

How the Incredible Years (IY) Child Dinosaur Social, Emotional and Problem Solving Curriculum Prepares Children to Cope with Trauma

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The Incredible Years (IY) evidence-based parent and child programs have been used and evaluated for decades as treatment for young children diagnosed with conduct problems, oppositional defiant disorder and ADHD (Menting, Orobio de Castro et al. 2013, Webster-Stratton, Reid et al. 2013, Webster-Stratton and Reid 2017). These programs have also been evaluated as selective and indicated prevention interventions for high risk, economically disadvantaged families, foster care, adoptive and incarcerated parents (Linares, Montalto et al. 2006, Menting, Orobio de Castro et al. 2013, Webster-Stratton 2016). Within these populations, young children's behavioral problems are often a manifestation of their emotional and psychological difficulties because of single or multiple traumatic family life experiences including abuse and neglect or homelessness, witnessing violence at home or school, or experiencing the loss of a family member or friend, or reactions to parental divorce. Multiple randomized control group studies have indicated the success of the IY trauma-informed parent, teacher and child programs in promoting more responsive, nurturing and loving parent-teacher-child interactions, reducing child externalizing and internalizing problems and promoting young children's positive social competence, emotional regulation and school readiness skills (Webster-Stratton and Reid 2017). All three IY parent, teacher and child programs focus on four types of adult coaching that include academic, social, emotional and persistence coaching. These coaching methods are central to helping children persevere and become resilient in the face of adversity and traumatic experiences.

In this article we will briefly describe the Incredible Years *Dina Dinosaur's Social, Emotional, Academic and Problem Solving Curriculum for Young Children* (4-8 years) and how trauma-informed cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements are woven throughout the IY child programs and tailored according to the

developmental and cognitive status of young children and their particular experiences. The child dinosaur program (Webster-Stratton 1990) was originally designed for use by therapists as a small group treatment program for children diagnosed with conduct problems and subsequently revised into weekly lesson plans for use by teachers as a prevention classroom-based curriculum. With the help of large child-size puppets, teachers and therapists help children to learn and practice emotion language, to manage their anger, fears, guilt, and depression through self-regulation strategies such as deep breathing, positive self-talk, and positive imagery (happy places), to develop social skills in order to build supportive friendships and to problem solve using prosocial solutions in order to persevere in face of difficult circumstances (Webster-Stratton and Reid 2005, Webster-Stratton and Reid 2008). When possible, it is recommended that the child dinosaur program be offered in conjunction with the IY parent program so that the emotion communication, problem solving steps, self-regulation methods and resilience coaching used in the child program can be reinforced at home by the parents to help their children cope with a range of emotions in regard to trauma related experiences.

Making Friends and Learning Group Rules (Apatosaurus and Iguanodon Units 1 & 2)

The first units of the curriculum teach children the rules for working safely and collaboratively in groups with peers and adult leaders. The children start by developing and practicing group rules such as listening to peers, using friendly voices, keeping hands to selves, and helping each other. These discussions take place with life-sized boy and girl puppets (Molly and Wally) as well as Dina, a dinosaur puppet who is the director of Dinosaur School. Fantasy and sociodramatic play appeals to and engages children ages 4-8 years in these discussions and enhances their learning because of their *preoperational and imaginary stage* of cognitive development (Piaget and Inhelder 1962). By using fantasy play and puppets, teachers and therapists give children with limited vocabulary an opportunity to talk about, act out or draw their feelings, take on different roles and feelings, work out emotional issues, and come up with solutions to problems that can be acted out with the help of their friends. While most children recognize these puppets are not real, they are still motivated to engage with them because of this imagination phase of cognitive development. For group leaders, joining children in their imaginary world creates an intimate bond and high level of trust. Children will often share more with a puppet than they share with an adult therapist or teacher.

