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A Special Issue for You!
A Compilation of Feature Articles

Best Practices for Participating in Professional Development Webinars

Submitted by Sheila Zickefoose, MA, IMHE, Statewide Coordinator, West Virginia Early Intervention Interagency Coordinating Council



In today's world there are many things that can make getting quality professional development challenging. Travel, release time, and money are all things that must be considered as individuals are exploring how to attend professional development. Early childhood programs and systems must also consider these same factors when developing and providing learning opportunities for the field. While there are no easy answers, technology can be one way of addressing these.

WV Birth to Three recognizes the need for diverse professional development opportunities. We are always working to support newly enrolling professionals, veteran professionals, and our community partners. WV Birth to Three also has responsibilities to inform the field of policies and procedures, as well as increasing the knowledge of practitioners in evidence-based practices. It is also important for practitioners to network with others who do what they do. In the Fall of 2011, WV Birth to Three began providing professional development opportunities through a webinar platform.

Over the ensuing years, WV Birth to Three trainers and guest speakers have built skills and knowledge about how to engage with their audiences more effectively, while presenting information in different ways based upon distance education research and GoToTraining platform recommendations. We also recognized the need to provide information and support the field on how to participate in those opportunities. The first way to address that need was in the development and facilitation of a quarterly webinar titled “Learning via Webinar”. This article outlines the steps and best practices for participating in a WV Birth to Three webinar.

Step 1 – Registration

There are a couple of different ways to learn about the webinar sessions that are offered by WV Birth to Three on a monthly basis.

- Visit the WV Birth to Three website and click on the “Click here for WVBTT Training Schedule” button. This will provide you with a list of the trainings WV Birth to Three has scheduled on the WV STARS Training Calendar and Course Catalog. A link is provided to the training calendar site for registration.
- Search the WV State Training and Registry System Training Calendar and Course Catalog for “online” sessions.

Once you are registered through the WV STARS Training Calendar, you will receive a confirmation email, which contains the webinar registration link. You must complete this second step for registration to gain access to the materials for the session and the live session on the date and time schedule. Each individual who is participating in the live webinar must be signed into the webinar from their own device to receive credit for participation.

Step 2 – Preparation Prior to Participation

After completing both registration steps, you will receive a second confirmation email from the webinar platform. Please review the contents of this email as it provides you with important links to review prior to the session. These links include:

1. [Please review the materials](#) – provides you access to the handouts for the session. It is very important to download these materials prior to the session. We encourage you to print out all handouts so you have a place to take notes throughout the live session

and to assist you with the post-test that follows the majority of West Virginia Birth to Three webinars.

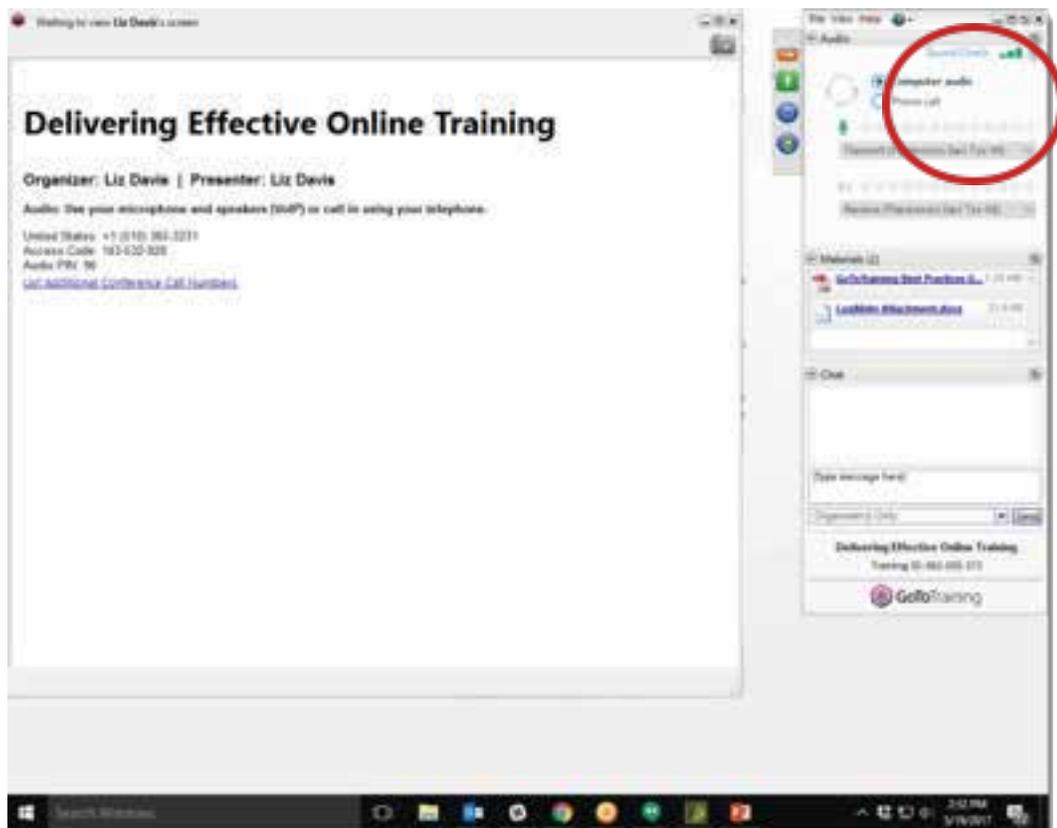
2. Test your connection – This connects you to two system tests to assess if you are able to participate in the live webinar. These will be especially important to run if this is your first time participating in a webinar, or you have not participated in quite some time.
3. Join – provides you the connection to the live webinar on the scheduled date and time.
 - a. You can join the live session from your desk top or lap top computer by clicking on the “join” button with your mouse.
 - b. You can also join the live session from your mobile phone or tablet by clicking on the “join” button and downloading the GoToTraining app from the appropriate app store (i.e., Google Play or iTunes).
4. Audio connection – You have options! There is a link in the email where you can read the system requirements for audio prior to the session.
 - a. Computer/mobile device with microphone and speaker – this works most effectively with a headset that has a USB connection. If you do not have a headset, you can use the mic and speakers that your computer/mobile device is equipped with.
 - b. Computer with telephone audio – If you do not have a microphone or speakers on your computer you can call into the session for the audio component, while watching the video on your screen. The phone number for access to this audio connection is included in the email. However, you may not participate in sessions listening only to the audio component.
5. Canceling your registration – If something arises which will prevent you from attending a webinar, you can cancel your registration for the webinar through the link embedded in the confirmation email.

Step 3 – Day of the Webinar

1. Join the live webinar. Best practice would be to join the session at least 10 minutes prior to the start of the session. This allows you to work out any potential “bugs” that may occur for you.
2. Test your audio connection. Once you have joined the live session you will see a screen that looks similar to the one on the next page. On the right hand side of the screen you will find your control panel, and on the top right of that, in the circled area, is a button to test your sound. You can click this to find if your audio connection

is working well. You will also note that you have the ability to connect to your audio by phone here as well. Computer audio means you are using the computer mic/speakers or a head set. Phone provides the phone number and access codes to use a landline or mobile phone for the audio connection.

