Understanding Families with Substance Abuse

The effects of trauma on young children

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Pre-test

1. Of the 8.3 million children who live with a substance abusing parent, 40% are under the age of 5. T or F?
2. Children from households where drugs are used are more likely to be in out-of-home placements. T or F?
3. Increased family isolation is a symptom of a family who has substance abuse issues. T or F?
4. There is a strong correlation between abuse/neglect of children and families with substance abuse. T or F?
5. Love and affection is something that families still have a great abundance of despite drug abusing issues. T or F?
6. Trauma often occurs when children are exposed to drug/alcohol abusing family systems. T or F?
7. Children who experience trauma can often have unpredictable and explosive emotional states. T or F?
8. Children who suffer trauma have a larger more active amygdala. T or F?
9. Increasing "resiliency" in children who suffer from trauma is not possible. T or F?

Agenda:

- 30 minutes
  Pre-test/Introduction/Statistics
- 45 minutes
  Overview of Environments of families with substance abuse and the impact of neglect
- 1 hour
  Trauma effects including overview of brain effects of trauma
- 45 minutes
  Defining resiliency and how to build resilient factors in children from these family systems

Objectives:

Participants will be able to:

1. Identify statistics about children from family systems with substance use/abuse
2. Gain knowledge of the environment and lifestyle of families where substance abuse is present
3. Understand possible trauma experienced by young children in these environments and effects on brain development.
4. Describe ways to help young children cope and learn resiliency to better manage their current environments which include substance use/abuse
Statistics

- 8.3 Million children nationally live with a substance abusing parent. 30% of these children are under age 5.
- 5.2% of women admit to using illicit drugs during pregnancy
- 11.6% of women admit to use of alcohol
- Nationwide 750,000 children are born after prenatal exposure to drugs/alcohol

Impact on Child Development

- Bonding between caregivers/child is negatively impacted
- Babies will form unhealthy attachments to their parents/caregivers
- Academic success is impaired
- Demonstrate challenging behaviors

www.childwelfare.gov

Co-Occurring Issue: SAMSA report

Substance Use Disorder

- 20.8 Million
- 8.9 Million
- 42.8 Percent

www.samhsa.gov

The children...

There is a significant correlation between parental addiction and abuse to a child (both emotional and physical).

www.hopenetworks.org
More statistics:

Children of drug addicted parents are at higher risk for placement outside the home.

- Three of four child welfare professionals (75-77%) say that children of addicted parents are more likely to enter foster care, and 73% say that children of alcoholics stay longer in foster care than do other children.

www.loopnetworks.org

Environmental risks for these children:

- Often left alone without supervision
- Food is often unavailable - CHRONIC HUNGER
- Often dirty and do not receive health/dental care
- Subjected to unsafe environments with drug paraphernalia
- Parents with significant mood swings

Environments...

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs...
IN BRIEF: The Science of Neglect

Family life with substance abusing parents:
- Caregivers have low pay jobs
- Caregivers may have no job
- Money is likely difficult to come by
- Money is mainly used for drugs not necessities

What do these families have in common?
- Emotional or physical violence
- Increased family conflict
- Decreased family cohesion
- Isolation from others
- Little family organization
- Frequent moves
- Increased stress including work problems
- Caregiver illness, marital strain, and financial problems

Family life...
- Parents/caregivers can’t express love or affection
- Parents/caregivers main focus is the substance
- Parent/caregivers can be involved illegally with the drug trade
- Violence is the norm in these homes
Typical behaviors?
- Video clip of mom on meth shopping at Walmart:

Trauma sustained
Two elements impact trauma:
1. Exposure to a traumatic event that threatens the integrity of the individual
2. Intense feelings of fear, helplessness, or horror (American Psychiatric Association, 2000)

It is important to remember: the child’s appraisal of the situation often has the most impact on his or her response to the traumatic event. What is recognized by others to be the most traumatic moment, is not necessarily what the child perceives as the most traumatic.

When children are exposed to dysregulation in their environments, such as the ones described and seen in slides above, they will have experienced Trauma.

Traumatic stressors are not universally received:
- There can be a marked range of responses to identical traumas. Consider the longitudinal studies of children from the same family exposed to the same horrific events. Each child experienced the traumatic event differently.

Adapted from: Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief in Children and Adolescents by Judith Cohen, Anthony Mannarino, and Esther Deblinger.
Ongoing Trauma that starts early in life, has the potential to dramatically alter a young child’s development. This is very different for a child who has chronic Trauma that begins later in life, such as in adolescence when the brain is more fully developed.

Brain Differences:

The BODY/BRAIN response to Trauma

Structural and Physiological changes:
Change in neurotransmitter and hormonal activity produces these changes:
- Higher resting pulse rates
- Higher blood pressure
- Greater physical tension
- Smaller brain size (the areas of the brain that control executive functioning – cerebral cortex is smaller)
- Increased alertness

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Impact of Trauma on young children

GENERAL SYMPTOMS:
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Conduct problems
- Learning impairments
- Dissociation
- Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms
- Developmental disturbances
- Neurological impairments
More specifically...

Intolerably distressed children...

- They often feel out of control
- They feel helpless
- Due to effects on the brain they go from fearful to fight/flight/freeze
- When exposed to reminders of the trauma they behave as if traumatized all over again

What can we do to help?