Understanding and Detecting Feelings (Triceratops Unit 3)

Promoting Emotional Literacy and Empathy: In this unit, the first step is for young children to learn language for accurately identifying their own emotions as well as beginning to recognize other's feelings. Through laminated feeling picture cue cards and video vignettes of children demonstrating various emotions, children's emotional literacy is expanded to include basic feelings such as sad, happy, scared, and angry feelings to more complex feelings such as frustration, disappointment, blame, loneliness and guilt. Children are helped to recognize their own feelings by checking their shoulders, feet, arms, and faces for "tight" (tense) muscles and relaxed muscles, frowns, smiles and sensations in other parts of their bodies (e.g., butterflies in stomach, heart racing, clenched shoulders and fists). Wally talks to the children about what it means to be tense or relaxed. He shows them pictures of himself in tense and relaxed positions and asks them to practice tensing different muscles so they can feel the difference when their muscles are tense and then relax.

Wally: *When I am nervous sometimes my body gets tense or tight or stiff and uncomfortable – can you show me your tense hands? tighten them so tight they are squeezing a small apple so tight the juice is coming out. Keep squeezing tight, tighter, tighter and now relax and see how relaxed your hand muscles feel. Now let's try your abdomen, imagine a big dinosaur is behind you and about to step on your tummy.. tighten it as hard as possible so if the dinosaur steps there your tummy will be hard.. keep hardening, the dinosaur is coming... harder... Oh he stepped over you, now you can relax. See how your tummy feels now.*

Children are encouraged to be feelings detectives, given a magnifying glass and are guided to use their detective skills to look for clues in another person's facial expressions, behavior or tone of voice to recognize what another person is feeling. Games such as feeling dice, feeling bingo, feeling spinning wheel and matching feeling game are played to reinforce the development of emotion language and to help children talk and share a time they felt a certain feeling. Art activities such as making paper plate faces of outside and inside feelings, shaving cream drawings of face feelings, or coloring on line drawings of their own bodies or human figures using different colors to represent different emotions can help young children make the connection between emotion words, feelings and body responses to emotions. Nursery rhymes, songs and children's books also provide fun opportunities for children to talk about the character's feelings, how they cope with uncomfortable

feelings, and how they express feelings. During all of these discussions, the fun games and play times described above, the Wally and Molly puppets are active prosocial participants who share their own feelings about events and model feeling talk, thoughts and behaviors. The goal is to make talking about feelings non-stressful, enjoyable and comfortable and to establish trust in the group.

Wally shares his feelings

- Wally: (laughing, jumping up with glee, smiling) *How do you think I am feeling?*
- Children: *Happy*
- Wally: *How do you know I am happy?*
- Children: (identify cues of voice, behaviors, tone of voice)
- Wally: *I feel happy when I see you each week. When do you feel happy? (help children to talk about happy times)*

Or,

- Wally: (looking down, crying, sobbing,) *How am I feeling now?*
- Children: *Sad*
- Wally: *How do you know I am sad?*
- Children: (identify cues of sad voice, behaviors, tone of voice)
- Wally: *I am sad because my dad is gone. When do you feel sad?*
- Children: (encouraged to talk in general ways about sad times)

Basic emotional literacy must be developed in first sessions and trust established before therapists/teachers can start to include scenarios that are targeted to encourage discussion of specific trauma experiences the children may have had. Once a format for exploring feelings has been established in the group, a variety of different traumatic or upsetting experiences can be explored in the group. These situations are always introduced by the puppets who begin a discussion about a situation somewhat similar to what the children have experienced. For instance: having to move to a foster home or grandparent's house, witnessing family violence and arguments, experiencing death of a family member, being hurt by an adult, or being in a hurricane or accident. This puppet sharing of his or her thoughts and feelings helps children to normalize their thoughts and feelings around a traumatic event and opens up the possibility of them feeling safe talking about a trauma they have experienced.