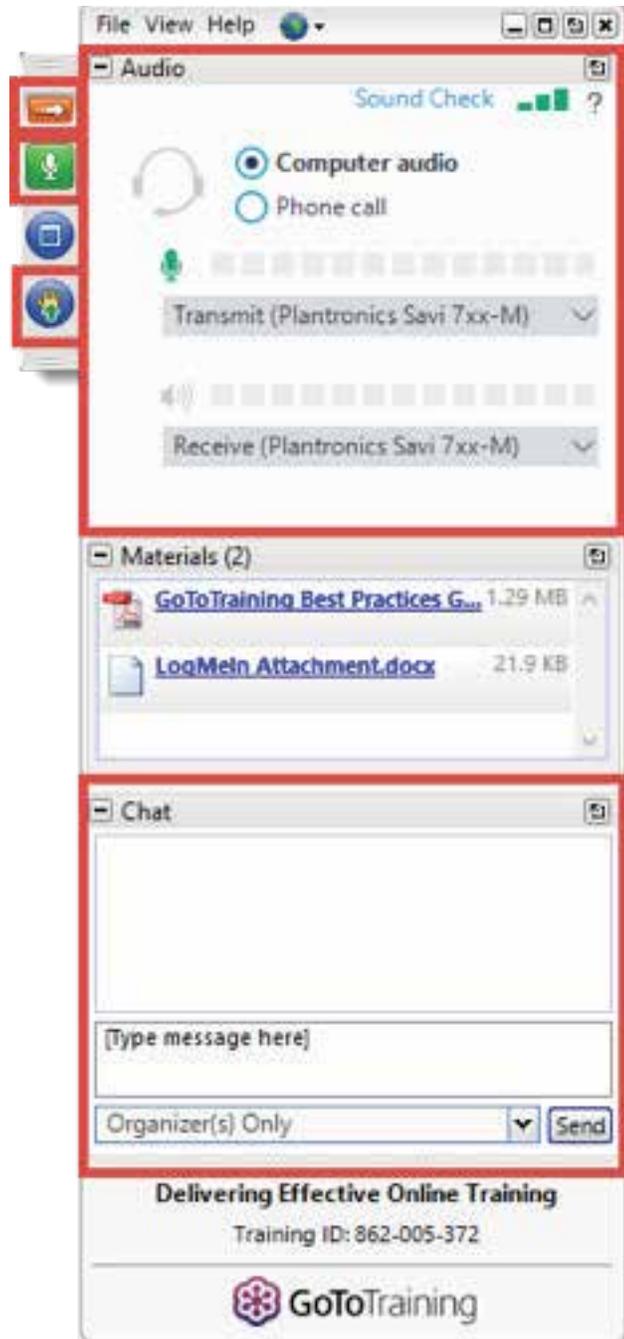
3. Minimize distractions and technology issues – Please close any nonessential computer applications as well as mute your landline and/or mobile phone. Let the answering machine or voice mail take a message so you can give your full attention to the learning opportunity.
4. Problems – Communicate with the session facilitator through the chat box if you are having challenges!



Step 4 – Participate in the Webinar

1. Give yourself the permission to fully attend to and fully participate in the webinar, just as you would attending an in-person training.
2. Mute your audio connection. You can do this through the GoToTraining platform (click the green microphone button) or on your individual device.
3. Use the GoToTraining features to interact with the session presenter and the other attendees. These can all be accessed through the control panel, which you will see on the next page.

- a. Orange arrow button – opens and closes the control panel
- b. Hand with a green arrow – raise your hand to get the presenter's attention.
- c. Materials – this section will have all of the handouts for the session. You will be able to download them during the session if you were not able to do that ahead of time.
- d. Chat box – will be the primary way you have to interact with and respond to the presenter and the others attending the session.



Step 5 – End of the Webinar

Beginning January 1, 2018, WV Birth to Three began implementing a post-test requirement for all core training sessions in addition to session evaluations. To receive contact hours for the session, you must complete the post-test and score at least an 80 percent. Post-tests will be comprised of 10-15 questions, with those questions consisting of a mix of true/false and multiple choice. The post-test will be launched by the trainer in the last 15 minutes of the session. At the end of the 15 minutes, the test will close. The webinar platform will score the post-test and you will be provided with a report of your score on the test. If you do not meet the score requirement, you will need to complete the training again to receive contact hours for the session.

Step 6 – Follow Up From the Webinar

The session trainer will be provided a report of scores to review. This will facilitate the entering of attendance to the WV STARS system based upon your score on the post-test. Attendance will be entered within five working days of the training date. Once your attendance has been entered, you will receive an email from the WV STARS system notifying you that you have access to the session evaluation. You must complete the session evaluation to gain access to the certificate of training attendance.

While changes and new opportunities are exciting, we recognize there may be questions. Should you have any questions about participating in a WV Birth to Three webinar, please contact Sheila Zickefoose at szickefoose@rvcds.org.

Navigating WV STARS

Submitted by Rebecca Wheeler, Statewide Coordinator, WV STARS

WV STARS (West Virginia State Training and Registry System) is the Early Childhood Professional Development System in West Virginia. There are two different ways to participate with WV STARS, as a Registry participant or as a Career Pathway participant. Qualified staff working in a licensed child care center are required to be a Career Pathway participant. A Registry participant can enroll in a training, and have training tracked, but is not awarded a Career Pathway Credential.

Here are some frequently asked questions that you may find helpful.

How can I locate and register for WV STARS training?

WV STARS training is located on the Training Calendar, which can be accessed by going to www.wvstars.org and clicking on the link, or by logging into your WV STARS account. Here is a link that will walk you through accessing the Training Calendar and registering for training: http://www.wvstars.org/wp-content/forms/ONL_Training_Search.pdf.

How do I locate WV STARS online training on the Training Calendar?

Online training can be searched by typing online into the refine box and



hitting the filter button. This will show you only the online trainings that are scheduled to the Training Calendar.

What online training am I allowed to count toward non-STARS hours?

Online training that is not registered with WV STARS can be submitted

using the Non-STARS training submission form. This form must be completed with documentation attached and submitted to the WV STARS office for the hours to be added to your training transcript. To access the Non-STARS training submission form, please visit the Professionals page at www.wvstars.org.

What if I attended a national conference or face-to-face event that was not WV STARS registered?

WV STARS is able to count face-to-face training that you have completed that is not WV STARS registered as a non-STARS training for you as long as it can be aligned to the West Virginia Core Knowledge and Competencies and you are able to provide the necessary documentation. In order to have this training added to your Training Transcript, you must complete the non-STARS training submission form that is available on the wvstars.org website. Please see this link:

http://www.wvstars.org/wp-content/forms/Non_STARS_Training_Submission_Form.pdf

How can I complete my training evaluation online and access my official training certificate?

WV STARS now requires all training attendees to complete an online training evaluation in order to receive their official training certificate. All training certificates will print on demand after the completion of the online training evaluation. Here is how you can complete the evaluation and print your certificate.

Step 1. Go to wvstars.org

Step 2. Click on the Professionals tab and select Log In (bottom right)

Step 3. Enter your UserID (Registry ID) and Password (if you have forgotten this there is a forgot password option or call the WV STARS office)

Step 4. Click on the My Dashboard tab and select My Courses

Step 5. Click on the name of the course/training you have completed and listed as IN PROGRESS in blue. (Note: You will be unable to complete the training evaluation until your Instructor has marked you as attended.)

Step 6. Complete the Training Evaluation

Step 7. After completing the training evaluation, the training will show in the COMPLETED (green area) and My Transcript area of the My Dashboard tab.

Step 8. Click on My Transcript and select the course/training that you completed

Step 9. Click View Certificate located beside the course/training

Step 10. Print certificate

If you prefer to reference a guide that includes visual aids and screenshots, please use this link: http://www.wvstars.org/wp-content/forms/ONL_Training_GUIDE.pdf.

Individualizing Your Professional Development Plan: Why One Size Doesn't Fit All

Submitted by Natalie Snider, Distance Learning Consultant

It is important for all early childhood professionals – no matter how qualified – to incorporate new knowledge, behaviors, and skills into their work with and/or on behalf of young children and families. With the publication of new research, development of new curricula, and overall societal changes, it is expected that even after many years in the field, professionals always have something more to learn. Professional development, such as formal education, training and technical assistance, can provide learning and experiences to develop and enhance the growth of professionals. However, just attending whatever local training that is offered, regardless of the topic, or taking a course because it's the cheapest is not necessarily the answer.

Consider the following professionals:

Brenda's Story: Brenda is a new family child care provider. She has raised three of her own children and they are now starting families of their own. As she begins her work, she soon realizes that many things have changed since her kids were young. She also has many required trainings that she needs to complete.

Laura's Story: Laura is a Head Start teacher with a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education. She has been a

teacher for over 20 years. At this point in her career, she finds that the "same old trainings" that she has taken before are being offered repeatedly. She is looking for something more to serve the children planning to attend Kindergarten the following year.

Tonya's Story: After completing the Apprenticeship for Child Development Specialist (ACDS) program, Tonya was promoted from a part-time assistant teacher working with three-year olds to a full-time infant caregiver position in a child care center. With the increase in hours and salary, she also has more responsibility. Tonya is excited about her new position and she is eager to use the knowledge that she has learned about infants, but doesn't know where to start.

All three of these professionals have different backgrounds, different levels of educations, different needs, and different goals. They may find themselves in the same training occasionally, when they complete mandatory health and safety trainings; however, it would be incorrect to assume that they all need the same classes or have the same learning experiences just because they are part of the same profession.

As they continue in their professional growth, each professional would ben-

efit from having their own individual plan that would focus on their own experiences, knowledge, and goals. In a statement by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), it is indicated that "professional development experiences are most successful when they respond to an individual's background, experiences, and the current context of their role." Therefore, it only makes sense that one-size does not fit all when it comes to professional development; they need something more individualized.