- Understand that much of the reactions seen from these children are due to trauma sustained.
- Help them learn to master their environment and experiences
- Give them predictability and continuality (Routine) (see article)
- Help them play an active role in developing positive coping skills
- Model for them how to handle unmanageable stress
- Don’t leave them to their own devices, always play a part in helping them regulate emotions.

ACTIVITY

IN SMALL GROUPS
READ THE ARTICLE “AN UNHEALTHY DOSE OF STRESS.”
DISCUSS: HOW TOXIC STRESS IS EXPERIENCED BY CHILDREN IN SUBSTANCE ABUSING SYSTEMS

What else?

Defining Resiliency.

- The ability to recover from or adjust to misfortune or change
- The ability to bounce back
- Or “overcoming the odds”
- Use of an individual’s executive function in the brain
Promoting resilience involves reducing risk factors and strengthening protective factors at the environmental, familial and within-levels.

**AUTONOMY & Initiative**

- the child's ability to use independent thought and action to meet needs
- Give children opportunities to be a helper
- Expand on children's interests (e.g., "You seem to really like this cooking channel, why don't we make brownies together?")
- Give children choices throughout the day
- Partner children together to do activities throughout the day
- Be the "learner" – let children show YOU how to do something!

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**How can we...**

**Increase Resiliency?**

1. Autonomy/Initiative (making choices)
2. Self Esteem
3. External Support Systems/Building relationships
4. Affiliation (a positive group working toward a positive goal)
5. YOU! Relationship building

*Article: Tips: Building Resiliency*

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**1. Autonomy: in the early learning classroom**

Activity: "Negotiation Station"

*Materials Needed:*
- Area with small table and chairs, "touch" closet light or bell, vase with fake flowers, books on emotions, tissues, mirror, crayons & paper, friendship lotion (perfume free lotion with glitter added)

*What to Do:*
- Introduce your child to the word "negotiate" by telling him it means talking it out to find a solution both agree on
- Make a "Negotiation Station" together with your child in a comfortable and central area in your home/room. Decorate it with items listed above. Explain to your child how to use the "station", go with her to the "station" with a made up problem. Explain the first step is to state the problem, then how she feels, and then what a solution might be. When a conflict arises, the child is to turn on the light or use the bell to signal permission to use the "station." After your child successfully uses the station, she always give an encouragement (high five, "I like how you talked to me about your problem")
- When leaving the "station" child may want to use some friendship lotion!
**BUILD SELF ESTEEM/SELF REGULATION**
- Child's ability to express emotions and feel positive and competent about himself
- Encourage children as they engage in acceptable activities alone or with peers
- Discuss interests with children (E.g. "you really like the show "Wild Kratz...tell me about it.")
- Find solutions together. Talk with children about how they think they should solve problems rather than solving things for them.
- Praise children for following directions
- Teach your children feelings words
- LAUGH TOGETHER! PLAY TOGETHER!

**2. Self Esteem, 3. Positive Social/Emotional Lens in the classroom**

Activity: “Give me a Hand”
- Materials needed:
  - Paintbrushes, magazine or book pictures of sad and happy children, washable tempera paint
- What to do:
  - On the back of your child's hand draw a happy face, on the other hand a sad face.
  - Help your child think of recent situations with friends or family that might make everyone feel happy or sad. Ask your child to hold up the happy face or sad one. (Remember he is learning so you might have to discuss why it would be each feeling)
  - After a few situations, find magazine pictures or pictures in books with children with happy or sad faces. Try to figure out what might have happened in each situation to make the child feel a certain way.

**EXTERNAL SUPPORTS/BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**
- Child's ability to promote and maintain mutual, positive connections with other children and significant adults
- Model gentle affection with children and others, gently touching (if comfortable) when giving praise, using high fives, getting on their level
- “Check in” with children often
- Follow through. When you say you going to do something, make sure you can!
- Read and role play – use books about friendship and give ideas about how to make friends

**4. Affiliation**

Working toward a positive GOAL
- As a family or a group, solve problems together
- Teach children how to “make amends” with others after conflict and when all are calm. Role model it for them
- Engage in community projects (E.g. earth day, recycling, can goods drive for hungry...)
- Help others in need of service, volunteer for an organization
4. Affiliation
Working toward a positive GOAL in the classroom

Activity: "President for a Day"
Materials needed:
Book about President and his job, art supplies, large paper
What to do:
- Read your child the book on the President and his responsibilities, and then talk to your child about 1 of his jobs being to help make rules
- Share additional information with your child about why rules are important (safety, know what is expected) and some of the rules you have to follow.
- Now, talk about rules in your home/classroom. Together with the child, make a "Rule Chart" for your home/classroom. Include rules that make the child feel safe.

*To note, make sure you limit the number of rules to 3-4. Write the rules in positive language (instead of "don't do this; write "we are kind to each other")

5. YOU!
Building positive relationships...

Participant activity: In small groups, read the article and develop a presentation. (Some examples include writing a press release, doing a poster and reviewing, a role play, etc.)

ACTIVITY
In small groups read the scenarios about children who have a history of abuse and neglect due to drug use/abuse in their care giving families.

Decide as a group what strategies would be helpful for each child.

RESOURCES:
- www.acoastal.edu
- www.samhsa.gov
- http://coed.vanderbilt.org
- www.edc.org
- www.extension.org
- www.earlychildhoodohio.org
- www.centerforresilientchildren.org
### Post-test

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**THANK YOU...**

Questions...  
Evaluations...