of compliance and in some cases termination
- Unable to read environment:
 - Difficulty understanding laws
 - Difficulty understanding social situations
 - Difficulty judging right from wrong

Symptom or Cause?

- Substance abuse
- Domestic violence
- Depression
- Childhood trauma
- Traumatic brain injury
- Prenatal alcohol exposure
- Poverty
- Lack of education



SBCT Parents Had Traumatic Childhoods

Number of ACEs	Original Survey Sample	SBCT Mothers
0	49.5%	0%
1	24.9%	0%
2	12.5%	0%
3	6.9%	0%
4 or more	6.2%	100%
Total	100%	100%

Role Playing: 1st meeting between mother and DHS case worker

Considerations for Active Engagement

- How you are is as important as what you do.
- Hold parents up. Believe in them when the parent doesn't yet believe in him/herself. See them as parents and not problems.
- Recognize your own triggers and areas of vulnerability. Know when you're feeling burned out.
- People don't always receive messages the way we think they will. How do you share information in ways that will be perceived by parents as respectful?



Effective Strategies for Developing a Trauma Informed Approach



The Safe Babies Court Team Approach

Community Organizing
Creativity, and
Kindness



Safe Babies Court Teams

Help
maltreated
infants and
toddlers
reach safe,
loving,
permanent
homes as
quickly as
possible.



One mother's Safe Babies Court Team story



“Normal” in the United States

- Two married parents
- Their children
- Single family home
- Good schools
- No medical or financial problems
- No substance abuse
- Parents are college educated
- Children are expected to go to college
- Children participate in organized activities from an early age
- Active members of their church



A Disconnect on the Meaning of Normal

- Two married parents
- Their children
- Single family home
- Good schools...



- Your mother was a heroin addict
- You had a baby at 13
- Your father smoked pot with you starting when you were 14
- Your cousin introduced you to meth when you were 16



Critical concepts for working with families

- Importance of stable, loving caregiving relationships
- Making the first placement the last placement
- Focus on concurrent planning
- Frequent parent-child contact
- Building on parental strengths, supporting areas of need



Working together to support families

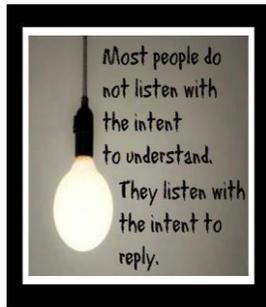
- Allowing more time for cognitive processing
- Facilitating social interaction (turn taking in a staffing/ Family Team Meeting, conversations with their children's teachers, perspective shifting with their children, etc.)
- Providing very specific verbal tasks, using one cue at a time in short 3-4 word sentences.
- Being cautious of "language overload" and abstract language (avoid sarcasm, idioms, jokes)



Not knowing: the only way to find out

"True listening comes from a stance of 'not knowing,' in which we are open to imagining our way into another's feelings, even when they are not our own. Listening requires a willingness to stay present with difficult, intense feelings while at the same time conveying a feeling of safety, offering another person a sense of being held securely. Most important and most challenging, listening requires being mindful of how our own feelings, memories, and experiences are stirred up: to be fully present, we must be able to manage our own reactions."

Quint, C. M. (2016). *The Silenced Child: From Labels, Medications, and Quacks to Solutions in Learning, Growth, and Living*. Kentville, NS: M.A. Da Capo Press. P. xiv.



Self Care

Enough sleep

Regular Medical care

Time to yourself

Friends you can call when you're losing your cool

If Olivia had come into care 3 years later...

- Her family would have been part of the Forrest County Safe Babies Court Team
- She would have had a developmental screening.
- She would have found a medical home in the practice of a developmental pediatrician.
- She would have been evaluated for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.
- She would have been placed in one foster home where she could remain throughout her foster care experience.



If Olivia had come into care 3 years later...



- She and her mother would have spent time together at least twice each week.
- One therapeutic venue for those visits would be Child-Parent Psychotherapy.
- Her mother would have found kindness and concern about the problems that led to her substance abuse.
- When the Hattiesburg community came together and started working as the Safe Babies Court Team, amazing things started to happen.

Be the change
you wish to see in the world

(Mahatma Gandhi)





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