As professionals, these individuals are generally aware of what their needs are and should have input, if not complete decision-making, in how to accomplish their goals. Though each program and position does have required training to take, professionals develop a stronger sense of responsibility and ownership for their learning when they have a say in what professional development they participate in. NAEYC also indicates that "students and professionals should be involved in the planning and design of their professional development program."

Each professional needs to create their own unique and individualized plans to assist in identifying career goals and



professional development needs. Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDPs) are these plans, written out in document form, that connect needed knowledge and professional standards to professional development experiences. There is a growing trend in the early childhood profession for individuals to develop IPDPs to help guide their professional growth.

In 2016, the Early Childhood Advisory Council of West Virginia released a revision of the *Core Knowledge and Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals*. This document provides recommended knowledge and skills for professionals who work directly with and on behalf of young children. Included with this document is a Professional Development Planning Tool that walks professionals through the process of creating

an Individual Professional Development Plan. This tool can be used at the workplace with review and approval by a supervisor or solely by the individual to map out their own needs and goals. It can be printed individually and used to draft an IPDP. This document can be found online at <https://wvstars.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/WV-Core-Knowledge-and-Competencies.pdf>. If you click on Professional Development, you will find the tool separated from the rest of the document.

This planning tool walks a professional through three steps to develop an Individual Professional Development Plan: assess, reflect, and plan. Each of these three steps is integral to create a meaningful and accurate plan. Skipping a step will often result in an unsuccessful plan.

First, to determine current skill and identify areas of strength and areas of opportunity, a professional should complete an assessment. This can be done independently or in conjunction with a supervisor or mentor. An assessment can help a professional accurately determine their level of competence in different content areas.

Once an assessment is completed, the professional can then reflect on what was learned by the results. Was there anything surprising? Did the assessment show gaps of proficiency? This step should help the professional narrow their priorities of future learning and develop specific and measurable goals based on the outcomes.

Finally, the professional can begin planning. In this step, the professional will

determine how to reach the established goals. Often, a professional can benefit from outside opinions and resources when developing this plan. A supervisor or mentor may have knowledge of varying professional development opportunities and/or agencies that may assist in meeting recognized goals.

Let's return to our three early childhood professionals and how they may approach the process of developing an IPDP.

Brenda, our new family child care provider, conducts her own self-assessment after receiving the Core Knowledge and Competencies (CKCs) from her child care resource and referral agency. In reflecting on the results of her self-assessment, she finds many areas that she would like to develop. However, as a new provider, she narrows down her priorities to learning more about the regulatory requirements for her to operate and maintaining the required paperwork. Her goal is to organize her business files and have a successful visit from her regulatory specialist next year. Her plan is to reach out to her Child Care Resource and Referral agency for additional training and consultation.

Laura, our more seasoned professional, completes a self-assessment of her competence in the area of Child Observation and Assessment. She has used assessment methods for some time but finds that her focus has always been more about cognitive and motor development. She is interested in dig-

ging deeper into assessment of the emotional development of the children she serves. She is determined to begin this process early next year so that she has time during the school year to work with the children and families. She reaches out to a colleague and discovers that there is a one-day training on the Ages and Stages Questionnaire®: Social-Emotional (ASQ®:SE). She plans to attend this training and implement the screening tool the following school year. After she completes this training, she modifies her goal to be more specific. Her new goal is to administer and score the screening results by the end of September so she can meet with families about the results in the month of October.

Tonya, who has recently been promoted after completing ACDS, shares the results of her self-assessment with her supervisor, who has also completed an assessment for Tonya. During this meeting, Tonya expresses feelings of being overwhelmed. Her supervisor helps her reflect and she narrows her focus to just one goal to focus on in the next six months; learning more about the families of the infants she cares for and developing partnerships to help individualize care. Tonya has decided to dedicate time to shadow her colleague to focus on how she communicates with families during drop-off and pick-up. She will also seek out technical assistance to develop individualized plans of care for each child. At the end of the first three month period, she will meet again with her supervisor to review the

plan and see if she is on target or if adjustments need made.

In these examples, each professional has developed their own plan for professional development that is individualized to their needs. They have completed a self-assessment, reflected on results, prioritized goals, and created specific actions. By taking the time to develop and document an Individual Professional Development Plan, they are more likely to meet their goals and grow as a professional.

For more information about professional development planning and Individual Professional Development Plans, see the following resources:

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (November 1993). A Conceptual Framework for Early Childhood Professional Development. Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements>

National Association for the Education of Young Children and National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies. (2011). *Early Childhood Education Professional Development: Training and Technical Assistance Glossary*. Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements>

Early Childhood Advisory Council of West Virginia. (2015). West Virginia's Core Knowledge and Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals. Retrieved from <http://earlylearning.wv.gov/CoreKnowledgeandCompetencies/Pages/default.aspx>

Camp Gizmo: What a Bright Idea!

Submitted by Ginger Huffman, Coordinator, Office of Early and Elementary Learning

Camp Gizmo is a unique summer event to promote inclusion for young children with disabilities through the use of assistive technology. The camp is for families of children with disabilities from birth to eight years old. Professionals, families, and college students come together from across West Virginia to learn about assistive technology (AT) and to explore how adaptations, modifications, and assistive technology can support children in fully participating in daily activities and routines in the home, classroom, and community settings.

Each adult attending camp is assigned to a focus child/family team. Team members attend workshops demonstrating the application of different aspects of assistive technology, visit technology labs, and observe children using assistive technology in camp activities. At the end of the week, each family leaves with an action plan of ideas, strategies, and resources to share with their educational team back home.

During camp, teams of professionals help each family identify tools and strategies to meet their assistive technology needs. The child, with their family, attends a variety of labs and sessions to focus on his or her specific needs. Camp Gizmo labs include computer and switch access, mobility, speech/language communication, sensory, make and take, feeding and swallowing, self-care/hand



skills, vision and hearing, and a resource library. There are sibling and parent groups for families to meet together to discuss concerns, feelings, and other issues while at camp. The camp also offers a family photography session.

This five-day event is for the entire family. In addition to labs and workshops, camp also offers Kids Camp for all children attending camp. This includes the child with a disability, siblings, and the children of professionals attending camp. Kids Camp is overseen by Camp

Gizmo veterans and provides a variety of educational and recreational activities. The Kids Camp provides a safe, fun camp experience for children with or without disabilities.

Camp Gizmo also provides continuing education and graduate hours for early childhood professionals and has partnerships with West Virginia University, Wheeling Jesuit, and Marshall University. The camp provides an opportunity to teach and provide in-depth training for college students, parents, and early childhood professionals on how assistive technology can aid children with disabilities by working with professional teams. The teams consist of professionals from around the state, graduate students, and returning families. While the camp is helping individual families that are selected for camp, it is also increasing core knowledge, competencies, and awareness of assistive technology for young children.

The camp has been an annual event since July 1995. It has a long history of helping children with disabilities and their families overcome obstacles relating to access, education, and independence. Camp Gizmo staff have the knowledge to help families navigate early childhood and education systems.

To learn more about Camp Gizmo and the application process, visit wvearly-childhood.org/Camp_Gizmo.html or call West Virginia Early Childhood Training Connections and Resources at 304-529-7603 or toll free 1-888-WVECTCR.

Camp Gizmo is funded by the WV Department of Education/Office of Special Education & Early and Elementary Programs, WVDHHR/Bureau for Public Health/Office of Maternal, Child and Family Health/WV Birth to Three, and WVDHHR/Bureau for Children and Families/Division of Early Care and Education and in-kind support is provided by WVATS, WVU Center of Excellence in Disabilities, National Seating and Mobility, Assistive Technology Works, Inc. Support and coordination provided by WV Early Childhood Training Connections and Resources.



Creating a Quality Learning Environment

Submitted by Ginger Huffman, Coordinator, Office of Early and Elementary Learning

There are many factors to a child's early learning, including parents, caregivers, and other children. Perhaps the factor with the largest scope is the early learning environment. The learning environment is the mix of spaces and context in which a young child grows and learns. The environment is often referred to as the "third teacher" (after parents and educators) due to its importance in early learning. While the environment can refer to a child's home, the outdoors, or a classroom, we will focus on the preschool as a learning environment.

Environments should be welcoming and interesting. Unfamiliar surroundings and people can provoke a stress response. It is important that the classroom environment helps children feel more comfortable, which aids in their ability to learn. Once a feeling of comfort has been established, there should be a variety of new and interesting areas and features. Some level of uncertainty and novelty generates intellectual arousal and interest.

