

Supporting Children With Special Needs

Presented by
Minnesota Communities
Caring for Children

What is trauma?

- Threatens the life or physical integrity of the child or someone critically important to the child (parent, sibling, etc.)
- Causes an overwhelming sense of terror, helplessness, or horror
- The body reacts to this threat automatically with physical responses (increased heart rate, rapid breathing, release of stress hormones)



Invisible Disabilities

- Autism spectrum
- Prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol
- Children in foster care more likely to be impacted by trauma
- Children with special needs often experience problems with bonding, inappropriate social interactions, school disruptions, oppositional behavior

Key Facts

- Child care programs and schools are places where developmental delays and social interaction issues often become apparent
 - The effects vary in range and severity
 - Parents may be impacted by traumatic events, prenatal exposure, or other delays and may go undiagnosed and may not function effectively in a parent role



Common Behaviors in Young Kids

- Developmental delays
- Poor motor coordination and fine/gross motor control
- Erratic sleep
- Learning problems
- Easily distractible
- Angry or frustrated often
- Extreme under or over sensitivity to sensory input
- Overly friendly and indiscriminate with relationships

Common Behaviors in Older Kids

Problems from younger years, plus

- Poor social skills
- Not learning from previous experience
- Appear to have no common sense
- Act like a much younger child
- Impulsive
- Poor follow through
- Difficulty understanding abstract concepts and generalizing information

There are strengths, too!

- **Friendly, likable:** May be outgoing and sociable and have little anxiety about strangers.
- **•Verbal, chatty:** May be very socially interested (but not necessarily socially-skilled).
- **•Helpful, hard-working:** If you ask, they will do it. They can be very good workers with the right job and training
- **•Determined, resilient:** They don't hold grudges and will come back if rejected. Every day is a new day!
- **•Want to be liked:** They will do whatever they can to have friends.



What lens are you using?

- Attention Deficit Disorder
- Autism
- Reactive Attachment Disorder
- Sensory Processing Disorder
- Bipolar Disorder
- Depression
- Trauma
- Poverty
- And more...

Practical Tips and Strategies: Not Solutions!

Accommodations

Information

Communication

Partnering

Accommodations

Things cannot always be “fixed” or “cured” but we can accommodate to meet the child’s needs where they are at.

Information Gathering

- What do you need to know about the child?
 - Understand parent's priorities
 - Behaviors – Strategies
 - Challenges/ strengths

Communication is key

- Daily communication logs for caregivers
- Regular team meetings to assess progress and establish goals

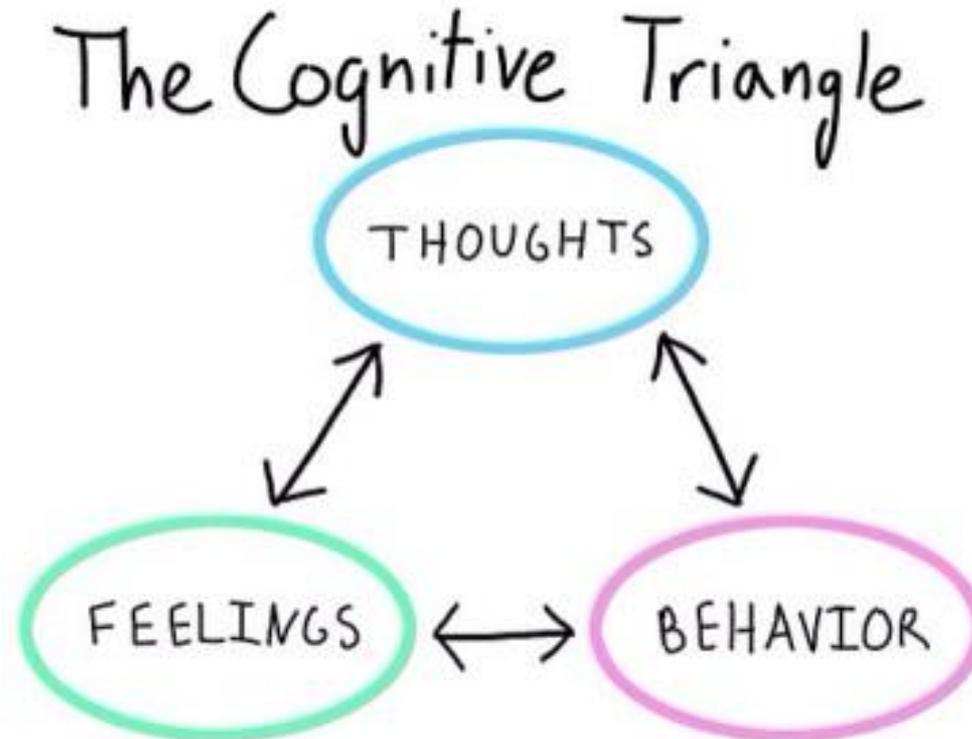
Parents as Partners

- Team approach
- Communication
- Greet parents with successes
- Acknowledge struggles
- Involve parents problem-solving process
- Share resources

General Guidelines

- Determine the child's developmental level
- Adapt your expectations
- Strengths focus
- Change the way you interpret their behaviors
- Prepare for transitions
- Provide a supportive environment

Cognitive Triangle



Learn to translate behaviors

Behavior

- Getting fidgety during an assignment
- Hitting another child while in line
- Ability to repeat instructions, not doing what is asked
- Becoming upset or unfocused with a schedule change

Translation

- I don't know what to do
- That kid bumped me in line
- I know what you said, but I don't know how to put that into action
- My usual understanding of how and when things will happen have changed and it's upsetting

Modifications

- Children with special needs may be under or over sensitive to their surroundings...Not having a language to say what is different for them...they will more likely communicate their response through their behaviors.
- Environments need to be modified to support people with special needs. Behaviors often change when environments are modified.

Visual Strategies



- Arrange toys/supplies orderly and labels are very helpful
- Teach organization and everything has a space and place

Auditory Strategies

- Prepare kids ahead of time for fire drills
- Use soft relaxing music for the whole group or individually
- Ear protectors
- Noise reducing materials
- Quiet spaces



Tactile Strategies

- A variety of sensory tools and strategies should be available to help the child self regulate
- These tools can enhance learning and attention during group activities



Supporting Social Skills

- Consistent routines
- Review and demonstrate rules
- Unwanted behavior is typically a cue the environment needs to be adapted
- Help the child identify and label feelings
- Maintain consistency with the people who typically interact with the child

Consequences

A word of caution concerning consequences they must be directly related to the behavior and used as a means of correcting not punishing

- Proactive and preventative approaches before it happens often



Consequences

- Be as consistent as possible
- Immediate – remind children what consequences are for
- Social stories
- Break down tasks into smaller more manageable pieces
- Concrete
- Repetition and routine

Listen, look, learn

- Children may find it hard to understand or express what they are feeling or why
- They may not be very good at reading other people's social cues
- They may be extremely reactive to any perceived threat

Your response matters

- Differentiate yourself from others in the child's past who may have been unpredictable, angry, rejecting, or simply absent.
- Tune in to your child's emotions and help him/her define and express feelings
- Set an example of appropriate emotional expression and behavior
- Encourage positive expression and behavior by supporting your child's strengths and interests

be the
KIND OF PERSON
you needed
WHEN YOU WERE
younger

If you would like a certificate of attendance, please put
your email in the chatbox.

Mary Weaver

mweaver@pcamn.org

218-731-0705