Wally Experiences a Car Accident

Wally: *Last week something scary happened to me. I was driving with my mom and a car hit the side of the car. It was really loud and the car jerked. My mom was crying and so was I. Have you ever been in an accident? (models sharing feelings)*

Children: (children share any experiences and feelings regarding accidents thus helping to normalize the event and feelings)

Wally: *I didn't get hurt and nobody else got hurt either, but I was still scared. The next day I was really nervous to go in the car because I thought I would have another accident. I didn't even want to go to school in the car. My mom gave me a hug and said it was okay to be scared, but I had to get in to go to school. I closed my eyes and didn't look all the way to school. What do you do to make yourself be less scared when you are scared to do something?*

Children: Children share their ideas for how to cope with fear.

Wally: *We didn't have an accident and I felt better when we got to school. My mom told me I was brave and reminded me that we've ridden in the car a lot of times and only had one accident. She said that the accident was bad luck, but that cars are mostly safe. That made me feel a little better (models how feelings can change)*

Therapist: *So you thought of your happy times in the car and remembered this accident only happened once so you felt less scared. You also realized you wanted to go to school and you learned to control those scary thoughts by thinking of something else happy. (reinforces the idea that children can take some control over their feelings)*

Molly Sees Her Parents fighting

Molly: *Last night my parents were yelling loudly at each other. I am scared and sad when my parents fight and yell at each other. Have you ever heard your parents fight? I sometimes feel it is my fault they are fighting.*

Children: (children share any experiences witnessing fighting and their feelings) (This promotes talking about uncomfortable feelings thereby normalizing children's feelings.)

Therapist: *It is normal to be scared when someone fights and is angry. Parent fighting is not your fault. Most parents do fight at times but hitting is not a safe way to handle anger. How can you stay safe when they start fighting?* (reassures child is not to blame)

Molly: *When that happens, I go to my room, and sometimes I call and talk to my grandmother. Afterwards I realize my parents love me. What do you do when your parents fight?* (This encourages children to talk about safe places or people to reach out to for help)

At this point in the curriculum the objective is to encourage children to feel comfortable expressing a range of feelings, to normalize their thoughts and feelings and to reassure children they are not to blame for what has happened. Children are often confused by traumatic events be it a parent fighting, physical or sexual abuse, or an accident, or death, and may feel guilt that they somehow caused the event to happen. It is important they have accurate information and are told this is not their fault. It is still too early in curriculum to discuss solutions to these problems and these discussions will be elaborated upon in the problem-solving unit, which occurs next. At this point in the program children are helped to understand that just talking in general about their feelings with others is helping them to feel less anxious, fearful, guilty, sad or alone.

Therapists always listen for information that indicates that the child is currently in a dangerous setting and take appropriate action to protect the child, if needed.

Coping with Uncomfortable Feelings

Once a range of positive and negative feeling words have been developed, next children learn strategies for determining the intensity of the feeling and then how to change negative feelings (angry, frustrated, sad) feelings into more positive feelings. Games, positive imagery and activities are used to illustrate how feelings change over time. A laminated “calm down thermometer” is used to help children to learn to identify the intensity of the emotion and when they are calm or cool in the blue or green at the bottom of the thermometer and when they are beginning to feel sad, or nervous or mad in the yellow section and finally when they are very mad or sad in red at the top. Wally helps the children practice determining how strong their emotion is by discussing feelings caused by different events and determining where they are on the thermometer.

Wally is Nervous When Dogs Bark

Wally: *One day a dog chased me and barked, I didn't think he was going to bite me, but he sure was noisy and angry looking. I was kind of nervous and I guess in yellow on the thermometer.*
How do you feel about dogs who bark at you? Where are you on the thermometer?

Children: (share feelings about dogs)

Molly is Afraid of Rats

Molly: *I am really scared of rats and one time I saw one in the kitchen.*
I was pretty scared and started to scream. I was a bit higher than yellow on the thermometer. How do you feel about rats?