Different parts of an environment can have different stimulation levels, which have a direct effect on how children play. Large areas encourage movement and use of space, while closed areas with more soft features lend themselves to reading or discovery activities. With this in mind, it's clear that a diverse envi-



ronment creates a variety of experiences and opportunities for a young learner.

An effective learning environment encourages learning through play with a rich set of materials and learning opportunities. An effective environment will also be responsive, containing features that involve all five senses and provoke thinking, open-ended outcomes, and creativity. For example, consider a nature table, an indoor fixture with branches, sticks, leaves, and perhaps some simple dolls or figures. There are textures, smells, things to see, and things to compare and play with in such an environment. A rich mixture of these textures and different objects creates a valuable play experience.

The social nature of the environment

is also important. Does the environment contribute to social interaction between children or does it inhibit it? A preschool room should have more open space, collaborative activities, and stations or areas of interest. Social interaction between children gives them access to different perspectives while playing and gives them the opportunity to learn to interact.

The Creative Curriculum outlines the learning environment from three perspectives.

1. Setting up and maintaining the classroom. The physical space of *The Creative Curriculum* classroom is organized into 10 interest areas: Blocks, Dramatic Play, Toys and Games, Art, Library, Discovery, Sand and Water, Music

and Movement, Cooking, and Computers—and also Outdoors. Interest areas offer multiple opportunities for children to explore, discover, and grow. In each, the arrangement of furniture and the materials involves children not only in learning, but also in caring for the classroom and what is in it.

2. Establishing a structure for each day. The daily routines and schedule create a sense of order in *The Creative Curriculum* classroom. Children know what to expect, and they understand what is expected of them. With the assurance that their environment is predictable and familiar, children can settle into learning and function as part of a group. The order around them creates a sense of order inside them.

3. Creating a classroom community. This is the social/emotional environment of *The Creative Curriculum* classroom. Teachers relate to children in positive ways and help them do the same with one another. The positive social climate helps children feel good about school and learn to the best of their abilities.

The learning environment meets children's developmental needs. It makes all children—including those with special needs—feel safe and comfortable and that they belong. As a result, they are helped to become independent and confident learners.

Why is this important? The brain is a complex organ that is constantly physically changing itself. Throughout our

lives, the brain re-wires itself based on experiences and different environments. This is why rich environments in these early stages of development are so important. Not only are children learning new things in new environments, their brains are constantly applying knowledge of past experiences to newer ones! This is why the concept of not using learning spaces that are simply a background for learning, and instead creating responsive environments that generate interactive experiences, is so crucial to early learning.

Resources: Natural Pod and the Importance of Learning Environments by Christopher Roy, www.naturalpod.com

Trister Dodge, D., Colker, L., and Heroman, C. *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool*. Teaching Strategies, Washington, D.C.



So You Want to Build a Playground!

Ingrid M. Kanics, OTR/L, FAOTA, Kanics Inclusive Design Services, LLC

Spring is knocking on the door and children are itching to get outside and play. You think, “Wouldn’t it be great to have a fun playground in our neighborhood? Maybe we can get a playground in that little park around the corner or update the playground at our local school.”



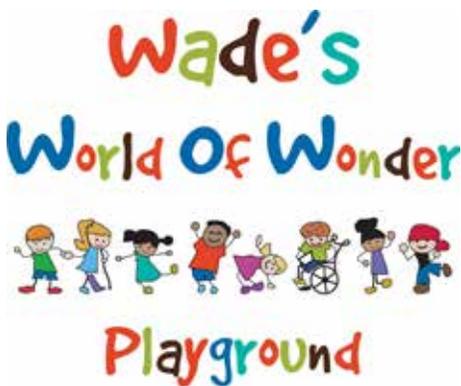
There are many ways to get a playground into your neighborhood to provide families with a great place to play. Here are the steps you need to take to make this happen. Along with these steps, we will provide you an example of what these steps look like by using a playground currently being planned in Kingwood, West Virginia. This playground, Wade’s World of Wonder Playground, also called Wade’s WOW Playground, will be a great place for all to play in the near future.

Step 1: Develop partnerships

They say it takes a village to raise a child and the same is true for a playground. The process is a whole lot easier if you have lots of partners in the process. Different partners have different roles in making your playground a reality.

Playground Committee Partners: These individuals are community members in your community who feel that getting children of all abilities outside to play is important. These could be your neighbors, school members, parents, grandparents, children, business owners, and others who believe in the value of adding a quality play space to your community. The purpose of this group is to identify the need for this playground and define the vision of what this playground will be for the community.

Wade’s WOW Playground committee is a collection of families, educators, and business owners in the Kingwood region who have realized that a park with an inclusive playground would bring a whole new dimension to their community. The playground is a memorial playground remembering Wade Mazza and other children with disabilities in the community who never got the chance to really play because their lives were impacted by a medical condition of one type or another. The vision is that this playground will be a place where all children can play.



Playground Property Partners: It is important very early in the process to identify who owns the property where the playground will be placed. This could be a school district, community park organization, the city, or the county in which you live. It is important that the playground committee has a strong partnership with those who own the land and work with them to create a memorandum of understanding as to how the playground will be built and who will own and maintain it once the playground is completed. The property partners will help determine the best location on the property to install a playground, as well as advise you on any preparations that might have to be done to the property to make your playground successful. This partnership can look a variety of different ways depending on local codes and laws.



Wade's WOW Playground committee has worked with assorted community groups and has identified several different property locations for their playground. They have worked with these groups to identify a final location and are now working with that group to get the land surveyed to determine the best location in the park for the playground.

Playground Fundraising Partners: These are the partners who can help your group with the whole fundraising process. They may be members of your committee or an outside organization that specialize in fundraising for community projects. If you are planning on managing fundraising within your community group, then it is recommended that you create a non-profit organization to be able to manage funds raised for your project. It is important that you have team members with a strong background in grant writing, fundraising, and managing finances for a non-profit. This can be a hard skill base to find so another option is to partner with a local community foundation who will manage all donations and financial processes for your project. Going this route allows your playground committee to focus more on getting the community excited about the project and coordinating other activities around designing and installing the playground.

Wade's WOW Playground has partnered with the Tucker Community Foundation. This community foundation supports community development projects in 10 counties in northeastern West Virginia. They believe in supporting projects that

provide the greatest benefit for the communities within their reach. They have partnered with the Wade's WOW Playground committee to help manage the playground fundraising process to ensure that this playground is built, thus improving the quality of life for all in this region of West Virginia.

Playground Manufacturer Partner: This is the company that will provide the community with the actual playground equipment for your playground. There are a variety of playground manufacturers around the United States and it is important for your playground committee members to evaluate, interview, and ultimately choose your playground manufacturer. They should provide you with a collection of playground elements that support development of all children. Their design should meet your community vision for your playground. They should support



your property partners and fundraising partners to ensure the playground will fit properly on the property, that any property preparation is done accurately, and that the final installation is done properly to ensure that all who play on the playground can play safely. They should also support the fundraising partner by providing support documents on benefits of the playground design for all children and other documents that support the fundraising process.

Wade's WOW Playground committee looked at different manufacturers and has partnered with Sparks@Play who provides Landscape Structures Inc. designed and manufactured playground equipment. The committee has worked with both of these groups to design a playground that supports play for children of assorted ages and abilities. The design for the playground also captures some of the unique history and activities found in Preston County. Specifically, the design captures the history and fun of the Buckwheat Festival, which this county is so well known for in West Virginia.

Creating these partnerships is a very important part of making your playground a great success. It is the foundation that needs to be in place to make the design, installation, and grand opening happen for you community.

Project Manager: With so many different partnerships needed to make a playground happen it is important to have a very clearly identified Project Manager.

This person has to have the authority to manage all the different interactions for the full playground project. This person is typically a member of the Playground Committee or the Playground Fundraising Partner organization. This person has to have some of their everyday time dedicated to coordinating all the different activities that make the playground come together.

For Wade's WOW Playground, the Project Manager has been provided by the Tucker Community Foundation and will be overseeing all parts of the project moving forward to completion of the playground.

Step 2: Designing Your Playground

Designing your playground is a fun part of the process. Here you get to dream big as you look at all the possibilities available through your manufacturer partner. This is where you make the vision of your playground become real for your whole community. There are several things to think about when designing your playground.



1. Getting to the playground: Think about how people will get to your playground? How long will it take them to get to the playground from their home? Your Playground Property Partner can help you with some of these things to consider.

- **Will they walk there?** Then you need to consider the sidewalks that will get them there. How wide do your sidewalks need to be when you have groups of people traveling on them to your playground?
- **Will they take public transportation?** Then you need to consider the routes and stops that visitors would use to get to the park. How far do people have to walk from the bus stop to the park? What are the sidewalks like from the bus stop to the playground?
- **Will they drive there?** Then you need to consider road access and parking. How far is the parking lot from the playground area? How wide are the sidewalks from the parking area to the playground?

2. Restrooms and other amenities: Think about how long you would like people to play at the playground. Are they just coming for an hour or so or would you like them to come for half a day or a day, which allows them to experience your region. Is your playground going to be in a large park with a variety of other outdoor ac-

tivities? Your Playground Property Partner can help you with some of these things to consider.

- **Restrooms:** Make sure that you have restrooms that can handle the volume of visitors who will come to the playground. Make sure that they support visitors of assorted abilities by including full size changing benches for those with children or those with disabilities.
- **Drinking fountains:** Make sure that visitors have access to drinking water so that they do not dehydrate while they play.
- **Seating:** Make sure that there places throughout the playground where visitors can sit to rest and observe others at play.



- **Shade:** Make sure that there are trees or man-made shade structures around the playground to provide shade. Man-made shade structure can be integrated into different play areas and seating areas. Your Playground Property and Playground Manufacturer Partners can help you make decisions on these amenities.

- **Shelter/Picnic areas:** Make sure that there are places around the playground where families can gather for snacks, meals, and celebrations.

- **Fencing:** Many families worry about children running away from the playground into parking lots and other areas which might not be safe. Fencing is recommended around the playground area to provide additional safety for children while they play on the playground.

3. The playground: Now to design the actual playground! There are several things to consider about the actual playground. There are a variety of playground regulations that determine what equipment is appropriate for children of different ages as well as overall safety on the playground. Your Playground Manufacturer knows these inside and out. They will be able to guide you as you make your play equipment choices to be sure your playground meets all of these regulations. When you look at all the amazing equipment for your playground, you need to keep the following concepts in mind:

- **Developmentally appropriate play experiences:** Think about the

ages of the children who will be coming to play on the playground. Will there be infant and toddlers? Preschoolers? School Age? Teenagers? Adults? Senior Citizens? You need to have a good sense of who will come to play so that you can be sure to have the variety of play opportunities to support them.

- **Sensory play:** Make sure that the playground has sensory play experiences that are visual, auditory, and tactile in nature. Children can play with these senses on the playground. Children with autism often navigate to these types of play experiences.



- **Movement play:** Make sure that children get to feel movement through space (also known as vestibular play). This includes linear movement from swings, slides, ziplines and see-saws, rotation movement from merry-go-rounds, and spinning movement from spinners. Make sure that some of these are accessible to children who use wheelchairs or walkers so that they can experience this movement too!
- **Muscle play:** Make sure that children get to use their muscles (also known as proprioceptive play). This includes climbing, pushing, and pulling on play elements. Make sure that children get to use their arm muscles with overhead play elements.
- **Social play:** Make sure that children are able to connect with other children when they play. This could be in small groups or larger groups. Quiet places are important too for children who might get overwhelmed by all the playground activity.
- **Pretend play:** Make sure that the playground design allows children to enter into their world of make believe.
- **Ramping/Access to height:** Make sure that all visitors can access some level of height on the playground. This can be done by using ramps or using the lay of the land (topography) to get up high.

These are all the different things to consider when you design your playground. Again, your Playground Property Partner and Playground Manufacturer Partner will be important partners to help you cover all of these areas so that you can get a playground design that you feel will meet the needs of your community!

Wade's WOW Playground has worked with their assorted partners to create their playground design over the past few years. This process can take time and will depend on the property where the playground will ultimately go. This process took some time with Wade's WOW Playground as they did shift their property location several times before landing where they will ultimately build.

4. Fundraising around the final playground design: Once you have a design all set, the fundraising process can happen big time. Your Playground Fundraising Partner may have been doing some fundraising while the design process was happening but it will go into major fundraising mode once there is a design that everyone can see and talk about. The Playground Committee Partners should also be sharing the playground design with everyone they meet, sharing how excited they are about the project, and sharing how it will benefit the greater community. While fundraising is happening, this is the chance to talk to community groups and get media exposure around the project. This is also the time to start planning for installing the playground and lining up contractors and volunteers to get the playground installed. The Playground Property Partners will begin preparing the playground site for this installation. This might involve adding sidewalks, parking areas, restrooms, and other amenities.

Wade's WOW Playground is currently in this stage of the playground process. With a solid design, the Tucker Community Foundation and the local Playground Committee are working to raise awareness and funds to make their playground a reality in Kingwood, WV.

5. Installing the playground: Once the playground funds have been raised then the installation process can begin. This can be a great event for the community. Volunteers can be part of the installation process working alongside with the Playground Manufacturer Partners to make the playground a reality of the community! It is important to have a ribbon cutting and grand opening event where everyone can celebrate!

Wade's WOW Playground Committee is already beginning to plan for their opening. They are discussing the best ways to have the community involved in the installation and when and what their grand opening will look like for the community.

6. Ongoing maintenance of the playground: Once the playground is open it will need to be maintained on a daily, weekly, and seasonal basis. This often falls

back on the property owner and what this looks like needs to be defined as part of the memorandum of understanding early in the playground process. Often times the fundraising process will include funds for ongoing maintenance.

Wade's WOW Playground fundraising process includes the development of a maintenance fund that the local property owner will have access to for the ongoing maintenance of the playground.

So, as you can see, building a playground involves a lot more than just picking some pretty looking playground equipment. It is a process that involves a collection of community members and partners. All of these people working together through the process can make an amazing place for a community to play, learn, and grow together!



Resiliency, Simply Defined

Submitted by Nonie Roberts, Training Specialist, Partners in Community Outreach



Resiliency, simply defined, is what we use to move forward when we face adversity. Often, people think of resilience as something complicated or difficult. It's not. Resilience is not something we are born with, it's something we acquire through learning habits and skills. So people with little resilience can learn resilience. It's an ongoing process.

The National Council for Behavioral Health lists five essential elements for promoting resiliency. These elements are safety, calming, self-efficacy, hope, and connectedness. If you want to help someone build resilience these are the things you will want to work on.

When looking at safety we want to consider a person's living situation, including where that person lives as well as with whom that person associates. We want to consider with whom the person lives, works, goes to school, and is exposed to on a regular basis in other ways. Helping someone address anything that is dangerous or frightening in their life helps assure their safety.

Calming means to know how to settle yourself when you find yourself upset or under stress. Many people have specific things they do to calm themselves – take a few deep breaths, count to 10, say a prayer. Others calm themselves but aren't fully aware of what they have done to get there. And still others have no method for calming and end up responding to a stressful situation in an explosive or volatile way, which aggravates the situation. Helping someone think about what they do to calm themselves and teaching new or different ways of calming themselves allows a person to live on a more even keel. The more we practice methods of calming ourselves, the more tranquil we stay all the time, not just when we're experiencing stress. In fact, when we practice being calm we will reduce our experiences of stress.

Self-efficacy is our belief in our ability to succeed. Making choices and taking responsibility for those choices is important and empowering. When we recognize and *believe* that how we move through life is because of the choices we make, not magic or trickery falling from the sky or other people's deeds, we are able to take actions and see the differences those actions make in our lives. Helping people trace results back to choices and reviewing how those results affected them, helps people develop self-efficacy – their ability to make choices that lead to success.

Hope means to believe that a desire or expectation will be obtained or achieved. That can be a hard one! Sadly, because of life experiences, many people in our lives have lost hope. But hope can be restored! Working on calming and self-efficacy can help people create hope. When a person begins to feel calm more often than they feel stress, and begins to experience success, that person will begin to recognize empowerment and achievement, and that is when they can begin to develop hope again. Point out successes and achievements to people. Help them build their belief in themselves. That is a powerful gift!

Connectedness is when people have positive connections in their lives – people who show they care, clearly have an interest in their success, and work to encourage that success. We are not meant to be isolated beings. We require a connection to others to thrive. It's very difficult to navigate life alone. Children whose caretakers are unable to focus on them may not be able to thrive because of a lack of connectedness. Kids who haven't developed a strong bond with their parents struggle to succeed and may become involved in a negative activity just to have a place to belong.

People who have suffered abuse as children look for connection elsewhere

and often connect with another abuser because that's what they have grown up with; that's what they know. People need positive connections in their lives. That can be a teacher, a coach, a club leader, an employer, a best friend, a co-worker, or a neighbor. In fact this can be anyone who is truly looking out for a person's best interest. When we can help others find those people and make those connections, they can strengthen all of the other elements of resilience through the belief and encouragement they receive from those connections.