Therapist: *Where is your feeling on the thermometer compared to how you feel about a barking dog?*
(help children identify degrees of feelings for different events)

Wally's pet dog died

Wally: *My dog Chardo died a week ago and I was really, really sad and unhappy and mad too. I was in red and crying all the time.*

Therapist: *How are you feeling now?*

Wally: *I am in yellow now.*

Therapist: *How did that happen?*

Wally: *My parent helped me make a picture book of all my happy times with my dog Chardo. I think more about that now.*

After the intensity of feeling has been discussed, Wally and the therapist help the children practice how to get down from red hot feelings into calmer feelings (blue or green) on the thermometer. Wally teaches his 3 “secrets” for calming down that include: developing positive imagery and thinking happy thoughts, telling himself he can calm down, and taking slow, deep breaths.

Wally Helps Children Develop Happy Places and Thoughts

The first self-regulation exercise is to help children develop positive imagery and happy thoughts by sharing with each other their happy places.

Wally: *My favorite time being relaxed and happy is when I am reading with my mom. I like to think about that when I get into yellow or red and feel bad about myself. What happy thought or place do you use when you feel worried, or sad or afraid?*

Children: (Children share happy places and these are recorded and later drawn or written about in a journal)

After this discussion in their small group activity they draw pictures of all the places, people or activities where they feel happy, safe and loved. Once children have established these happy memories they can be helped to use this guided imagery when they are feeling tense, anxious or sad or mad. For children who have lost a close family member it is important to keep the memory of that person alive

by talking openly with stories about the person, both positive and difficult memories. This will help them continue to feel connected to this person and be able to integrate a story that helps them develop a sense of control over their past experiences,

Wally Helps Children Practice Positive Self-Talk

A second self-regulation strategy is to help children use a positive power thought or word when they are having an uncomfortable thought. For young children this might be one word such as saying “calm” or “peace.” Older children may use a 3-4 word sentence. Wally teaches the children his personal mantra.

Wally: *I get nervous when the teacher asks me to read in class. I tell myself, “I can do it” or “I can stay calm” Sometimes I take some deep breaths when I do that too.*

Wally Teaches Children How to do Power Breathing

The third of Wally’s secrets for managing uncomfortable feelings is controlled breathing. Wally helps the children learn how to take deep breaths and slowly blow out breaths so they can help their body relax. It is helpful to demonstrate this with a balloon first so the child can see the balloon slowly get bigger like a stomach and then demonstrate the importance of letting it go slowly rather than letting it go quickly (the balloon seems nervous if you let go quickly). The therapist/teacher can even have the children put their finger (or a paper cup) on their belly button to watch their tummy rise and then fall as they breath. This can be practiced on the floor with a cup on their stomach.

Wally: *Once I got really scared because a dog bit me, and I couldn’t go near dogs after that. Now when I see a dog I take deep breaths. It is really powerful. Let me show you how I do that. I concentrate on my breathing and watch my tummy rise and then try to breath more slowly when I breath out than when I breath in. I sometimes imagine I am smelling a flower and then slowly blow out a candle. Sometimes I count to four when I breath in and then try to count higher when breathing out. This really helps me stay calm.*

Children: (practice with Wally deep breathing “balloon in” and slowly exhaling “balloon out”)

Problem Solving (Stegosaurus Unit)

As we noted earlier, children who have experienced trauma may have inaccurate information and thoughts about what happened and feelings related to blame, guilt, sadness, and anger or some mixture of all these feelings. In the feelings unit we have focused on helping children talk about all kinds of feelings and correcting any misinformation or inaccurate thoughts or self-blame. We have also taught a few simple strategies for beginning to regulate the high intensity feelings. Some children react to traumatic events with hostility and aggression, while others may withdraw, developing physical somatic symptoms or becoming socially isolated, anxious and depressed. In the problem-solving unit children learn other ways (solutions) that they can respond to and cope with challenging situations. The puppets Wally and Molly help them to learn a 7-step process of problem solving: (1) How am I feeling and what is my problem? (define problem based on uncomfortable feeling); (2) What is a solution? (3) What are some more solutions? (alternative choices); (4) What are the consequences? (5) What is the best solution? (Is the solution safe, fair and does it lead to good feelings?) (6) Can I use the plan? And (7) How did I do? (evaluate outcome and reinforce efforts). Learning these steps helps children persevere with obstacles and to build resiliency in coping with life’s challenges, big and small.