Some of the skills and habits of resilience are simple and pretty easy to share with others. Some are more difficult to share or develop. But as people begin to develop some of those habits and skills around safety, calming, self-efficacy, hope, and connections their resiliency increases and that allows them to move forward. As people experience successes they are ripe for learning more skills and habits of resiliency, and may be ready to tackle a more difficult one like hope or maybe safety. Resiliency is learned. You can learn it. And you can teach it. It's an ongoing process.

Pick any of the five essential elements and get started on yourself, your family, your friends and the children and families with whom you work.



Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

What are ACEs?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are serious childhood traumas that can result in toxic stress, causing harm to a child’s brain. This toxic stress may make it difficult to learn, to play in a healthy way with other children, and can result in long-term health problems.

THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC) VIEWS ACES AS ONE OF THE MAJOR HEALTH ISSUES IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

Lowers tolerance for stress, which can result in behaviors such as fighting, checking out or defiance

Increases difficulty in making friends and maintaining relationships

Increases stress hormones which affects the body’s ability to fight infection

May cause lasting health problems

Increases problems with learning and memory, which can be permanent

Reduces ability to respond, learn, figure things out, which can result in problems in school

“I can’t hear you, I can’t respond to you, I am just trying to be safe!”

Exposure to ACEs can increase the risk of:

- Adolescent pregnancy
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Asthma
- Depression
- Heart disease
- Intimate partner violence
- Liver disease
- Sexually-transmitted disease
- Smoking
- Suicide

ACEs can include:

- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional neglect
- Physical neglect
- Mother treated violently
- Household substance use
- Household mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce
- Incarcerated household member
- Bullying (by another child or adult)
- Witnessing violence outside the home
- Witnessing a brother or sister being abused
- Racism, sexism or any other form of discrimination
- Experiencing homelessness
- Natural disasters and war

i SURVIVAL MODE RESPONSE

Increased heart rate, blood pressure, breathing and muscle tension. When a child is in survival mode, self-protection is their priority.

The good news is **RESILIENCE** can bring back health and hope!

What is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability to be healthy and hopeful despite experiencing stressful events. Research shows that when caregivers provide physically and emotionally safe environments for children and teach them how to be resilient, the negative effects of ACEs can be reduced.

Resilience Trumps ACEs!

Parents, teachers and caregivers can help children by:

- Gaining an understanding of ACEs
- Helping children identify feelings and manage emotions
- Creating safe physical and emotional environments at home, in school and in neighborhoods

What Does Resilience Look Like?

1. Having resilient caregivers

Caregivers who know how to solve problems, who have healthy relationships with other adults, and who build healthy relationships with the children in their care.

2. Building attachment and nurturing relationships

Adults who listen and respond patiently to a child in a supportive way, and pay attention to a child's physical and emotional needs.

3. Building social connections

Having family, friends and/or neighbors who support, help and listen to children.

4. Meeting basic needs

Providing children with safe housing, nutritious food, appropriate clothing, and access to health care and good education.

5. Learning about parenting and how children grow

Understanding how parents and caregivers can help children grow in a healthy way, and what to expect from children as they grow.

6. Building social and emotional skills

Helping children interact in a healthy way with others, manage their emotions and communicate their feelings and needs.



Resources:

1-2-3 Care Toolkit

srhd.org/1-2-3-care-toolkit

ACES 101

acestoohigh.com/aces-101

CDC Parent Information

cdc.gov/parents

CDC Kaiser Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

cdc.gov/violenceprevention/cestudy

Community Resilience Initiative

criresilient.org



ACEs Coalition of West Virginia

One Creative Place, Charleston, WV 25311

304-205-5685 • info@wvaces.org • www.wvaces.org



The Effect of Trauma on Social-Emotional Development

Submitted by Sharon M. Bright, Region III Director, WV Birth to Three



What is Social-Emotional Development?

Social-emotional development is the ability for children to understand the feelings of others, control their own feelings and behavior, get along with others, build relationships with adults, form friendships, communicate emotions, and learn how to deal with challenges. These skills are important because they impact how a child functions at home, in school, and in the community. They are a barometer of a child's future success.

Successful social-emotional skills are developed through a positive relationship with a trusting and caring adult. Caregivers can aid in this development by providing a nurturing, loving environment that is rich in language and hands-on experiences. Singing songs, reading books, giving verbal and visual encouragement, empathizing with the child, teaching problem solving skills, and allowing expression help to

build these skills. At the end of this article, you will find the age ranges of when social-emotional skills are learned in the first three years of life and how to support the development of these skills.

What is trauma?

Trauma is a response to a perceived threat to survival or emotional well-being of an individual or large group, such as a community or culture. Trauma leads to adverse brain, bodily, and psychological changes that damage self, relational, and spiritual development and impair living, learning, and working. Early exposure to trauma can alter the brain and have long term effects across all developmental domains. The impact extends into later childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. A traumatic experience may result in overwhelming terror, helplessness, and horror. It can overwhelm a child's ability to cope and produce intense physical reactions, such as pounding heart, rapid breathing, trembling, dizziness, or loss of bladder/bowel control.

The most common causes of trauma in children include witnessing domestic abuse, physical/sexual abuse, the sudden loss of someone close, accidents, medical concerns, and multiple transitions in foster care.

Exposure to trauma may affect a child's ability to trust others and his ability to manage his emotions, possibly leading to inappropriate physical responses. Traumatized children may have an increased need for personal space. Trauma can affect a child's ability to navigate changes and distort a child's perception of self, the world, and the future.

Each child's response to a traumatic episode depends on their age and developmental stage, the nature of the event, the child's perception of danger and the child's relationship to the victim or perpetrator. The availability of loving and caring adults affects the child's response, as does the adversities faced after the trauma. A child may exhibit episodes of revisiting the trauma either by dreams or wanting to constantly talk about the event. Some children will experience avoidance and withdrawal. Other children may appear nervous and hyper-vigilant. The responses vary by developmental age. Children exposed to trauma expend a great deal of energy responding to, coping with, and coming to terms with the event. Trauma may reduce the child's capacity to explore the environment and to master age-appropriate developmental tasks. The longer traumatic stress goes untreated, the further children tend to stray from appropriate developmental pathways.

Signs of trauma include: low self-esteem; being needy or clingy; lack of self-control; alienation from parents and/or caregivers; anti-social behavior; difficulty with trust; obsession with food; lack of empathy; academic problems; anxiety; depression; and susceptibility to chronic illness. Emotional and physical trauma is the primary predictor of future mental, emotional, learning, and physical problems. Trauma creates an ongoing threat that has a profound influence on the development of the brain and development in general.



Caregivers can help these children by providing trauma-informed care. The caregiver needs to recognize the impact that the episode has had on the child. Caregivers need to help the child feel safe by allowing the child to express his or her emotions. Caregivers need to help the child understand and modify problem behaviors. Most importantly, the caregiver needs to model a positive, stable relationship with the child and to advocate for the child's mental and physical well-being. Helping a child who has been traumatized also means helping the child's family. The caregiver may have to help the family deal with the trauma as well. You can identify and build on the protective factors and educate the family on how trauma is affecting the child. The caregiver must avoid making promises that, if unfulfilled, are likely to increase traumatization.

Children in foster care are very susceptible to experiencing trauma. Child Protective Services in the United States receives approximately three million referrals every year, representing 5.5 million children, of which one-third are under the age of five.

Most children enter foster care in the early years when brain growth and development are more active. Children in foster care need continuity with a primary attachment figure and a sense of permanence. Unfortunately, these children frequently change foster home placements and multiple attempts at reunification with their biological family. Children who are abused or neglected are at greater risk for not forming healthy attachments to anyone. If separation occurs before 6 months of age and is followed by good quality care, the separation may not have an effect on social-emotional development. Separations occurring between 6 months and 3 years are more likely to result in social-emotional disruptions. This is a result based on the typical anxiety of children this age and the normal limitations of speech and language. Children older than 3 are more likely to use language to cope with the change. The emotional consequences of multiple placements or disruptions are likely to be harmful at any age.

Physical and mental abuse during the early years tend to suspend the brain in an acute stress response mode making the child respond in a hyper-vigilant, fearful manner. Repeated experiences can lead to poor eating, withdrawal, tantrums, mood swings, impulsiveness, anxiety, and sleep issues.