Young children, ages 4-6, will mostly focus on the first 3 problem solving steps of practicing appropriate solutions (e.g., share, wait, take turns, ask for help, help others, take deep breaths, think of happy place, ignore, walk away, take a break). Children ages 7-8 will likely be able to learn all 7 steps and choose the best solution or combination of solutions. New solutions are introduced at each session often by the puppet sharing a problem he has and asking the children to help him solve it. As the children come up with solutions, they act them out in order to help Wally learn how to use the solution and feel better. Laminated picture cue cards in Wally’s detective kit are used to prompt ideas for possible solutions. Young children start learning and practicing less complex and more behavioral solutions (ask, share, wait, take deep breaths) and as they are developmentally ready move on to more complex and cognitive solutions such as doing the right thing, saying no to someone who is doing the wrong thing, asking for help, or apologizing). The therapists/teachers use the puppets and mediate video vignettes to introduce different problem scenarios in the beginning for younger children and as they get older (7-8 years) they encourage children to generate their own problems for group

discussion. Younger children participate in small group activities that include drawing pictures of their solutions or dictating them while the group leader writes them down in their journals. Older children are encouraged to write stories about how they used a solution to solve a problem. Problem scenarios are acted out by the children so they can practice the solutions with the puppets or their peers and experience the problem from different perspectives.

Wally is frustrated because his friend won't share

Wally: *I really wanted to use the computer at school and my friend who had been on it for a long time didn't want to share. I was getting frustrated and angry. I was in yellow for sure. What solution should I use?*

Children: (children are encouraged to come with solutions such as ask again and say please, wait, do something else, take 3 deep breaths.

Wally: *Those are good solutions. Can you help me practice one of those ideas? I will be the boy who won't share, and you will show me you will do to get me to share.*

Notice that Wally takes the role as the child who won't share while the other children trying out some possible prosocial solutions. It is important that children are put in the role of practicing the appropriate behavior and not the inappropriate behavior.

Death of family member

Molly: *My grandpa died and I felt sad and had nightmares. I really missed him.*

Therapist: *What good things do you remember about him?*

Molly: *He took me to the park to throw balls and sometimes we went for a treat sometimes and he told me funny stories.*

Therapist asks the children: *Have any of you had a special pet or a person that you love die? What do you remember about him or her?*

Therapist: *It seems like these are some good memories you want to remember.*

Molly: *Yes, they are. You know I drew pictures of my good times with grandpa in a special book and sometimes when I have a nightmare I think of this good stuff and it helps me feel happier and get back to sleep. Sometimes I take some deep breaths too*

Therapist: *Wow you have shared with us two good solutions of two ways to take control of your sad feelings and thoughts. One is to make a memory book of your grandpa and the other is to take deep breaths to calm down. Molly you know talking about your feelings about your grandpa dying was a really brave thing to do.*

Therapist to children: *What would be a good way for you to remember all the good memories of your (grandparent, pet, parent, or other family member).*

As solutions to traumatic events are discussed, they can be modeled by Wally or Molly, as seen in the examples above, or the ideas can be generated by the children and then acted out for the puppets to learn from them. The children and puppets discuss the fact that there is often not a solution that will “fix” the child’s problem. Instead the focus is often on ways to get comfort, help, or to start to feel better, even if the original problem does not go away.