Profound neglect has long lasting consequences on all aspects of development. These include poor attachment, developmental delays, poor physical development, and antisocial behavior. Being in a neglected environment makes it more difficult for a child to develop brain connections that facilitate language and vocabulary development.

Parental drug use causes chaos in the home that creates a sense of insecurity. Children are often forced to take on responsibility at an early age. Left alone for long periods of time, the children usually feel rejected and unimportant resulting in low

self-esteem and difficulty forming relationships.

Post-traumatic stress disorder in children has a grave impact on very young children. Young children can suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder which is difficult to diagnose because the event may have occurred before the development of expressive language. Children with PTSD may show a fear of strangers, be afraid to leave the parent, and experience sleep issues or nightmares. They may also be more fussy, irritable, and aggressive. Children with PTSD may lose skills and revert to earlier habits such as thumb sucking and bed wetting.

When working with children affected by trauma, it is important to be consistent and predictable. You should be clear with your expectations. The caregiver should listen to the child and help the child label his/her emotions. Caregivers need to be aware of the child's behavior and pay attention to possible triggers.

Trauma can be prevented by educating the family on child development so expectations are appropriate for the child's age. Caregivers need to help families build resilience and provide social connections for families. Resilience is the ability to recover from traumatic events. A child's resilience factors are a sense of security (am I safe), a sense of self-esteem (am I lovable), a sense of self-efficacy (am I capable), and a sense of coherence (I can understand, manage). Resiliency can be built through strong relationships with a competent, caring adult and feeling connected to that role model. These caregivers should nurture the child's talents and abilities and provide a sense of belonging.

As stated earlier, trauma can have lifelong ramifications to children in all areas of development. It is vital that caregivers provide high quality care.

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- Child Development Institute, <https://cdikids.org>
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- Child Trauma Academy, childtrauma.org
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network, <https://www.nctsn.org>

Social Emotional Development Milestones

Birth to 12 months

- Able to calm down for short periods of time



- 
- Uses thumb sucking, gazing at objects, or other sensory modalities to calm
 - Gives signals about needs through crying
 - Smiles spontaneously to main caregiver's voice, face, or smile
 - Enjoys being cuddled
 - Responds to name
 - Enjoys being near other people
 - Responds happily to play interactions with others
 - Has special attachment to primary person
 - Has stranger anxiety--beginning around 8 months
 - Recognizes self as individual
 - Reaches to be picked up/held

To Encourage Social-Emotional Development **Birth to 12 months**

- Hold and touch the baby
- Talk softly, and sing to the baby
- Let the baby watch people and activities
- Get to know the child's likes/dislikes, favorite toys, and schedule
- Build an open and collaborative relationship with the child's family
- 4-7 months - place a mirror in front of the child, praise child, start telling finger plays, stories, and name everything in the environment
- 8-12 months - introduce finger feeding, play peek-a-boo, play games and songs with interaction, and provide additional safe materials that can be explored with hands and mouth

12-24 months

- Develops sense of self
- Temper tantrums are common
- Enjoys playing by self or along side of others
- Defends possessions
- Tests limits
- Views self as "center of the world"
- Increasingly more aware and expresses new emotions such as jealousy, affection, pride, and shame
- Identifies own gender
- May ask for same parent/caregiver
- Rapid mood changes--emotions are usually intense but short
- Likes routines
- May start to comfort other children
- Begins to initiate activities
- Begins to actively resist discipline
- Wants to control others

To Encourage Social-Emotional Development **12-24 months**

- Be consistent
- Provide structure
- Praise the process, not the result
- Provide lots of support while playing in a group
- Play turn-taking games
- Redirect the child's attention during tantrums
- Establish routines and transactions
- Help child become a confident problem solver

24-36 months

- Begins to play interactively with peers
- Enjoys pretend play--critical to development
- Capable of empathy
- Loves saying "no"
- Struggles to resolve conflicts with friends
- More advanced social play skills--share/take turns

To Encourage Social-Emotional Development **24-36 months**

- Talk about feelings
- Encourage early friendships
- Ask child to imagine how their behavior may affect others
- Make a friend book
- Describe what a child is doing
- Get involved in child's play by following their lead
- Empathize with child's frustration
- Keep it simple
- Review what happened
- Point out consequences
- Talk about rules/limits in language child understands
- Show child the benefits involved in cooperating
- Praise child for doing things independently
- Encourage exploration, decision making
- Provide opportunity to interact with other children
- Play imitation games

Supporting Relationships for Infants and Toddlers with Two Homes

Reprinted with permission from the Michigan Infant Toddler Mental Health Association

Two life courses disrupt whatever relationship has developed between parents and infants/toddlers and move responsibility for the well-being of the infant/toddler to the judicial system:

- When parents divorce, and/or
- When substantiated abuse/neglect has occurred and the infant/toddler is placed in foster care

In each of these life courses, the amount of contact between a non-custodial parent and infant/toddler becomes a matter for court determination.

What Infants/Toddlers Require for Sound Social and Emotional Development

Infants come into the world dependent upon others for their physical existence. Equally important, the infant requires a consistent caring relationship--essential for the infant's social and emotional well-being. The bonding or attachment of the infant to his or her mother begins before and after birth and continues to develop through caregiving and interaction during the first months and early years. The developing infant and toddler will also attach to one or more consistent caregivers.

Attachment enables the infant and toddler to perceive the world as predictable, to develop connections with others, to moderate behavior, and through experiences to energize the growth of the brain structures essential for learning.

Infants/toddlers who do not have a consistent ongoing relationship with an adult will present as blank-faced, somber, disconnected, self-involved; or as disorganized, fearful, aggressive, sad. They may be excessively friendly, seeking comfort or help indiscriminately from any adult.

Infants and toddlers need

- Ongoing nurturing relationships
- Physical protection and safety
- Experiences appropriate to their stage of development
- Experiences appropriate to their

individual temperament and capacity

- Limit-setting and reasonable expectation for behavior
- Consistent daily routine

The ability to connect with other people and to manage emotions starts with the infant/toddler's early experiences with parents or caregivers.

Warm relationships between infant/toddler and parents show in the faces of happy, productive children who are able to

- Form healthy, warm relationships with others



- Explore and experience the world
- Communicate feelings
- Feel good about themselves
- Have good impulse control
- Show concern for others
- Continue to learn and develop

The lack of such a relationship can be seen in the sad, angry, expressionless faces of infants/toddlers who may show some or all of the following behaviors:

- Cries, calls, and searches for absent caregiver
- Refuses others' attempts to provide comfort
- Shows lack of interest in age-appropriate activities
- Has poor impulse control, aggressiveness, and learning problems

For the infant/toddler who is coping with the changes resulting from divorce or removal from home, an unfamiliar caregiver or one who does not respond empathetically to the infant/toddler's signals triggers additional stress.

Suggestions for Parenting Across Two Homes in Divorce

- Be careful not to see the infant/toddler as an object or possession to be won or divided in the divorce/custody settlement. Sometimes parents bargain for themselves rather than taking into account the infant/toddler's needs.

- An infant/toddler needs to be able to develop a primary attachment with a parental figure, and this might not happen under some parenting time arrangements. Avoid splitting parent times by percentages, taking care of parent's needs at the expense of the infant/toddler's, and putting the infant/toddler through an overwhelming travel schedule.

- Minimize the time spent with babysitters to which the infant/toddler is exposed. Infants and toddlers experience disturbance in their environment as if it were part of themselves. Young children tend to wonder if they are responsible for the conflict and too often assume that they are to blame.

- Maintain teamwork and communication. How parents interact with each other will directly affect the child. Coordination between parents helps their child establish a secure self-concept. Lack of coordination makes a child feel split between parents.

- Always support the ability of the child to have a secure relationship with the other parent.

- Attempt to arrange frequent contacts, even if short. It is easier for the child to maintain a relationship when the parent remains familiar. Extended visits do not make up for weeks of no contact.

- Keep to a regular schedule as much as possible. This helps the young child anticipate and prepare for transitions and develop a sense of trust in relationships. Irregular contacts lead to a sense of helplessness.

- Try to maintain continuity in caregiving patterns. For the infant, it is particularly important to build on the primary caregiver's patterns rather than compete or conflict with them. For the toddler and young child, continuity enables the child to focus on play and exploration, rather than being distracted or disturbed by major changes in routine. Having a blanket or stuffed animal go back and forth with the infant/toddler provides a sense of continuity. Providing a diary or cassette tape about routines and preferences is a way of keeping both parents on the same page.

- Attending parenting classes, consulting with professionals, and practice with partial days before going to overnight can assist in providing children with the consistent rules that help them learn good behavior.