As children become comfortable with the problem-solving steps, more complex traumatic situations can be introduced. For example, scenarios where there is possible violence or sexual abuse in the home, or bullying on the playground by older children. These scenarios first involve helping children understand what is appropriate or inappropriate touch followed by solutions that help them identify where are safe places to go, what people they can turn to for help, or how they can say “no” if an adult or sibling is doing something wrong.

Sibling Abuse

Wally: *Sometimes my brother gets really angry at me. One time I took his bike without asking and he yelled at me and*

started to hit me really hard. What should I do when that happens?

Children: (encouraged to come up with solutions such as get help from adult or sibling or peer if feeling unsafe, say you are sorry, walk away, take deep breaths and stay calm)

Children are encouraged to talk about times they may have been hurt by someone or feel unsafe. For young children, the puppets can prompt these discussions with their own stories and children are encouraged to talk about what they can do to stay safe. Small group activities can include making a book or journal of places they would go when they feel unsafe.

In the books *Wally's Detective Books for Solving Problems at School and at Home* there are 50 problem solving cases that therapists can use to help children practice how to solve problems. These small books can be worked on in small group activities where children act out solutions or draw solutions to the problem scenarios.

If children in a particular group have personally experienced violence, direct trauma, or sexual abuse, the puppets can also be used to talk about those issues. The puppet and therapist are used together to provide a safe atmosphere where the issues can be discussed. The puppet presents a version of the experience and the therapist can provide a safe and non-blaming response. Children are then free to share or not share their own experiences. It is very important that these groups are run by therapists who are comfortable and experienced with this kind of discussion.

Anger Management (T-Rex Unit)

After the Problem Solving Unit where children have learned some solutions to manage difficult and uncomfortable problems, the program focuses on anger management. By this point in the curriculum, children will have expanded their feeling comprehension and literacy, will be more empathic to others feelings, and will have a framework for talking about problems and generating solutions. However even though children have learned the problem solving steps, they must be able to self-regulate in order to use solutions. In the anger management unit, a new puppet named Tiny Turtle teaches 5-step anger management strategy that includes (1) recognize anger and where you are on the thermometer; (2) think "STOP", (3) going into his shell to take 3 deep breaths, (4) then replacing his

unhappy thoughts with calm thoughts (e.g., “I can calm down”) and positive imagery (reading with mom) and (5) trying again. Children practice these steps with the Tiny Turtle puppet. While they have learned some of the self-regulation skills in earlier programs, the turtle steps help them integrate their learning and realize they can stop their thoughts by saying “stop” first and then adding in replacement thoughts and other self-regulation strategies. Younger children focus on the simple turtle shell imagery, but by 7-8 years of age children will be able to expand their repertoire of solutions to include some beginning thought stopping, positive self-talk and imagery and more advanced solutions.

In this unit children practice how they can use Tiny’s Turtle Power in other stressful situations. For example, being rejected by a friend, having trouble learning to read or write, feeling left out, waiting for a turn, losing at a game, being teased or bullied, responding to a parent or teacher who is mad, making a mistake, and feeling lonely because no one wants to play with them. The puppets can share their experiences with any of these problem situations and ask the children to help them stay calm and come up with solutions.

Wally Talks about Parent Fights

Wally: *Do you remember how we learned from Tiny Turtle how to calm down when we are nervous or angry? Tiny showed us how to go in our imaginary shells and take deep breaths. I have used that and it really helps me and now I use it in different places. Sometimes when my parents are fighting with each other I get scared and I go in my shell and tell myself “I can calm down” and sometimes I use it when my brother makes me mad. When do you use Tiny’s secret power?*

Children: (share times they could use this secret turtle power)

Therapist: *Remember when your parents argue and fight with each other it is not your fault. It’s okay for them to be angry but people should not hit or hurt each other, even when they are really mad. This is not a solution that is fair or safe or leads to good feelings. As you know there are better solutions to solve problems.*

Wally: *Sometimes my parents even hit or push me and I*

think this is my fault and I deserve it because I was bad.

Therapist: *Wally that sounds really scary. It sounds like your parents were mad, and maybe they were mad at something you did, BUT parents should not hit children no matter what. All kids misbehave sometime and do things parents don't like. Wally it's not your fault if your parents hit you. Your parents are not bad people, and I think that they still love you, but they made a mistake when they hit.*
Let's talk about what you will do if you feel someone in your family or school might hurt you.

Children: (encouraged to come with solutions for staying safe such as calling a family friend who they trust, going somewhere safe, telling the person no you don't like to be touched in that place)

As mandated reporters, therapists will also need to discuss with the group, and with individual children, what happens if therapists are worried that children are not safe at home. While children should be empowered with some ways to get help if they are faced with dangerous situations, they also need to know that it is the job of other adults to help protect them when they are not safe, and that sometimes this means that they may need to live with someone else for a while. This is clearly a traumatic outcome for children and will need more intensive support and processing than can be handled entirely in the group setting.

While trauma focused treatment focuses on differentiating between thoughts and feelings, this distinction is intertwined and not age appropriate for young children because they are not able to be introspective about their own cognitive processes. In fact, they still cognitively confuse fantasy and reality. However, young children can understand what others (including a puppet) might feel. So they can learn from hearing about what Wally (or Molly or Tiny) feels and thinks, or from their suggestions of positive self-statements they might use to cope with a traumatic event. For this age group, the therapists with the help of a puppet, will model alternative thoughts for children, whisper thought ideas for them to suggest in group discussions and find creative ways for them to express basic ideas about thoughts, feelings and behaviors. For example, in this program we talk about "turtle power," helping a child to envision himself as a turtle and imagining he has

a shell or shield that can reject or bounce off nasty comments from others and absorb the friendly comments and thereby feel better. The child learns to go inside his shell when he needs to calm down by taking deep breaths, visualizing happy places and thinking happy thoughts. Other puppets can be used to promote positive thoughts, feeling talk, empathy and problem solving. For example, one puppet Freddy Frog is hyperactive and jumps around a lot getting into trouble so the children help him to calm down and learn how to make friends. The puppet Oscar Ostrich is afraid to talk about his feelings and always puts his head in the sand so the children can help him feel better by sharing his feelings and problems. A baby Dina dinosaur puppet is nervous and wants to learn how she can feel less lonely and make friends.

How to be Friendly and Talk with Friends

Few people need to be convinced of the value of friends for helping someone cope with a traumatic event. While many children who have experienced trauma may react with anger, or by withdrawal and avoidance, these last two units help children learn about the value of sharing, helping others, cooperating together, apologizing, giving compliments and successfully managing conflict. Developing these friendships in these circle time group discussions and small group activities helps children feel a sense of belonging, support and understanding of each other. As with other units, the friendship strategies include puppets modeling these social skills, mediated video vignettes and guided practices along with friendship bingos, cooperative games and activities. In their discussions, children learn that other children have had related trauma experiences such as death of family member, parental divorce, or stress related to family violence or harsh discipline, or accidents. This sharing helps children to feel less alone and normalizes to some extent their experiences while helping reduce their feelings of anxiety, or fear or anger especially as they work on solutions designed to help them feel safe, supported, connected to something bigger than themselves and more in control.

Involving Parents

While the focus in this paper has been on ways group leaders can help children cope with trauma by using the Dinosaur Curriculum, it is highly recommended that parents (or grandparents, foster parents, or other caregivers) also be included when possible. It is important to provide parents with the overview and rationale for the child dinosaur program. Parents are encouraged to take the accompanying group-based IY BASIC Parent Program that begins with learning ways to build a sensitive, responsive and nurturing relationship with their children and reinforces

parents using many of the same ideas at home that the children are learning in the Dinosaur Program. For example, parents learn the importance of using child-directed play and social, emotion and persistence coaching with their children to build their children's emotional literacy and capacity to communicate about their feelings and resilience to try to solve problems. Moreover, parents are helped to understand how to manage any behavioral problems that their children exhibit. Many parents feel guilty about disciplining, especially after their child has experienced something traumatic. However, parents not only need to build a strong loving relationship base with coaching methods, praise and rewards but also to provide clear rules, developmentally appropriate limits and a predictable schedule to help children feel safe and loved.