- Photos, telephone calls, and letters may help bridge unavoidable long-distance relationships. Even very young infants begin to recognize voices and gradually connect a particular voice to a particular person. Sending photos not only maintains visual contact but also gives the infant/toddler permission to value the absent parent.

- Learn about the abilities the infant/toddler is developing at each age and how you and he/she can practice them. Enjoy the opportunities to explore, play, and enrich a variety of learning experiences.

- Get to know your infant/toddler as a person with feelings, hopes and needs. Understand that any young child will have some stresses and growth pains whether parents are together or not.

Difficulties are often manifested in the earliest stages of development as temporary eating and sleeping disturbances, and later in behavior.

- Take care not to jump to conclusions if your infant/toddler has difficulties when going between parents. This may reflect difficulties with transitions and doesn't necessarily indicate problems with the other parent.

Suggestions for Parenting Across Two Homes in Abuse/Neglect

- Meeting the schedule of visitations not only fulfills the court's requirements but helps the infant/toddler keep the biological parent in mind.

- Consider the foster parent an ally, not a competitor.

- Visitations are not solely a reward for the parent; they must also meet the needs of the infant/toddler.

- Visitations will generally take place in a community setting. Having a blanket or stuffed animal go back and forth with the infant or toddler provides a sense of continuity.

- If visitations can take place in the foster home, this provides an opportunity to observe the infant/toddler's normal routines and caregiving.

- The foster parent has the difficult task of meeting the social-emotional needs of the infant/toddler, who in the best of circumstances will be returned to the biological parent. The foster parent can enhance the process by helping the infant/toddler keep the absent parent in mind and preparing the infant/

toddler for visiting time.

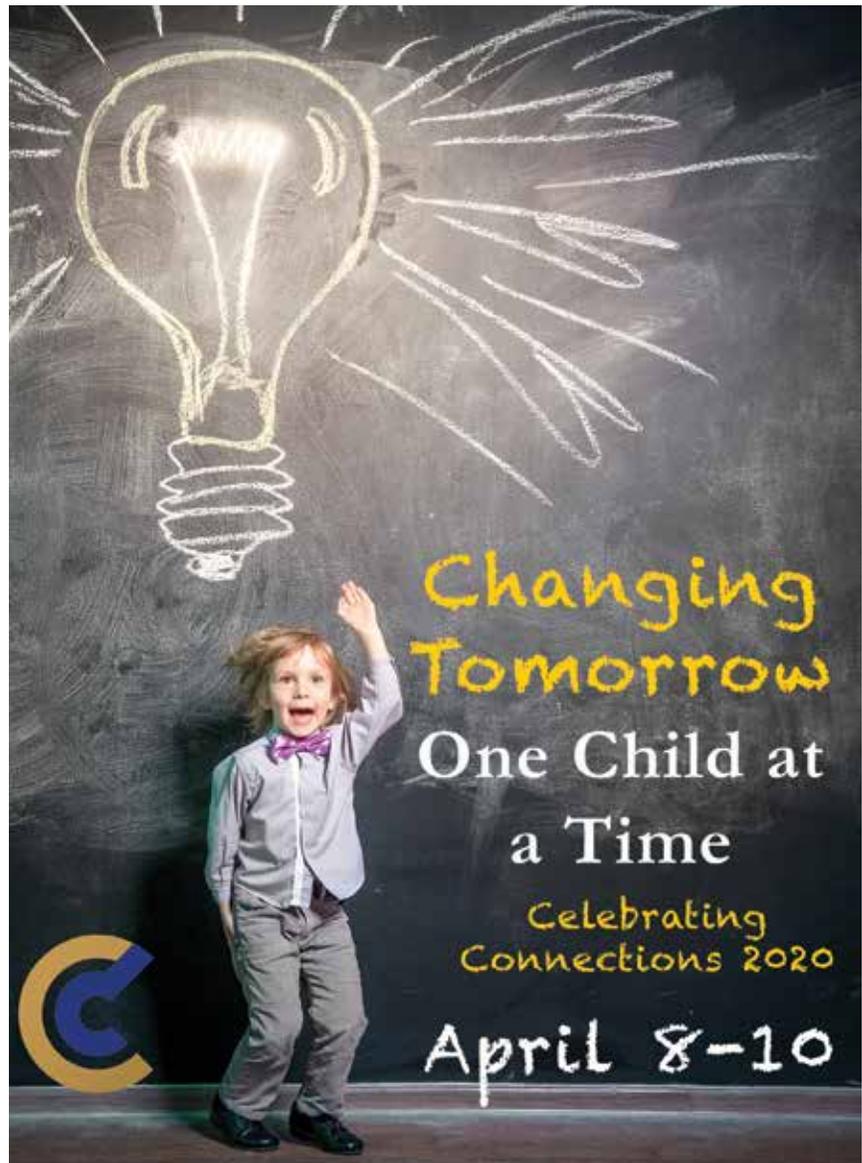
- Photos, telephone calls, and letters may help bridge the unavoidable long-distance relationship. Even very young infants begin to recognize voices and gradually connect a particular voice to a particular person. Sending photos not only maintains visual contact but also gives the child permission to value the absent parent.

- Learn about the abilities the infant/toddler is developing at each age and how you and he/she can practice them. Enjoy the opportunities to explore,

play and engage in a variety of learning experiences.

- Get to your infant/toddler as a person with feelings, hopes, and needs. Understand that any infant/toddler will have some stresses and growth pains whether or not parents are together. Difficulties are often manifested in the earliest stages of development as temporary eating and sleeping disturbances, and later, in behavior.

For more information, please see the publication "Supporting Relationships for Infants/Toddlers with Two Homes", mi-aimh.org.





Making the Right Call: Finding Resources in West Virginia

Submitted by Sheila Moran, First Choice Services

Have you ever had an infuriating experience trying to reach a company to set up a new service or get something fixed? Endless time on hold, multiple transfers, telling your story for the 5th time, talking to agents who don't seem to understand or care.....Sound familiar? Now, imagine the service you're calling about is a life or death matter, like finding shelter for your family, getting health insurance, or receiving treatment for addiction. Consider making that call if you're living in poverty, disabled, experiencing mental illness or drug addiction, or have no family to help.

At First Choice Services, we want to make sure this is not the reality for anyone in West Virginia. We have seven helplines here in West Virginia and help over 50,000 people per year. Our call agents, many of whom have experienced the issues

we focus on, are taught to treat every caller as if it is their family member. Our goals are to have a live person answering every call, to provide the right help right away, and to follow up to make sure the caller's needs were met. Many of our programs are 24/7, and several offer online chat and texting options.

Our 1800GAMBLER program offers free, comprehensive treatment for problem gamblers and their loved ones. Our HELP4WV program assures that anyone needing treatment for substance use disorder can begin treatment, usually within 24 hours of their call. This includes detox, short term treatment, recovery housing, support groups, medication-assisted treatment and therapy, peer support, and transportation assistance. Our Tobacco Quitline offers coaching and medication to ease cravings. Our Suicide Lifeline

provides crisis counseling and treatment referrals.

We partner with the United Way to offer the 211 program, which connects callers with social services, like shelter, food, and utility assistance in their area. Our WV Navigator program offers free health insurance counseling to help callers determine if they are eligible for Medicaid or subsidized insurance through the Marketplace. We take calls for WV's Jobs and Hope program, which helps callers find opportunities for education, training, and employment.

If you need help for yourself or a family member, or you are trying to find help for someone else, visit FirstChoiceServices.org and see what we have to offer.



Serving West Virginia and beyond with behavioral health helplines

1♥800♦GAMBLER

Fast, free, confidential help for problem gamblers and their loved ones. This program includes a 24-hour helpline, referrals to gambling addiction specialists, support groups, and much more!



Providing immediate help for those struggling with substance use or behavioral health issues, HELP4WV has 24-hour access to call, text, and chat, and a searchable online resource directory

WV NAVIGATOR

1-844-WV-CARES

Specifically designed to help people sign up with the Health Insurance Marketplace under the Affordable Care Act, WV Navigator offers free health insurance counseling.



We're proud to be answering the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for callers in West Virginia. Our staff are trained in Crisis Management and are ready to help 24/7.



The Quitline offers personalized coaching and nicotine replacement therapy to help any West Virginian stop smoking.



We are proud to partner with United Way to answer the line for the WV 211 program, which helps people locate social services and resources in their community.



We connect anyone seeking job training or employment to someone who can help.
(304) 583-4019 | (833) 784-1385