With the context of prior trauma in mind, some topics (such as ignoring and Time Out) are sometimes delayed and extra sessions offered initially to establish more secure attachment and parent-child bonding. When the ignoring, Time Out and discipline strategies are eventually presented for aggressive or destructive behaviors that cannot be redirected, discussion around these strategies focuses on how these strategies support child and parent self-regulation with the goal to use them briefly and non-punitively without jeopardizing the child's sense of safety. Following a planned ignore or Time Out to calm down experience, parents then reunite with their child in a positive way to provide their child with new learning opportunities to use other solutions to the problem situation (such as communication about feelings, or getting help, or calming down by walking away, or finding a friend or safe person to talk to). For families where there is a history of trauma, time is spent talking about the difference between the positive use of these strategies and punitive or neglectful parenting behaviors. When used thoughtfully, patiently and calmly, these strategies are important skills for all parents to learn as part of non-violent and positive discipline.

It is important to remember that parents are also undergoing extraordinary stress themselves because of their child's trauma experience. Many parents are reluctant to talk about the trauma event with their child for fear it will be overly distressing to themselves and their child. They feel helpless because it is impossible to fix or cure their children's problems. The IY ADANCE Parent Program (Webster-Stratton 1994) helps parents understand the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behavior for themselves as well as their children. Like children, parents need to be encouraged to challenge their own negative or inaccurate thoughts and feelings of guilt or shame about the trauma event and find things to be happy about so they can model adaptive coping using a positive attitude for their children. In the Advance program parents learn to regulate their own emotions through

relaxation methods and positive imagery, improve communication and listening skills, and the importance of building support networks. Parents are helped to understand the therapeutic benefits of letting children talk about their feelings when they are ready as this listening approach helps children manage their anxiety or anger and develop coping skills.

However, it is also important for parents to understand that it is developmentally normal for young children to escape from reality into fantasy and deny anything bad happened. In fact, children may act as if nothing has happened. Rather than forcing discussions that children are not ready for, parent and group leader/therapists can create safe spaces for that discussion to happen when children are ready. As children learn the emotion language in the dinosaur program along with some emotion regulation strategies, they may eventually be ready to talk or act out their experiences. The benefit of children participating in the child program is that even when children are not ready to talk about their own experiences, they can begin to process these experiences indirectly through the scenarios that the puppets and other children present. Like the therapist or teacher, parents can also help by labeling their children's emotions with an emphasis on both positive and negative emotions along side coping responses. They can reassure their children that it is okay to cry and ask for help, it is okay to be happy and joyful, and it is okay if they don't want to talk about it at that time. They can praise their children for appropriate management of their emotions such as expressing their feelings, taking deep breaths and going into their turtle shell, asking for help and for finding appropriate solutions to problem situations. Giving children focused attention and engaging in child-directed play with them is a key step in helping build children's resilience to cope with their trauma. It helps children learn that even after the traumatic event or loss, there still can be love and joy in their lives.

The Incredible Years Parent and Child programs provide a framework that sets the stage for healthy expression of feelings, problem solving, anger management, and self-regulation. These resilient skills are useful to all people, regardless of their life-circumstances. For families who have experienced trauma, these foundational skills set the stage and provide a safe space for more tailored treatment of the trauma experience. This partnership between parents, teachers, and therapists offers promise for helping children who have experienced trauma learn to feel safe, socially and emotionally competent, and supported to cope with life's challenges.

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